

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GAY MEN IN THEIR ACHIEVEMENT OF LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH
AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS**

by

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“Lived experiences of gay men in their achievement of leadership in South African organisations”

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Abstract

There is a noticeable absence of the voices of gay men in leadership in South African government and corporate organisations. This absence of visible gay male leadership in organisations in South Africa, coupled with the limited research in a South African context, gave rise to the research topic. This qualitative study investigated the lived experiences of gay men in their achievement of leadership with a focus on the possible barriers or obstacles they may have encountered and overcome to realise their leadership positions. The study was conducted through interviews with South Africa citizens working in mainstream South African organisations; some participants also had personal experiences working in multinational organisations allowing for a comparison between the multinational workspace and the South African workspace. By utilising snowball sampling methods, eleven participants were purposefully selected from a sample of self-identified cisgender gay men. The selected participants had all openly revealed their same-sex sexual orientation to the organisations where they worked and were all working in senior leader roles. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the participants and later transcribed, and rigorously analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis methods. The findings of the study identified that gay cisgender males in mainstream South African organisations do indeed encounter barriers relating to prejudice based on their same-sex sexual orientation. These barriers may impede their professional development and growth into senior leadership positions. It was found that some gay men possess internal resources or enablers that allow them to overcome existing barriers and advance into successful leaders in their careers. Similarly, progress has been made in some South African organisations, allowing them to provide a culture and environment of safety and support for gay men, enabling these men to realise their aspirations of senior leadership. By combining senior leadership who are supportive and involved in LGBTI+ affirmative practices and implementing workplace processes like LGBTI+ forums and inclusivity,

and awareness training programmes, organisations may create cultures where LGBTI+ people may flourish and advance to senior leadership roles in South African organisations.

Keywords: absence, affirmative practices, barriers, culture, gay male leadership, inclusivity, internal resources, interpretive phenomenological analysis, lived experiences, organisations, overcome, prejudice, professional development, sexual orientation, South Africa.

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my husband, Ruben and my wonderfully crazy family. Thank you for all your quiet support, encouragement and laughter, even when I lost my way and experienced frustrations.

Throughout my journey to becoming a psychologist and now lately, while completing my PhD, I have maintained that success in this field is more about perseverance than knowledge. However, during my doctoral research journey and the process of writing this thesis, I have come to realise that although perseverance has been my ever-needed partner, some knowledge and skill has inexplicably leaked into my head, leaving me with a deeper understanding of, and respect for, LGBTI+ communities of which I too am a member. It is profound for me how well members of LGBTI+ communities can overcome and thrive despite the sometimes-overwhelming challenges. I have seen it in the participants of this study and how they have reached the highest echelons of leadership despite challenges, and I see it regularly in national and international news; how members of LGBTI+ communities continue to fight and rise above their—even—life-threatening challenges, to achieve the lives and relationships they deserve.

This study is wholeheartedly dedicated to all those people in LGBTI+ communities who continue to struggle and persevere so that their generation, and future generations, may possess the freedoms and accomplishments that people in the heterosexual community take so much for granted.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my promoter Professor Juan Nel. Your consistent encouragement, quiet support, and the valuable experience shared throughout this journey have made the challenging times and periods of doubt mere bumps in the road that could easily be navigated.

Thank you to the brave participants of the study who not only shared their experiences with me but lived through some very tough and challenging times to achieve the positions they have in South African organisations. You are an inspiration to gay men who seek to grow and develop into the future leaders of the organisations in this country.

To my parents, who have listened, encouraged, and supported me no matter what challenges I have faced and no matter which paths I have taken and who taught me that when times get hard, you can get through them with a little determination and a great sense of humour.

To my friends for their unwavering support when my frustrations became overwhelming and for reminding me how close I was to reaching my goal, even when I was convinced I would never make it.

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Chapter One

In his foreword to The South African Workplace Equality Index (SAWEI, 2019), the Chief Executive of the Other Foundation, Neville Gabriel states:

For LGBTI people to be free, there are two things we can be sure of. One is that LGBTI people experience the frontlines of discrimination in their daily family and workplace lives. The other is that exclusion from economic participation has the most devastating effect on LGBTI people and their families (p.3).

This chapter introduces the study and provides an orientation and background to the research conducted by examining the literature and the South African organisational landscape. The research problem statement is explored, followed by its connection to the field of senior leadership in South African organisations. Furthermore, the research questions that guided the study will be explored, and attention will be given to the motivation underlying this scientific enquiry. The chapter concludes with a brief outline of the main concepts which provided a foundation on which the study was built.

Background and Orientation

The landscape of South African organisations is changing. While much attention has been placed on addressing the impact of Apartheid and the racial inequalities that have plagued organisations, and some progress has been made, little focus has been placed on other minority groups and the impact that the Apartheid system of government had on them in the context of the South African workplace. One such minority group is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other (LGBTI+) communities. Several acronyms, including LBGT, LGB, LGBTIQ are used in this thesis in order to accurately reflect the information sources referenced within. For the purposes of this study the acronym “LGBTI+” will be used as a

representation of the LGBTIQ+ community. “LGBTIQ+ [is an] abbreviation referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. ‘LGB’ refers to sexual orientations, while ‘T’ indicates a gender identity, ‘I’ a biological variant, ‘Q’ a queer identified person, ‘A’ for asexual, and ‘+’ indicating other non-conforming minorities. These groups are clustered together in one abbreviation due to similarities in experiences of marginalisation, exclusion, discrimination, and victimisation in a heteronormative and heterosexist society, in an effort to ensure equality before the law and equal protection by the law. However, the possible differences between persons who claim these labels and those to whom these labels may be assigned ought not to be trivialised. The respective issues, experiences and needs of these people may in fact differ significantly and in several respects” (The Psychological Society of South Africa [PsySSA], 2017, p. 7). LGBTI+ communities in South Africa can claim the privilege of living in a country with one of the world’s most progressive Constitutions and supportive regulations, particularly in terms of Chapter 2 of The Bill of Rights which states that every person has the right to protection from discrimination no matter their race, creed, or sexual orientation, among others (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). The Constitution and its auxiliary legislation extend their protection to all employees, including minority groups like LGBTI+ employees, within South African organisations. However, there is a noticeable absence of the voices of LGBTI+ people in organisations throughout the world (Bell et al., 2011; Carey & Languilaire, 2017; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018; Ozeren, 2014) and particularly in the South African organisational context (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Soeker et al., 2015). These silenced voices, particularly within organisational hierarchies like senior leadership, coupled with the limited literature and research into LGBTI+ communities and their workplace experiences, have created a gap in scientific knowledge that requires exploration.

This dearth of research is particularly observed in the South African organisational leadership arena (Collins, 2012; SAWEI, 2019). The challenges encountered by LGBTI+ employees in their work life are a vital and under-researched area (Beggan & Allison, 2018;

Carey & Languilaire, 2017; Fassinger et al., 2010; Schneider & Dimito, 2010). The absence of LGBTI+ voices and the limited literature on research in this field, provided the motivation for this study. As LGBTI+ communities encompass several different groups that fall under the LGBTI+ umbrella, the research focused specifically on the gay cisgender male portion of these communities which may provide a point of departure for future investigations into LGBTI+ communities in the South African workplace. The foremost objective of this research was to pursue scientific knowledge into the neglected area of study on LGBTI+ employees in senior leadership with a specific focus on the gay cisgender male population. Carey and Languilaire (2017) state that although LGBTI+ people occupy a noteworthy portion of organisational and societal populations, this community holds little relevant space in research.

The decision to focus on gay cisgender men in the South African workplace led to the deliberation of the following research question: 'Where are the gay cisgender male leaders in South African organisations and why do we not hear about them or from them?' Reflecting on the question and discussing it with numerous employees in South African organisations, it became apparent that little information existed to explain the absence of the voices of gay men in leadership. Observations of South African organisations revealed few visible gay cisgender male leaders, particularly in mainstream South African organisations. It was concluded that an effort should be made to understand this phenomenon to ascertain whether there are indeed gay men in senior leadership in mainstream South African organisations. It was similarly determined that should gay cisgender male employees have ascended to the level of senior leadership, those leaders may hold valuable information regarding the journey to leadership for gay men and that this information should be examined.

This study was directed toward unearthing the background and details behind the muted gay cisgender male voices in leadership, and particularly, how some gay men can navigate organisational hierarchies and challenges to achieve senior leadership positions. The study thus investigated the lived experiences of gay men in their achievement of senior leadership roles,

emphasising the barriers or challenges they have encountered and overcome to acquire senior leadership positions.

Research Problem and Rationale

As gay men and their lived experiences are the foundation of the investigation, the underlying focus of the study is on sexual orientation, or more specifically same-sex sexual orientation, in the workplace. There is a scarcity of literature on the influence of sexual orientation on the achievement of leadership for gay men, particularly in South African organisations (Aksoy et al., 2019; Balfour, 2016; Beggan & Allison, 2018; Fassinger et al., 2010; Morton, 2017). The SAWEI conducted in 2019, found that out of 27 companies participating in the index, less than 60% could identify senior leaders who were part of LGBTI+ communities and revealed their sexual orientation to their organisations (SAWEI, 2019). This figure raises concern particularly as the organisations participating in the index; are understood to be aware of discrimination towards LGBTI+ employees, show concern for the challenges their LGBTI+ employees experience and are attempting to redress these. If this figure is so low in these organisations which are known to be LGBTI+ affirmative organisations, there is a reasonable possibility that other organisations in South Africa, that do not yet participate in this index, could present figures relating to LGBTI+ leaders that are even lower. The absence of South African research voices regarding sexual orientation in the workplace and the absence of openly gay men in leadership, therefore, provides a point of departure for research to augment the field of psychology and the knowledge of LGBTI+ employees' experiences in the workplace.

The rationale for this research was to create new scientific knowledge on sexual orientation in the South African workplace and to ascertain how gay men are affected when they openly reveal their same-sex sexual orientation in the work environment. The experiences within organisations, the obstacles gay men encounter and the intrinsic, internal, and extrinsic enablers that assist them to overcome these obstacles, could provide valuable data to

organisations and tertiary institutions on the persisting challenges confronting gay men and other LGBTI+ people within their ranks. These data also indicate areas of development that may assist gay men in overcoming these challenges.

The new knowledge created may further assist young gay men, and potentially other groups of LGBTI+ people entering the workforce, to prevail over the existing challenges in South African organisations and to realise their aspirations, including attaining senior leadership roles in these organisations.

Research Questions

The following five research questions presented a focus for the study and informed the research that followed:

- Research question 1: What is the current visibility status of gay cisgender male leaders in mainstream South African organisations?
- Research question 2: How does the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation influence the achievement of senior or executive leadership roles for gay men in mainstream South African organisations?
- Research question 3: What are the experiences of openly gay men, relating to their sexual orientation, that may create barriers to achieving senior or executive leadership roles in mainstream South African organisations?
- Research question 4: What are the personality traits or characteristics of gay men who openly express their sexual orientation in the workplace, that may enable them to overcome existing barriers to achieve senior or executive leadership?
- Research question 5: What are the extrinsic enablers in South African organisations that may assist gay men to rise above existing challenges and achieve senior leadership roles?

A definition of the important terms that shaped the study will now be presented and explored to provide an understanding of how they were integrated and utilised in the study.

A Brief Definition of the Terms

Various terms informed this study. Below is an exploration of these important terms with an explanation of each and how it was understood and applied to the study. These terms formed the foundation from which the study was built and provided a focus for understanding the findings of the analysis process:

Sexual Orientation

As sexual orientation underlies the study, it is an important concept to comprehend. Sexual orientation revolves around an individual's physical, emotional and romantic attraction to others and this is knowledge that is held internally (Sutherland et al., 2016). The term *sexual orientation* has varied definitions in the literature, but the preferred definition utilised in this study is that provided by The Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA, 2017) who define it as an enduring sexual and emotional desire towards other people. The Academy of Science of South Africa (2015) further states that sexual orientation can be divided into three categories, homosexuality (e.g., individuals who identify as gay, lesbian or homosexual and experience same-sex sexual and intimate feelings), heterosexuality (individuals who identify with a heterosexual sexual orientation and are attracted to members of the opposite sex) and bisexuality (individuals who have a strong attraction to members of both sexes). PsySSA considers 'Asexuality' an additional category under the broader category of sexual orientation, which represents people who are not attracted to either gender. The additional category of asexuality was included in the demographic intake form to acknowledge all categories of sexual orientation for the participants to select; however, the study requirements indicated that only participants who identified with a same-sex sexual orientation would be included.

It is important to draw a distinction between the medically informed concept of “homosexuality” and the socially constructed typology of the gay male. Historically, the medically informed concept ‘homosexuality’ was considered a pathology or mental illness. Homosexuality was, furthermore, considered immoral and criminalised in South Africa during the Apartheid era (PsySSA, 2017). However, this classification was later removed due to social and political pressures and recognition that homosexuality presents as a normal variant of human sexuality, not a disease or mental illness. The concept of being gay, on the other hand, refers to a socially constructed identity and community that includes individuals who identify as homosexual or same-sex attracted, as well as those who engage in same-sex behaviours, but may not necessarily identify as gay. It is important to recognize that these are two distinct concepts, and while the medical concept of homosexuality may be useful in a clinical setting, it should not be used to define or limit the identities of individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, the socially constructed concept of being gay may not fully capture the diversity and complexity of sexual and gender identities. Ultimately, it is up to individuals to determine how they choose to identify and define themselves and this reasoning led to the request of participants to self-identify their sexual orientation.

In this study, sexual orientation was represented using a self-identification process concerning the above categories. All participants selected for the study identified with a same-sex (gay) sexual orientation. Soeker et al. (2015) found that many gay men will hide their sexual identity to avoid marginalisation. However, to discover the role that sexual orientation plays in the achievement of senior leadership, participants had to be “open” or “out” about their same-sex sexual orientation. This implies that all the participants chosen to be part of the study had revealed their same-sex sexual orientation to the members of their respective organisations and openly expressed their gay sexual orientation.

Prejudice and Discrimination

In South Africa, as with many other countries world-wide, people who do not identify with a heterosexual orientation (e.g., same-sex sexual orientation) are frequently considered abnormal. These members of communities and organisations are often discriminated against because of their divergence from heterosexual orientation, often referred to as heteronormativity or heterosexism (Balfour, 2016; Meyer & Beyer, 2013; Reed & Leuty, 2016; Reygan & Lynette, 2014). Heteronormativity is, therefore, a belief that heterosexuality is the preferred, normal and accepted sexual orientation and reflects ongoing heteronormative cultures in communities and organisations which aim to suppress any sexual and gender identities that are understood to be different from or a heterosexual orientation (Reygan & Lynette, 2014). Those who do not fit into the heteronormative mould tend to experience prejudice, discrimination and victimisation (Kugara et al., 2017; Nyeck et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2019; Soeker et al., 2015).

Another concept often understood as synonymous with heteronormativity, which is regularly observed in organisations, including many South African organisations, is patriarchy. In many families, organisations and societies, patriarchal systems remain predominant where men, particularly heterosexual men, are considered the only adequate people to assume authority or become leaders. In their report, Sutherland et al. (2016) explain that patriarchy is a social system based on gender where the majority of power or influence is given to men and where women are often considered to have lesser value than men. Patriarchal systems and practices are often deeply entrenched and prescribe specific roles, behaviours, tasks and even jobs to people of certain genders (male or female) or with specific characteristics. Leaders in patriarchal systems or organisations tend to require specific physical and behavioural characteristics which are often masculine, male-focused, and heterosexual attributes (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; McLachlan et al., 2019). People who fail to conform to these prescribed categories are therefore seen as unusual or improper and are often met with resistance from other members of their organisation. Gay men are often stereotyped with characteristics which

may be associated with heterosexual people of the opposite gender such as femininity or emotional traits (Pellegrinin et al., 2020). As gay men are stereotyped or perceived to fall outside the typical patriarchal ideals for a leader, they are often confronted with discrimination or prejudice in the workplace, when seeking leadership positions.

Furthermore, Barrantes and Eaton (2018) explored sexual orientation and the suitability of gay men for leadership positions. They discovered that many hold perceptions that gay cisgender male leaders possess feminine leadership traits making them better suited to female-type leadership roles. From their research, and others by Morton (2017) and Rumens et al. (2019), members of organisations often assume that gay men are better suited to preconceived female roles or positions such as secretarial or assistant roles. These assumptions seem particularly prevalent in patriarchal systems or organisations (Fassinger et al., 2010).

Homoprejudice, more commonly known as homophobia, is another challenge gay men and other LGBTI+ communities, face in South African society (Hattingh, 1998; Nel, 2007; Reygan & Lynette, 2014). This research investigated the influence that homoprejudice has on the lived experiences of gay men and how this contributed to barriers for gay men in South African organisations. Soeker et al. (2015), discovered that although there are minimal statistics regarding the existence of homoprejudice in organisations in a South African context, it can be deduced that homoprejudice remains visible in the South African workplace. According to PsySSA (2017), homoprejudice and homophobia are similar terms used to refer to a form of discrimination which presents as feelings or statements of aggression, anger, revulsion or uneasiness towards men and women who identify with same-sex sexual orientation. LGBTI+ people often internalise the negative attitudes and feelings aimed at gay people and to which many people in LGBTI+ communities are exposed throughout their lives. These attitudes and feelings are integrated into their sense of self, which can result in symptoms like lowered self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Soeker et al., 2015). This internalising process may lead to an excessively negative view of the self. It can lead to gay men adapting their behaviour to protect

themselves and to come across as heterosexual or striving to fit the heteronormative ideal. They, therefore, choose to deny or hide their sexual orientation in order to be accepted. According to Nel (2007), this internalised homophobia may result in gay men being unable even to consider revealing their sexual orientation.

Balfour (2016) explored the impact of disclosure of sexual orientation on people with same-sex sexual orientations. The author posits that revealing same-sex sexual orientation in the workplace could result in exclusion from leadership, and that to attain leadership, gay men may have to conceal their sexual orientation. Thorpe (2018) further explains that for some members of LGBTI+ communities there is a genuine fear of violence against them that impedes their willingness to disclose their sexual orientation. Chung et al. (2015) discuss the overt discrimination or unfairness towards LGBTI+ employees and also explore micro-aggressions, which are those informal discriminatory actions such as isolation by co-workers or heterosexist jokes and comments. Both the overt and micro-aggression types of discrimination and prejudice can represent barriers that gay men need to overcome to achieve leadership positions.

The study used a qualitative methodology, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the experiences of gay men in leadership positions in South African organisations. Phenomenology is a research approach that aims to explore and understand individuals' experiences of a particular phenomenon. This study sought to understand the challenges that men with a same-sex sexual orientation face on their journey to leadership in South African organisations. It also sought to understand how gay men overcame these barriers and succeeded in achieving leadership. This ability to overcome obstacles and thrive despite them could be termed 'resilience'. Meyer (2015) explains resilience as one's ability to survive and thrive despite adversity. As so much of the research highlights the continued prejudice and discrimination of gay people in organisations (Badgett et al., 2007; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Collins, 2010; Meyer, 2015, Nel et al., 2007; Nyeck et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2019), openly gay

men who have achieved leadership positions hold valuable information on how to overcome the expected barriers like prejudice and discrimination.

In the process of recruiting gay cisgender male leaders for this study and managing the highly challenging process of finding willing participants, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, the evidence of prejudice and discrimination against gay men in leadership became palpable.

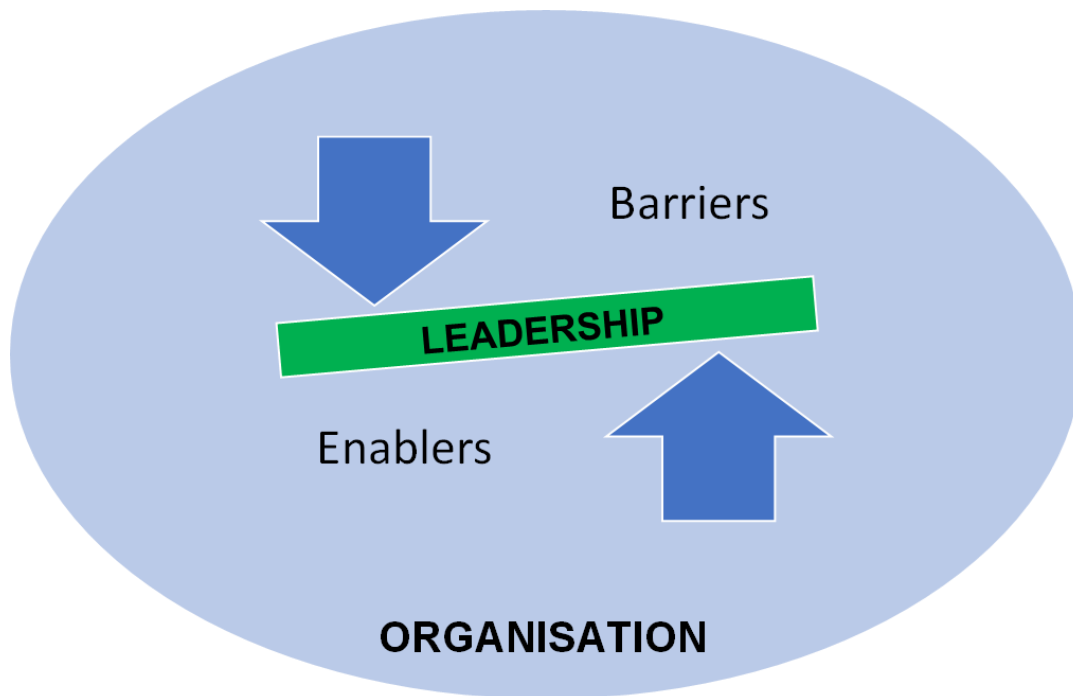
Barriers

Any obstacles related to sexual orientation in general and same-sex sexual orientation specifically, and which may have resulted in a perceived negative effect on the attainment of leadership roles, was considered a barrier. As explored earlier, discrimination and prejudice against LGBTI+ people, and particularly gay men who openly express their same-sex sexual orientation in the organisation they work for, are often understood to be significant barriers to the advancement of the careers and achievement of leadership for gay men (Aksoy et al., 2019, Soeker et al., 2015). Homophobic or heterosexist prejudice and discrimination are therefore experienced as a barrier that frequently results in gay men encountering a ceiling or limit to their professional growth and progression in the workplace (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Bell et al., 2011; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Denton, 2009; Frik, 2019; Gedro, 2010; Hill, 2009; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Soeker et al., 2015).

It is important to note that the concept of 'barriers' has dual dimensions in this study. While the study was interested in the possible barriers that each participant may encounter in the work environment, it was equally interested in how the participants may have overcome these barriers and continued on to achieve senior leadership positions despite these challenges. Data on the extrinsic enablers, like policies and practices in organisations which assist and support gay men in their leadership aspirations, were also explored and noted. Figure 1 depicts the duality of barriers as presented in this study where existing barriers may influence the achievement of leadership in organisations but also, where intrinsic and extrinsic enablers may assist gay men in overcoming barriers to achieve leadership.

Figure 1

The Duality of Barriers in the Achievement of Leadership



Leadership Roles

Leadership and sexual orientation intersected in this study, creating a focus on this often-neglected area of leadership studies (Beggan & Allison, 2018; Morton, 2017). The focus, therefore, was not on the typical, dominant identity group of leaders that are so often found in organisations in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. Those people presenting with gendered characteristics like masculinity, identifying as a cisgender male, heterosexual and often from a White racial group, were not what this study sought to investigate (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Collins, 2012; Morton, 2017). Instead, leadership was explored from the perspective of minority groups of people who present with diverse identities like those of LGBTI+ people or more specifically, gay men (Collins, 2012). While the attention was on understanding where leadership and sexual orientation intersect, specific emphasis was given to senior leadership roles in South African organisations. This emphasis sought to depict the

impact sexual orientation may have on gay men throughout their workplace journeys to achieve senior leadership roles in South African organisations.

Organisations in South Africa and globally face a workforce that has become increasingly diverse in aspects like gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation (Ozeren, 2014). Aksoy et al. (2019) in their research in the United Kingdom (UK), found that there is minimal information on how diverse sexual orientations may relate to the accessibility of leadership roles. Ozeren (2014) continues by explaining that sexual orientation may be considered one of the last, and still somewhat acceptable, forms of prejudice compared to other diversities. While the historical heteronormativity and homophobia present in organisations must be acknowledged, gay men in senior leadership roles in organisations who may have overcome the existing prejudices of heteronormativity and homophobia are, therefore essential to study and understand. In their research in the United States of America (USA), Barrantes and Eaton (2018) state that the presence of heterosexist culture in organisations may have implications for LGBTI+ people in terms of their desire and prospects to achieve senior leadership roles in the workplace. In studying the lived experiences of gay cisgender male leaders who openly express their sexual orientation, we can understand much about the attributes of these leaders themselves and the organisations they lead. Fassinger et al. (2010) highlight that when self-disclosure of sexual orientation is present in leadership, it creates a momentous event that needs to be studied. By investigating the lived experiences of gay men in leadership, attention is paid to the advent of self-disclosure of sexual orientation and how this may influence and be influenced by leadership.

The position of leader in an organisation is ambiguous and context driven and can have a variety of meanings and role implications (Pillay et al., 2016). In this study, a leadership role is understood as a behaviour that involves leading people who work in an organisation. Leaders are often understood as influencers of employees' behaviours and perception of the organisation. They set a vision and mission for the organisation, motivate, and direct the

employees through their various worker functions and assist in maintaining employee morale. The leadership roles of the participants in this study were measured in terms of the position or role they currently hold in a South African organisation and the entry requirements for this study were that each participant should be working in the role of a senior leader or, have been in a senior leadership role in the past five years.

Gay Men

While the researcher, hereafter referred to in the first person, acknowledges the need for further research on LGBTI+ employees in the workplace, the present study is focused solely on the gay men in these communities. The decision was based on various reasons. First, as a self-identified gay man working in South African organisations, this research was particularly relevant to my own career development. Second, an attempt was made to limit the scope of the study to a particular sub-section of the LGBTI+ population. Third, my observations have been that there appear to be very few gay men in leadership positions or, if they are in leadership positions, that their sexuality is not openly expressed.

Gay men fall under the broader LGBTI+ population and are part of what is commonly known as a minority group based on their sexual orientation (Chung et al., 2015; Lead & Leuty, 2016; Miner & Costa, 2018; PsySSA, 2017; Thorpe, 2018; Victor & Nel, 2016). The term gay refers to sexual orientation and is often used to describe a man who is sexually and emotionally attracted to other men (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). PsySSA (2017) describes sexual orientation to be an enduring sexual and emotional desire towards other people. Gay men or men with a same-sex sexual orientation are a group of people who fall under the umbrella term 'LGBTI+ communities' and are one of the central demographic requirements for participants in this study. Gay men are commonly understood to be a minority group within the population of organisations and the broader population of South Africa (Chung et al., 2015; Lead & Leuty, 2016; Miner & Costa, 2018; PsySSA, 2017; Thorpe, 2018; Victor & Nel, 2016). As the

demographic requirement was for participants to be 'gay men in senior leadership', same-sex sexual orientation is a significant component of this study.

It is important to begin with an exploration of gender. Most people are raised in families who understand gender to have a binary, biological nature. They understand gender to have only two representations, male or female, and every person falls within one of these two binaries (Butler, 1994; Crandall et al., 2022; O' Malley et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2016; Victor et al., 2014). In this study the term 'cisgender' is utilised. Cisgender denotes or relates to a person whose sense of their gender and gender identity corresponds with their assigned sex at birth (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Goldberg et al., 2020). PsySSA (2017) defines gender identity as internally held perception of their gender which may be female, male or another gender. The perception of their gender may be the same or different from the biological sex they were assigned at birth. If an individual identifies with the gender identity assigned at birth, the prefix used before their gender identity label would be 'cis'. For instance, if a gay person identifies as male and his gender identity is consistent with the biological sex he was assigned at birth, he would be referred to as a 'cisgender male'. Similarly, a female who identifies with the sex assigned to her at birth would be identified as a 'cisgender female'. A person who does not identify as the biological sex they were assigned at birth would be known as transgender (Goldberg et al., 2020). Participants needed to self-identify as 'gay' and 'cisgender male' to be considered for this study.

Lived experiences

The construct "lived experiences" refers to the first-hand accounts of an individual's life as it is experienced, which can include their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. It is a concept used in social research to understand how individuals experience and navigate the world around them. Lived experiences are shaped by a variety of factors, including social, cultural, economic, and historical factors, as well as individual characteristics and life events. In terms of this study, 'lived experiences' represent the personal experiences of gay men in the workplace

environment but specifically linked to their sexual orientation and its effect on their progress in terms of leadership achievements.

'Lived experiences' as a construct and research approach has grown as a methodology and finds its roots in feminist studies, phenomenology, and ethnographic research (McIntosh & Wright, 2019). Scott (1992) explains that obtaining an individual's own account of something that they have lived through could be considered one of the most authentic forms of knowledge. McIntosh and Wright (2019) conducted a critical examination of 'lived experience' as a concept and found that amongst various other positive motivators for its use in social research, in the field of feminist phenomenology, lived experiences provide a lens to examine and extract prejudices that may be gendered and/or embedded in social environments. Incorporating the lived experiences of individuals can therefore provide a vehicle to respond to the subordination of gay men in the workplace by giving voice to the voiceless and visibility to the invisible (McIntosh & Wright (2019). As this study sought to uncover and acknowledge the frequently silent voices of gay cisgender male leaders, the exploration of the 'lived experiences' of senior gay leaders provided an effective method for acquiring the data.

Husserl considered the originator and instrumental figure in the foundation of phenomenology (Alase, 2017; Furtak, 2019; Smith, 2015), considered lived experiences to embody two dimensions, the experiences that a person lives through and the meaning that they ascribe to those experiences. Husserl's emphasis on the importance of understanding the context in which lived experiences occur is also a central theme in phenomenology. Husserl believed that experiences are always situated within a particular context or horizon of meaning, and that it is important to take this context into account to fully understand the meaning of an experience (Alase, 2017). Building on Husserlian phenomenology, Alase (2017) felt that to conduct research that is positioned to explore the context where certain phenomenon occur, it is important to understand the lived experiences of people existing in those contexts. The idea that research should be positioned to explore the context in which certain phenomena occur is in line

with the phenomenological approach. By focusing on the lived experiences of individuals in a particular context, a deeper understanding of the meaning of those experiences and the structures of perception and consciousness that underlie them could be explored.

In the case of gay men working in mainstream South African organisations, studying their lived experiences can provide insights into the ways in which sexual orientation intersects with leadership in the workplace. By understanding the context in which these experiences occurred, a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by gay men in leadership roles, and how these experiences are shaped by broader social, cultural, and political factors were explored.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach that focuses on exploring how individuals make sense of their personal experiences. It seeks to understand how people understand and interpret their experiences and how these interpretations influence their behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes. IPA, therefore, offers an approach to analysing the data from lived experiences. IPA is particularly interested in exploring the unique perspectives of each participant in a study and in allowing the research findings to be narrated through the lived experiences of the participants themselves (Alase, 2017). This means that through utilising IPA methodology this research could capture the rich, subjective, and context-specific nature of participants' experiences, rather than trying to impose preconceived categories or theories on the data. Utilising IPA involved a detailed analysis of interview transcripts with an aim to identify themes and patterns in the participants' accounts. The analysis involved a recursive process of reading and re-reading the data, identifying emergent themes, and revisiting the data to refine the analysis. Ultimately, the goal of utilising IPA methodology was to generate an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences and to develop a rich, nuanced narrative that captured the complexity of those experiences.

Organisations

The context in which this research was conducted is the workplace or the organisation where a gay cisgender male employee may be working. For this study, an organisation is understood to be an entity where more than ten people work together towards a particular goal or purpose. In exploring sexual orientation in South African organisations in this study, a decision was made to focus solely on mainstream South African organisations. The rationale for selecting only mainstream organisations in South Africa is that it was expected that organisations working with or within LGBTI+ communities and organisations that encourage and support LGBTI+ people (currently or historically considered to be 'LGBTI+ or gay-friendly' organisations), would be more accommodating and inclusive in their policies and practices than the average organisation (Stahlman et al., 2015). However, mainstream organisations are presumed to reflect the prevailing attitudes and values of most organisations in South Africa, particularly regarding sexual orientation.

Ng and Rumens (2017) assert that there are three segments of organisational scholarship in the field of LGBTI+ workplace issues; the first presented homosexuality as a disease, the second centred on the negative attitudes towards homosexuality, and the third centred on creating an affirmative workplace culture. Ng and Rumens (2017) continue that study in the third phase of organisational scholarship aims to refute heteronormativity in the workplace and to implement policies and practices that are affirmative and inclusive. Indeed, this study endeavoured to enrich this third segment of organisational scholarship by exploring the absence of gay cisgender male voices and influence that heteronormativity and sexual orientation have on gay men in an organisational setting and in their pursuit of leadership. It was assumed that these organisations continued to tolerate prejudice and even hostility towards minority groups like those in LGBTI+ communities (Frik, 2019; Nyeck et al., 2019; SAWEI, 2019; Soeker et al., 2015) which could directly influence on gay men and their achievement of leadership roles.

Overview of the Chapter layout

The remainder of this study is comprised of four chapters. Chapter Two (Literature Review) contextualises the research by reviewing the limited literature on gay men in leadership in South African organisations. It delves into the role that sexual orientation plays in the achievement of leadership for gay men and explores South Africa legislation and how regulations and laws are implemented to protect the rights of gay men. Furthermore, it uncovers the challenges and barriers gay men may encounter in their pursuit of leadership and explores the factors that may enable them to overcome and flourish despite existing barriers. The chapter also presents the theoretical foundations of the research with an in-depth review of the central components of the study.

Chapter Three (Research Methodology) explores the methodology implemented to answer the research questions. The chapter discusses the research design, the target population, the data collection, and the analysis processes as well as the ethical considerations that steered the study.

Chapter Four (Findings and Discussion) reports the findings of the study. The findings are separated into a summary of the demographic data and the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis. The interpretation of the findings and how they relate to the literature and address the research questions are further explicated.

Chapter Five (Summary and Conclusion) concludes this study, and it provides a meta perspective of the study, a summary of the findings, the limitation of the research and a conclusion.

Concluding Comments

This chapter presented an introduction to the study. It provided a background and orientation into the landscape of the South African organisation and the persistent challenges encountered when sexual orientation intersects with leadership in an organisational context.

LGBTI+ communities were introduced as the minority population under study and how members from this minority group are confronted with, and may be required to overcome, challenges to achieve senior leadership roles in South African organisations despite South Africa's progressive and inclusive Constitution, was explored. The presence and influence of prejudice and discrimination in the South Africa workplace were also introduced, and how they contribute to the barriers that gay men contend with in the workplace. The components that informed the research were established and linked to existing literature to provide a foundation for the study. In the following chapter, a detailed review of the literature will be conducted to contextualise the study within existing research and theory.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will explore the following broad areas of research: LGBTI+ lived experiences in the South African workplace, and the barriers that gay cisgender male leaders may endure and overcome as expressed through their lived experiences. It will begin by contextualising the principles of the study within a South African context, exploring the challenges facing LGBTI+ communities within the ambit of leadership in South African organisations. Specific attention will be paid to the role that discrimination and prejudice play in shaping barriers for LGBTI+ communities and may influence their professional growth and development within organisations negatively. Attention will also be paid to the factors that may enable gay men to overcome obstacles to achieve leadership. The chapter will conclude by detailing the theoretical foundations that underpinned this study.

While limited literature exists on the discrimination and marginalisation of LGBTI+ communities in the South African workplace (Reygan & Lynette, 2016; Soeker et al., 2015; SAWEI, 2019), negligible focus has been given to the lived experiences of gay men in leadership and how the sexual orientation of these employees impacts their progress in organisations, within a South African context. Examining the literature has highlighted the dire need for research on the impact that sexual orientation on the professional development and advancement of gay men and other members of LGBTI+ communities in South African organisations. The importance of understanding the barriers they may expect to encounter and the enabling factors that may assist them in attaining leadership positions, is also indicated. This chapter begins by exploring the South African context and the barriers and enablers to leadership in South African organisations.

The South African Context

Sexual Orientation in South African Organisations

The term sexual orientation can be described as how a person self-labels when it comes to their sexuality. Sutherland et al. (2016) understand sexual orientation in a similar manner to PsySSA (2017) and describe it as an internally held sense of attraction towards other people on an intimate, emotional, or physical level. In their article published in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Bailey et al. (2016) delve into a robust and detailed explanation for sexual orientation which provides a rich interpretation of this concept. They imagine sexual orientation as consisting of four distinct phenomena: The first is *Sexual Behaviour* consisting of “sexual interactions between people of the same sex (homosexual), other sex (heterosexual) or both sexes (bisexual)” (p. 48). The Academy of Science of South Africa (2015) seems to agree with Bailey et al. (2016) and similarly divides sexual orientation into three categories, same-sex sexuality (e.g., individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and experience same-sex sexual and intimate feelings), heterosexuality (individuals who identify as ‘straight’ and are attracted to members of the opposite sex) and bisexuality (individuals who have a strong attraction to members from both sexes). However, as mentioned, PsySSA (2017) includes the additional category of asexuality (attracted to neither sex).

The second phenomenon Bailey et al. (2016) describe is *Sexual Identity* which relates to how a person identifies themselves as either heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. This second phenomenon coincides with Sutherland et al. (2016), who understand sexual orientation as an “internally held knowledge” (p. 13). How a person conceives of their sexual identity may be public or private knowledge contingent upon whether the person chooses to disclose their sexual identity or not. A study conducted by Katz-Wise and Hyde (2015), based on the seminal work of Diamond (2008), which emphasised the fluid nature of sexual orientation and sexual identity, found that approximately half their female respondents and over 30% of male respondents reported fluidity in sexual orientation identity over time. Diamond (2016) describes

the fluidity of sexual orientation as flexibility in sexual responsiveness to situations which allows for changes in same-sex or other-sex desire over short-term or long-term periods. The fluidity of sexual orientation and, therefore, sexual identity, is commonly acknowledged across much of the research on LGBTI+ populations.

In this study, sexual orientation will be described in terms of the cisgender male participants being “open” or “out” about their same-sex sexual orientation, implying that these participants may have somehow overcome obstacles such as marginalisation and discrimination. This study also infers that most other employees of the organisation where the participant is also employed are aware of the participants’ sexual orientation. This inference was based on the selection criteria for participation in the study. Each participant was required to have an openly expressed same-sex sexual orientation in their organisations, implying that the people in that organisation were aware of their sexual orientation. McCormick (2015) describes the process of revealing one’s same-sex sexual orientation to others as validation of a homosexual identity. McCormick (2015) explains that by identifying with a same-sex sexual orientation, a person may be coerced into committing to an unchanging sexual orientation even though sexual orientation is understood to be a fluid concept. Social pressure to conform to a label, once assigned (correctly or incorrectly) or self-identified, may create a situation where a person feels coerced into conforming to the characteristics or behaviours of that label despite its inaccuracy or that this label may no longer be how the person identifies themselves. Although it is agreed that sexual orientation and openness about sexual orientation are understood to be fluid concepts, for the purposes of this study, it was necessary for a cisgender male candidate to identify as openly gay at the time of the sampling and interview. This study in no way attempted to undermine the fluid nature of sexual orientation but, for simplicity of selection, requested participants to commit to a label to comply with the participation requirements

The coming out process could be seen to support the classic representations of sexual orientation identity formation, which proposes that sexual orientation is a stable construct that

persists over a person's lifetime (Bell et al., 1981; Money, 1988). However, there is a growing body of research that challenges this classical view and prefers an understanding of sexual orientation as fluid and non-binary (Diamond, 2016; Fassinger, 2016; Goldberg et al., 2020; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2015, McCormick, 2015; PsySSA, 2017; Victor & Nel, 2016). Fassinger (2016) provides a helpful understanding of the fluidity of sexual orientation (identities) when he describes how sexual and gender minority individuals have more positive experiences when they can reject social discourses that try to force individuals into narrow, fixed categories and instead embrace a more fluid and dynamic means of understanding their identities.

The third phenomenon of sexual orientation Bailey et al. (2016) explore is *Sexual Attraction* which they claim addresses the extent of a person's attraction "to the same sex, both sexes or the other sex" (p. 48). The final phenomenon is what Bailey et al. refer to as one's relative physiological *Sexual Arousal* to either males or females. They refer to this as the physical ways in which males or females are stimulated.

For the participants in this study, sexual orientation was measured using a self-label measurement according to how each participant identified themselves concerning the categories same-sex, bisexual, heterosexual or asexual at the time of the study. To be considered to participate in the study, potential participants needed to identify with a same-sex sexual orientation (gay), and this was understood as other than heterosexual, bisexual or asexual. Soeker et al. (2015) explain that some men tend to keep their same-sex sexual orientation a secret to avoid marginalisation or discrimination. Marginalisation and discrimination (as discussed above) could potentially be amongst the most significant barriers that gay men may encounter in achieving leadership in South African workplaces. In their investigation of research conducted in the UK, Aksoy et al. (2019) noted that gay men continued to encounter a ceiling or 'glass ceiling' that indicated that they were considerably less likely than heterosexual men to achieve senior leadership roles with the associated rank and income.

There is significant international literature but limited South African literature that supports the opinion that there remains discrimination and marginalisation of gay men, particularly in the workplace, due to their sexual orientation (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett et al., 2007; Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Kugara et al., 2017; Meyer, 2015; Miner & Costa, 2018; Nel et al., 2007; Nyeck et al., 2019; Ozeren, 2014; Ragins et al., 2007). In studying gay men who have achieved leadership in South African organisations, it is evident that the above research may not paint the complete picture. Some gay men can overcome potential barriers like discrimination and marginalisation and are able to achieve leadership despite being open about their same-sex sexual orientation. Therefore, the methods or enablers they use to overcome the expected barriers are important to understand. The following section will explore organisational barriers and how they impact gay men.

While some research has been conducted investigating sexual orientation in South African organisations (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Nel, 2007; Soeker et al., 2015), very little literature exists on the impact of the open expression of sexual orientation on leadership in South African organisations. In their working paper, Benjamin and Reygan (2016) indicate that although there has been some progress in this field, South African organisations require substantial work to be inclusive and welcoming to LGBTI+ people. Benjamin and Reygan explain that LGBTI+ people continue to experience discrimination throughout the cycle of their employment due to their apparent or actual sexual orientation. Indeed, when it comes to the open expression of sexual orientation and gender identity, LGBTI+ employees appear to prefer to conceal their sexual orientation due to fear of discrimination or prejudice or fear of a negative impact on their career progression (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016).

Based on international and (limited) South African research, fear of prejudice and discrimination is understood to be the chief barrier to the open expression of sexual orientation for gay men (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Fassinger et al., 2010; Morton, 2017; Nel et al., 2007; Soeker et al., 2015). Understanding sexual orientation, the

open expression of this, and the lived experiences of gay cisgender male leaders in South African organisations, is necessary. It can assist in recognising the barriers gay cisgender males may expect to encounter and overcome to achieve senior leadership.

Research on gay men in leadership in South African organisations remains scarce. Balfour (2016) explains that there is a scarcity of literature in South Africa on LGBTI+ leadership and identity, particularly in tertiary education settings. However, he explains that this does not imply there are no LGBTI+ leaders but rather that they are invisible. While Balfour limits his focus to tertiary education settings, this study explored mainstream organisations in South Africa in general.

The literature on gay men in leadership in mainstream South Africa organisations is minimal. Balfour (2016) explains that due to the desperate need for racial transformation post the Apartheid era, the needs and challenges of other minority groups were considered secondary. Pillay et al. (2019) agree with these sentiments regarding South Africa's transformation, stating that the challenges of racial inequality dominated transformation in South Africa, delegating LGBTI+ struggles to obscurity. The racial history and discrimination in South Africa prevalent during the Apartheid era has created such a devastating and lasting divide in all sectors of the workplace and economy that the focus on interventions regarding other forms of discrimination or prejudice has become invisible by comparison. Hence, research on sexual orientation in South African organisations remains a neglected and vital area that needs to be explored. Morton (2017), who conducted research in the USA emphasising the perceived leadership efficiency of gay male leaders, argues that sexual orientation has been understudied in the workplace and that significantly less research has been conducted on the experiences of gay and lesbian leaders compared the heterosexual leaders.

In a recent survey conducted by Sutherland et al. (2016), and commissioned by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Other Foundation in South Africa, it was determined that 0.9% to 2.2 % of the total population of 55.9 million people (Statistics South

Africa, 2016) in South Africa older than 16 self-identify as having either a same-sex sexual orientation, a bisexual sexual orientation or are non-confirming in some way. However, Victor (2017) suggests that statistics on sexual orientation may be underreported as people may be in various stages of coming out or inclination to openly express their sexual orientation. While the survey by Sutherland et al. (2016) indicates that the LGBTI+ population is a small number in comparison to the total population, however, these figures may be underreported (Victor 2017). There is growing scholarly interest in the field of LGBTI+ studies (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Ozeren, 2014; Pichler et al., 2015; Victor et al., 2014) which is accompanied by an increase in the visibility of LGBTI+ people in society and within the workplace (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003; SAWEI, 2019; Thorpe, 2018). These developments indicate that there is value in generating research on gay men working in South African organisations.

In 2018, the SAWEI was launched by The South African LGBT+ Management Forum (www.lgbtforum.org). It provides organisations with various tools and guidelines to benchmark and evaluate their organisations in terms of their levels of LGBTI+ inclusivity and equality practices in the workplace (SAWEI, 2019). While SAWEI's work is only now beginning, this is one avenue open to organisations to assess the inclusivity of their policies and procedures regarding gay men and other LGBTI+ people. Through the personal accounts of gay men's lived experiences during their leadership journeys, data were obtained, first on how successful organisations are at implementing non-discriminatory processes and, second, the possibility that gay men continue to experience obstacles related to their sexual orientation in their pursuit of senior leadership roles.

The section that follows will explore the South African Constitution and the legislation which supports it and protects the rights of the people of South Africa.

South African Legislation

While several laws and regulations, including the South Africa Constitution and other legislation, as discussed below, provide for the protection of the rights of sexual minorities, this

does not assure acceptance or recognition, particularly in organisations. Balfour (2016) states that until the aspirations of an equal and fair democracy become a reality in organisations, LGBTI+ people will continue to experience challenges in developing into leaders.

Prior to the drafting of our world-renowned Constitution, the Apartheid state of South Africa viewed homosexuality not only as immoral but criminalised it through legislation. Legislation like the Immorality Act of 1957 and the subsequent 'men at a party' clause, was primarily intended at preventing interracial sexual interaction. However, it was also used to prosecute cases of same-sex relations. The clause criminalised any gathering where there was a suspicion of sexual intercourse between members of the same sex (Botha & Cameron, 1997). Under this clause, people suspected of being homosexual were subjected to intrusive and degrading police raids and prosecutions. The Act was used to persecute and oppress individuals based on their sexual orientation, and it was a tool of discrimination and oppression that caused significant harm to the LGBTQ+ community in South Africa. The Apartheid government and its laws, therefore, helped to entrench social divisions based on race, gender, and sexuality (PsySSA, 2017). On 27 April 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections culminating in the 1996 Constitution. The Constitution provides for the protection, equality, human rights, and dignity of all persons (RSA, 1996). Chapter Two of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, section nine states that "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (RSA, 1996, p. 4). According to Francis and Reygan (2016), South Africa was the first country in the world to include protection for sexual orientation in its Constitution. Indeed, the following Acts governing the fair treatment of employees in South African organisations, provide for protection from discrimination, as informed by the Constitution:

- The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 states in Chapter Two Section Six that no person may be discriminated against by another person or by the government of South Africa (RSA, 2000). This act includes protection from hate speech and intentional unfair discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation.
- The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, Section 186 (2) provides that unfair discrimination is considered an example of unfair labour practice. Section 187 (1) (f) considers unfair labour practice as any time that an employer unfairly discriminates against an employee either directly or indirectly, on any arbitrary grounds including, race, sex, ethnicity, colour, sexual orientation, amongst others. (RSA 1995). The sexual orientation of employees is therefore protected by this Act, and this indicates that there should be no discrimination in the workplace against a person because of their sexual orientation.
- The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 states that its primary purpose is to give effect to and regulate the right to fair labour practices conferred by section 23(1) of the Constitution.
- According to the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, an employer must take steps to eliminate unfair discrimination in any employment policy or practice by promoting equal opportunity in the workplace. An employer should also prohibit unfair discrimination by ensuring that no discriminatory policies or practices occur based on an employees' race, gender, colour, sexual orientation, amongst others (RSA, 1998).

Despite the progressive regulatory landscape as presented above, South Africa remains a country where members of LGBTI+ communities continue to experience significant barriers to economic inclusion due to their sexual orientation (Nycek et al., 2019). Nycek et al. (2019) claim that although Apartheid has ended, inequality in South Africa remains extremely high. Through exploration of the lived experiences of gay cisgender male leaders, this research sought to

confirm or refute that these significant barriers are in fact present in South African organisations and, if present, how they may be overcome to enable gay men to attain leadership roles.

The following section will explore the literature on barriers that may impact gay men in their pursuit of senior leadership and the enablers that may assist in managing and overcoming these barriers to achieve senior leadership roles.

Barriers and Enablers to Achieving Leadership

While the focus of the study was to investigate the experiences of gay men in organisational contexts, I additionally sought to identify factors that helped them to thrive despite any challenges they may have faced. The study aimed to look at both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that enabled participants to thrive. By identifying these protective factors, the study sought to offer insights into how organisations can create more inclusive and supportive environments for their LGBTQ+ employees and to understand how gay men can continue to grow their professional careers and to achieve leadership roles despite barriers in their organisations. Are the factors that enabled a gay man to achieve leadership and overcome barriers linked to intrinsic (internal) attributes or are they perhaps linked to extrinsic (external) attributes? Some literature indicates that there are organisations that provide assistance to gay men in terms of policy or even open acknowledgement and acceptance of sexual minority groups (extrinsic attributes).

In referencing previous research, Joubert (1998) discovered that power can be used as a strategy to serve the interests of patriarchal heterosexuality. He found that power dynamics are often influenced by gender roles and expectations. Joubert suggests that power can be used as a means of maintaining heterosexuality, which is often seen as the normative sexual orientation. In this way, power can be used to enforce heteronormativity and maintain the dominance of patriarchal gender roles (p. 31). This may be understood as a continuation of heteronormative and patriarchal systems where only heterosexual men are seen to possess

masculine traits and they alone can assume masculine roles like leadership. Gay men in leadership positions would therefore appear to disprove these sentiments. Data on gay men who have achieved senior leadership roles by overcoming challenges associated with heteronormative and patriarchal systems can, therefore, provide an important resource for emerging gay leaders.

Barriers to Achieving Leadership

The barriers that may impact gay men on their journey to senior leadership will now be explored. As indicated in the Chapter One, in this study, the concept of barriers was understood to have an opposing dimension or duality known as enablers, which represent those attributes that can assist gay men to achieve senior leadership despite barriers. These enablers are explored later in this chapter.

Prejudice and Discrimination as Barriers. Any obstacles related to sexual orientation that impact on attaining or delaying leadership roles, could be considered a barrier. Discrimination and prejudice against LGBTI+ people, particularly gay men in this study, may cause significant barriers to their advancement and achievement of leadership. Soeker et al. (2015), in their study of gay men and their worker roles, agree with this sentiment stating that discrimination is a barrier for LGBTI+ people in the workplace. Aksoy et al. (2019), in their research in the UK, found that although gay men are often likely to achieve middle management roles in organisations, they are significantly less likely than their heterosexual male counterparts to attain the highest level of managerial positions.

Sexual orientation plays a role in the achievement of leadership positions and appears to create a glass ceiling for gay men in inhibiting their achievement of senior roles. Schneider and Dimito (2010) found that gay men were more prone to perceive heterosexist and homophobic discrimination as a barrier to achievement than other LGBTI+ groups. This is not to imply that other LGBTI+ people do not encounter barriers to their professional growth, but simply that gay men are more likely to perceived prejudice as a barrier to their career progression. Thorpe

(2018), in her research on LGBTI+ communities in South Africa and their inclusion in the political arena, including political party participation and leadership found that fear, discrimination, and poor opportunities create barriers for LGBTI+ people in the political arena. The literature supports the view that LGBTI+ communities continue to experience barriers to the achievement of leadership.

In South Africa, as with many other countries world-wide, people who do not identify with a heterosexual orientation are frequently considered abnormal, and these members of communities and organisations are often discriminated against because of their difference from the *normative* heterosexual orientation, often referred to as heteronormativity or heterosexism (Balfour, 2016; Meyer & Beyer, 2013; Reed & Leuty, 2016; Reygan & Lynette, 2014). Heteronormativity is, therefore, a belief that heterosexuality is the preferred, normal and accepted sexual orientation and may explain the continued prejudice towards people who present with other sexual and gender identities (Reygan & Lynette, 2014). Those who do not fit into the heteronormative box tend to be ostracised, discriminated against, and victimised (Kugara et al., 2017; Nyeck et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2019; Soeker et al., 2015). Prejudice and discrimination also filter into the work environment. Nyeck et al. (2019) clarify this by stating that the heteronormative freedoms of the dominant group in an organisation, who exhibit characteristics like gender-conforming behaviour or heterosexuality, tend to shape the environments under which people live or work while also stigmatising racial or sexual minority groups.

Morton (2017), in his research into the perceived effectiveness of gay cisgender male leaders, found that the more negative the participant was towards homosexuality, the less effective they would rate a gay male leader (p. 162). Homonegativity can be defined in two ways. The first is the historical view of homonegativity which Morrison and Morrison (2011) define as negative behaviours, thoughts and feelings aimed at gay men and women. The second is a more recent view of homonegativity which implies that discrimination against same-

sex sexuality does not exist and that gay men do not integrate well into the majority culture but rather seek unnecessary changes to the existing situation. In a country like South Africa, with its history of racial discrimination and discrimination of minority groups, homonegativity remains a significant concern.

Homoprejudice, more commonly known as homophobia (which may be understood to be synonymous with the term homonegativity), is another term for the challenges that gay men, and other LGBTI+ members, may face in South African society and South African organisations (Hattingh, 1998, Nel, 2007; Reygan & Lynette, 2014). PsySSA (2017) describes homoprejudice as prejudice and discrimination that presents as an emotional reaction expressed towards gay men or women (or people presenting with same-sex sexual orientation in general). This emotional reaction may elicit feelings of revulsion, fear, anger or even violence towards these gay men or women. Maruma and Chakale (2019) explain homophobia in similar terms to PsySSA describing it as an adverse belief, attitude, loathing and/ or intolerance of lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Maruma and Chakale continue stating that homophobia is often linked to traditional religious beliefs or dogma. It may also be the result of beliefs learned from parents and families or cultural systems like patriarchy which endorse hatred through abusive inclinations and methods.

Patriarchy. Patriarchy is a cultural, organisational or social system where masculine dominance is considered ideal and where the needs of heterosexual, often White cisgender males are regarded as paramount and other groups are disempowered or disregarded (Nel, 2007; Nel et al., 2007; Pillay et al., 2016, Sutherland et al., 2016). Patriarchal systems remain rife in South African societies, religious organisations, workplaces and in our families where leaders and leadership roles are often reserved for or associated with heterosexual men (Maruma & Chakale, 2019). It is often present and informs heteronormative beliefs that have been associated with the Apartheid system of government in South Africa (Nel et al., 2007). Apartheid has left South Africa with a legacy of inequality, discrimination and an intolerance for

people with behaviour, characteristics or sexual orientation, amongst others, that are perceived to be other than the norm (which often implies other than heterosexual and male). Patriarchy and Apartheid therefore hold similar viewpoints and ideals. As patriarchy is a social system that privileges men and seeks to maintain and reinforce male dominance through disallowing, condemning or discriminating against those who do not possess 'acceptable' characteristics, one can understand how this could impact gay men in a patriarchal organisational environment.

Perceptions of Gay Leaders. From the research of Barrantes and Eaton (2018) and others like Morton (2017) and Rumens et al. (2019), it becomes evident that there is a widely held perception that gay men 'fit' better with preconceived 'female roles', particularly when it comes to leadership. Masculinity or 'hetero-masculinity', as described by Rumens et al. often rears its head in patriarchal systems. Hetero-masculinity refers to men and men's practices where acceptable roles (including leadership roles) can only be occupied by heterosexual, cisgender males who show the 'appropriate' masculine traits (Fassinger et al., 2010; Joubert, 1998; Nel, 2007). Fassinger et al. (2010) state that confusion has been created in society regarding sexual orientation and gender where people who present with same-sex sexual orientations are assumed to desire to be or become the opposite gender. Similarly, if a person is understood or observed to be gender non-conforming, they are misconstrued as having a same-sex sexual orientation.

It would, therefore, be expected that a gay cisgender male who openly expressed his sexual orientation will be perceived to be more suited to feminine or female-type leadership roles. Should a gay cisgender male become a leader, his behaviour and decision-making ability would be carefully examined to determine whether he possesses the decisiveness, confidence and strength expected of a 'true' male leader (Fassinger et al., 2010). It would appear that due to these preconceived notions of gay cisgender males in leadership roles and the expectations others may have of them, gay cisgender male leaders may enact an hypermasculine leadership style to ensure their capability is not questioned. Zernechel and Perry (2017) describe

hypermasculinity as a cisgender male's attempt to hide his insecurities and feelings, which often develop in environments where there is fear of the feminine. In an environment such as this, a leader is someone who overemphasises and adheres to traditional cisgender male roles.

It should be noted however, that Barrantes and Eaton (2018) conducted research in the USA into gay male employees and if they are more suitable for feminine leadership roles and less suited for masculine or gender-neutral leadership positions. They found no evidence to suggest that gay cisgender male leaders are unable to assume hetero-masculine or gender-neutral roles leadership roles; however, they did discover perceptions that gay men are better suited to feminine-type leadership roles. One could assume from this study that gay cisgender male employees are considered the best candidates for most leadership roles. However, Barrantes and Eaton's study struggles to explain the trend observed in global and South African research that insists gay men continue to experience barriers to their professional career growth (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Bell et al., 2011; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Denton, 2009; Frik, 2019; Gedro, 2010; Hill, 2009; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Soeker et al., 2015).

One could speculate that Barrantes and Eaton's (2018) findings may imply a change is occurring in the attitudes of employees towards gay cisgender male leaders; however, further studies are needed to confirm their findings. Fassinger et al. (2010) conclude that the interaction between an individual with a LGBTI+ identity, other people and the situation, can have either a negative or positive influence on leadership. Nevertheless, they also agree that further empirical research is needed to ascertain what these influences and interactions may be. Exploring the lived experiences of gay men in leadership addresses the need for research concerning these influences and interactions.

Open Expression of Sexual Orientation. Same-sex-oriented people often experience what is termed *internalised homophobia* which describes a process of internalising the negative attitudes and feelings aimed towards gay people into your sense of self, resulting in psychological distress with symptoms like lowered self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Soeker

et al., 2015). The internalisation of the homophobic attitudes of a society or the organisation they work in, often results in gay men adapting their behaviour to protect themselves and to try to come across as heterosexual or striving to fit the norm. They, therefore, deny or hide their sexual orientation in an effort to be accepted. According to Nel (2007), "In some instances, due to internalised, societal or institutionalised homophobia, the personal, social or occupational consequences of acknowledging same-sex sexual desire (let alone same-sex sexual orientation) may be too vast to even consider" (p. xxvii).

This touches on the phenomenon of sexual orientation and its open expression in mainstream organisations, which is the primary phenomenon being investigated in this study. Balfour (2016) discusses the impact of disclosure of sexual orientation, stating that if a person discloses their sexual orientation it could result in exclusion from leadership. For Balfour (2016), the alternative is that if person wants to be a leader, they may have to conceal their sexual orientation. Based on Balfour's own experiences it is conceivable that many gay men prefer not to disclose their sexual orientation based on fears of exclusion from leadership or other opportunities, particularly in the workplace. It is also conceivable that gay men conceal their sexual orientation to achieve and continue in leadership positions. Einarsdóttir et al. (2016) propose that should organisations remain biased towards heterosexual employees and practices, this may contribute to an unwillingness from LGBTI+ communities to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace.

Chung et al. (2015) discuss the overt discriminations or unfairness towards LGBTI+ employees, mentioning that government and organisational regulations and policies provide some protection for them. However, Chung et al. also explore micro-aggressions against LGBTI+ employees, which they refer to as informal discriminatory actions performed against LGBTI+ persons such as isolation by co-workers or heterosexist jokes and comments. Nadal et al. (2016) refer to microaggressions as subtle forms of discrimination that may be behaviours or statements, that are unconscious or even unintentional. Microaggressions send a negative or

offensive message to or about previously marginalised groups. Nadal et al. explain that in contemporary society, where overt discrimination or bias is frowned upon, many people believe that they do not participate in discrimination. However, the literature maintains the view that microaggressions against LGBTI+ communities do occur and result in significant psychological implications for the LGBTI+ person including, but not limited to, mood disorders, lowered self-esteem and self-worth, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress and various other mental health issues (Chung et al., 2015; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Green, 2003; Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2016; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019).

Microaggressions, therefore, represent one of the expected barriers that gay men may encounter and have to overcome to achieve leadership roles successfully. Soeker et al. (2015) indicate that although South African legislation protects the rights of gay men, these men continue to experience marginalisation and discrimination in the workplace, which in turn impedes their professional development and the realisation of their career goals.

Carrim (2019) introduces another factor that may contribute to or increase microaggressions when exploring the notion of office gossip and how this may impact certain employees, particularly minority groups. Although Carrim suggested a need for further research into the impact of office gossip on minority groups, it was found that a person from a minority group may feel as if they have no power or social support and are ostracised (Carrim, 2019) as a consequence of office gossip. It may even result in the suppression of their sexual identity, which transforms office gossip into a significant barrier to the open expression of sexual orientation in the workplace (Carrim et al, 2022).

Thorpe (2018) further explores the possible barriers to open expression of sexual orientation in organisations and discusses that the fear of violence may impact LGBTI+ persons in organisations and leadership positions (particularly in the political sphere) and their willingness to live and participate openly in organisations. In their study, Kugara et al. (2017) found that LGBTI+ people are more likely to experience prejudice and even aggression due of

their sexual orientation. Fear of violence, therefore, may impact the willingness of gay men to declare their sexual orientation in South Africa organisations openly.

A substantial body of scholarship highlights the continued prejudice and discrimination confronting gay people in organisations (Badgett et al., 2007; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Collins, 2010; Meyer, 2015, Nel et al., 2007; Nyeck et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2019) which according to Meyer (2015) could fall under the label of “minority stress” (p. 209). Meyer goes on to explain that minority stress presumes that discrimination and prejudice cause specific stressors that may impact mental and physical health.

Understanding the challenges men with a same-sex sexual orientation face on their journey to leadership in South African organisations is vital. However, the invisibility of gay men in leadership, which may emanate from the various barriers explored thus far, made research into this field challenging. It was anticipated that a significant number of gay men in leadership positions are not open about their sexual orientation in their workplaces and obtaining information about or from them would be extremely challenging. This may help to explain the negligible statistics available regarding gay men in senior leadership in South Africa. It is, furthermore, concerning that the available data may reflect that there are fewer gay men in leadership than is the case. Acknowledging the preceding, it is clear that gay men who openly express their sexual orientation in South African organisations and who have, despite anticipated challenges and barriers, achieved leadership roles, possess vital information to share about their lived experiences, and attention was therefore paid to what they had to say. Their ability to navigate the expected challenges becomes an essential aspect of their achievement of leadership roles. The following section deals with the possible enablers that may assist them in their professional growth and development.

Enablers to Achieving Leadership

An essential portion of this study was to focus on how gay men overcome potential barriers and go on to achieve leadership. If certain openly gay men have achieved leadership positions, they hold valuable information on the processes they may have used to overcome the barriers that may result from typical patriarchal, heteronormative and hetero-masculine prejudices for cisgender male leaders. It must therefore be possible that certain gay men possess intrinsic attributes or characteristics that protect them and afford them with skills to achieve leadership roles. Resilience research has revealed that certain populations find substantial and effective mechanisms to cope from a young age despite stressful and difficult circumstances. Meyer (2015) states that some LGBTI+ people develop responses to adverse situations and experiences that allow them to flourish. There may also be certain extrinsic organisational systems or policies in place that assist gay men in their attainment of leadership roles. These intrinsic and extrinsic methods of assistance are referred to in this study as *enablers*.

Intrinsic Enablers: Resilience and Coping. The first enabler I will explore is that of resilience. There are numerous studies on resilience from South Africa (Ungar & Theron, 2020; Wilks et al., 2022; Van Breda, 2001) and internationally (Cover, 2016; Meyer, 2015; Rees et al., 2015; Windle et al., 2011) but few that focus on LGBTI+ communities. Meyer (2015) and Wilks et al. (2022) conducted studies on the role of resilience in minority groups like LGBTI+ communities.

Meyer's (2015) focus was on adversity, and the role resilience can play in helping minority groups to survive and thrive by adapting to and managing minority stress conditions. Meyer describes resilience as a quality for survival during stressful circumstances that leads to adaptation and diminishes the impact of stress on a person's health. Van Breda (2001) describes individual resilience as internal defensive factors that a person may possess which can hinder or help them to resist life stressors. Cover (2016) and Van Breda (2001) further

explain that resilience is often demanded from a person when they are presented with unsafe, hostile or threatening life circumstances. These life circumstances may lead to disruption and uncertainty in an individual's lived experiences, which then necessitate resilience and furnish an individual with the ability to adapt and learn (Cover, 2016). Meyer (2015) suggests that individual resilience is important, but community responsibility must not be overlooked, either, as it can be important in the context of minority stress. Meyer (2015) suggests that resilience should fall on a continuum, with individual and community resilience falling on this continuum.

Adding to Meyer's work (2015), Wilks et al. (2022) indicate that resilience science prefers to understand resilience from a multisystemic perspective. They describe resilience as having moved beyond individual-focused accounts of resilience to a multisystemic one where systems interact to facilitate the resilience of the individual. While they acknowledge resilience research cannot ignore adversity, they believe that LGBTI+ people may have developed effective resilience strategies utilising their own systems and multiple other systems to adapt and thrive under these adverse conditions. The approach that Wilks et al. (2022) present regarding resilience may assist in understanding how certain gay men in leadership rise above the existing barriers in their organisations and succeed in their career progression. It is, perhaps, an intersection of resilience systems that enable the individual to adapt and flourish in their careers.

It can be helpful to distinguish between coping and resilience where they may be seen as similar but are not precisely the same (Meyer, 2015). According to Meyer, coping refers to behaviours and cognitive actions directed at managing internal and external stressors but does not necessarily imply that they successfully adapted to the situation. Resilience on the other hand is the ability to endure, bounce back and even to flourish in the face of adversity. Resilience, therefore, implies that the person not only responded to the stress (using coping techniques) but withstood it and thrived, utilising various systems of resilience (Meyer, 2015; Rees et al., 2015; Wilks et al., 2022; Windle et al., 2011; Ungar & Theron, 2020). In this study,

resilience could be understood as intrinsic and extrinsic factors that may assist a gay man to overcome barriers like minority stress and flourish.

Rees et al. (2015) and Windle et al. (2011), describe a number of individual attributes that may impact a person's resilience. By merging the attributes presented by these authors, the following list emerges: mastery, personal agency, motivation, hardiness, optimism, self-esteem, personal competence, social competence, problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, social resources, insight, independence, creativity, humour, control, cohesion in the family, spirituality, initiative, mindfulness and education. As one reads through this list of personal attributes or characteristics that may impact resilience, it becomes clear that the ability of gay men to become leaders by engaging their innate resilient abilities could be an intricate and complicated exercise. As there is little literature on intrinsic resilience in LGBTI+ people in leadership in a South African context, this study strove to yield information on individual intrinsic resilience factors that may interact with other systemic resilience factors to assist gay men in managing the challenges on their journey to leadership in a work context.

Extrinsic Enablers. Cover (2016) expresses a need to move beyond an understanding of resilience as only a personal quality to an interactional, shared quality where families, groups, communities, and organisations assist the individual to thrive in the face of threats and challenges. Similarly, Meyer (2015), discusses the possibility that there are community resilience factors that may increase or decrease the opportunity for members of LGBTI+ communities to manage life's stressors. He explains that resilience cannot be determined by individual attributes if all primary social structures are not equal. Therefore, social systems and various other systems surrounding an individual must influence their ability to be resilient and consequently intersect to assist with an individual's resilience. Wilks et al. (2022) support the theory that the environment, social circumstances and socio-cultural factors, together with individual resilience factors, combine into a multisystemic pool from which the individual may draw resilience and adapt and thrive in challenging and distressful circumstances.

Rees et al. (2015), also explore the biopsychosocial model as an explanation for extrinsic enablers, which presumes that an individual's emotional health and ability to manage difficult situations is determined by an intersection of systemic factors. Rees et al. describe the biopsychosocial model as having two components; namely the biological component and the psychosocial component. The biological component presumes that an individual may have generalised biological vulnerabilities due to specific predispositions to mental health problems like anxiety and depression. The psychosocial component of this model suggests that these biological predispositions interact with the environmental and social circumstances the person finds themselves in. Together, these two components determine an overall vulnerability to experience barriers to an individual's professional growth and mental wellbeing or their ability to flourish in challenging circumstances. This model would indicate that gay men in leadership have innate personal characteristics that have interacted with their environment and other systems to produce resilience, enabling them to achieve leadership.

Meyer (2015) states that community resilience is the idea that individuals in a community, like an organisation, will be able to overcome certain challenges because of their lives are entwined with various social support networks. Meyer (2015) describes two types of community resilience resources. First, physical resources, which may be LGBTI+ support centres, crisis lines for telephonic assistance and affirmative regulations that encourage inclusiveness practices in the community. Second, the community resilience that could be considered less tangible and may include seeking to adjust social values and norms to include LGBTI+ perspectives so that life goals or expectations can be adapted.

Employers or organisations may also implement certain LGBTI+ supportive corporate policies or practices that can positively impact the LGBTI+ employee growth and progress within the organisation. Pichler et al. (2015) found that implementing corporate LGBTI+ supportive policies and practices has a positive correlation with the performance of that organisation. Ng and Rumens (2017) report that LGBTI+ inclusionary or friendly work policies have a significant

effect on the wellbeing of LGBTI+ employees, including but not limited to greater job satisfaction and more positive career experiences. Ng and Rumens (2017) provide a collection of practices that organisations can implement to create an atmosphere that is hospitable to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees. These practices are the consistent implementation of policies on sexual orientation and gender identity, the provision of benefits for same-sex relationships, support groups for LGBTI+ people, training staff on diversity regarding gender identity and the charitable support of LGBTI+ initiatives and communities. In this study, in an effort to uncover the methods gay men have implemented to overcome the various barriers existing in South African organisations, workplace policies and practices could therefore not be ignored as a possible enabler to the achievement of leadership roles for gay men.

In an attempt to create LGBTI+ inclusive workplaces, Nyeck et al. (2019) conducted a study, under the auspices of The Williams Institute, into the economic cost of LGBTI+ stigma and discrimination in South Africa. Their recommendations were that South African organisations should foster LGBTI+ inclusive work environments with policies, practices and benefits that are affirmative to LGBTI+ and other minority communities.

It would appear that current trends in South Africa are demonstrating the benefits of LGBTI+ inclusionary policies and practices in the workplace. The SAWEI (2020b) provides guidelines for organisations to use and follow in order to create a more LGBTI+ inclusive workplace.

Table 1*SAWEI Approach to Workplace Inclusion*

Areas of Assessment	Element	Guiding Question
Structures	Policies	Does the company have policies in place that will protect and nurture LGBT+ employees?
	Processes	Does the company have processes that are inclusive and considerate of the needs of LGBT+ people?
	Support mechanisms	Does the company have mechanisms or groups specifically designed to support LGBT+ employees?
Behaviours	Awareness and sensitivity,	Are all employees trained and aware of issues facing LGBT+ people?
	Diverse and inclusive thought	Do employees respect and value diversity of thought across all aspects of identity?
	Visibility	Are LGBT+ people visible within the company?

Source: SAWEI (2021b, pp. 3-11)

Table 1 is a representation of the structure that is followed by SAWEI to assess the workplace inclusivity of South African organisations that participate in the index (SAWEI, 2021b). Due to the value of this initiative in assisting South African organisations to create workplaces that are supportive and inclusive spaces where LGBTI+ people can feel safe and flourish, the dimensions of this index will be explored in more detail below.

In Table 1 the two main assessment areas within an organisation, the structures of the organisation and the behaviour of people in the organisation, are presented (SAWEI, 2021b). The assessment of the structure of an organisation investigates those aspects that can be conceived, quantified and constructed and often require time and financial investment. Three elements are assessed under the structure of an organisation: “policies, processes and support mechanisms” (SAWEI, 2021b, p. 3). The behavioural aspect of the assessment is measured by assessing the culture of the organisation, the ethics and the everyday behaviour of the people who work in the organisation. The three elements assessed under the behaviour in the organisation are “awareness and sensitivity, diverse and inclusive thought and visibility” (SAWEI, 2021b, p 3). Organisations complete a SAWEI questionnaire based on the guiding questions presented below, which address the elements listed (SAWEI, 2021b). In Table 1, each area of assessment had three elements under it, and each element has a guiding question that informs the 18 questions sent to each organisation that participates in the SAWEI index.

While the SAWEI suggests that South Africa is moving towards a more LGBTI+ inclusive workforce, the minimal research in the field of gay men in leadership in South African organisations provides little evidence of the impact that enablers, both intrinsic and extrinsic, have on the successful careers of gay men.

The following section will explore the theoretical perspectives that underly this research. Focus will be given to the field of Queer theory, social constructionist theory, phenomenology, and affirmative practice theory.

Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives of Queer Theory, Social Constructionist Theory, Phenomenology (and its subdiscipline, Hermeneutic Phenomenology) and Affirmative Practice Theory underpin this research. These theoretical perspectives contribute to understanding LGBTI+ communities and the specific challenges they encounter in society at large but principally in organisations. The theoretical perspectives were selected as they support the notion that phenomena like sexual orientation are socially constructed and that social interaction in certain environments impacts the construction of these phenomena in such a way that particular groups within these environments may be privileged while others may be marginalised (Beggan & Allison, 2018; Butler, 1990; Priola et al., 2018; Rubin, 1999; Tannenbaum, 2006; van Zyl, 2009). Studying these phenomena can provide important data on minority groups in our society, such as LGBTI+ communities. Members of minority groups may interpret these phenomena and how they are socially constructed as instrumental in defining or determining how they understand themselves and how they behave. Egner and Maloney (2016) state that our interaction with other people is affected by our ability to understand and provide information about ourselves, especially our gender and sexual orientation. Egner and Maloney continue that despite inconsistencies around the meanings of gender and sexual orientation, many of our social experiences are nonetheless contingent on these constructs.

This following section deals with Queer Theory and the relevance of incorporating this theory into this study. Attention will then be given to Social Constructionist Theory and how the meanings of phenomena are created and constructed through our interaction with the world and ourselves. An introduction to Phenomenological Theory will follow, and how this theory supports the study of phenomena like sexual orientation and how these phenomena affect people in various environments. Finally, Affirmative Practice Theory will be explored because its principles of an accepting, inclusive and non-judgmental stance are of particular importance in a study of LGBTI+ communities but also, as this stance represents my approach to interacting with people.

Queer Theory

As this study focused on the LGBTI+ population in South African organisations, Queer Theory provided a sound foundation for a theoretical understanding. Queer Theory is seen to have its roots in gender and sexuality, making it appropriate for this study. Queer Theory challenges many of the binary, normative sets of ideas in established fields of study, such as male or female, heterosexuality or homosexuality, by proposing that concepts like gender and sexuality cannot be defined by finite categories but are far more complex and that there is, in fact, no set normal (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). As this study sought to explore the lived experiences of gay men and the possibility that certain binary categorisations may continue to impact employees in South African organisations, Queer Theory provided a supportive stance in understanding these phenomena.

It is challenging to define the origins of Queer Theory as it appears to have emerged from various contexts such as Feminist Theory and Lesbian and Gay studies, but it is also often seen to have arisen out of the gay activist movement (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). Queer Theory is still considered a relatively new theory, only emerging as an epistemological perspective in the 1990's (Butler, 1993; de Launetis, 1991; Minton, 1997; Sedgwick, 1993).

'Queer Theory' as a term was coined by Teresa de Launetis. (de Launetis, 1991). Some of the most influential theorists central to the development of Queer Theory are Michael Foucault, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler. Foucault, who is often seen as the father of Queer Theory (Minton, 1997) held the view that sexuality is not a natural feature of human nature but is a socially constructed classification of experiences influenced by culture and history (Priola et al., 2018). Foucault, in his highly acclaimed book 'The history of sexuality: Volume I' wrote that although modern societies delegate sex to a hidden presence, they speak about it endlessly but insist it remain secretive (Foucault & Hurley, 1990). This study endeavoured to understand the hidden presence of LGBTI+ lived experiences in South African organisations as evidenced by the lack of voices from gay men in leadership. It is also

attempted to expose the hidden nature of the challenges gay men may encounter in organisations and to explore this hidden nature to expand scientific knowledge.

In an effort to understand the absence of gay voices, the work of McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2018) was explored. They discuss the notion of the 'Stranger', first introduced in the short essay written by Georg Simmel in 1908. In a similar fashion to Simmel, McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2018) understand that there is a duality for certain people in a group that can result in them experiencing being both close to and far away from the in-group. They are considered a stranger despite being close to the in-group. McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2018) present the LGBTI+ employee as a stranger in an organisation, one who is close to the organisation, being employed there, but also far away because they do not conform to heteronormative expectations due to their sexual orientation. Experiencing the working environment from the point of view of a 'stranger' may explain the absence of gay cisgender male voices in South African organisations. McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2018) state that for LGBTI+ people to have a voice in organisations, they would need to either disclose their sexual orientation continually or use mechanisms like surveys to voice to their concerns. However, there remains a potential risk of negative outcomes for professional career progression should the LGBTI+ person decide to exercise their voice (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2018).

Gayle Rubin (1999), who built on Foucault's work, wrote an article which is often understood to be one of the seminal texts of Queer Theory. In this article, she sees sexuality as a political element that is integrated into systems of power. These systems may reward certain people and acts while at the same time preventing others from having a voice and punishing them (Rubin, 1994). One of the core concepts of Queer Theory is heteronormativity as it pertains to organisations and a means of sense-making. It views heterosexuality as not only a logically accepted sexual orientation, but one that should be privileged (Berlant & Warner, 1998). This research sought to understand if LGBTI+ employees, particularly, gay men, are less privileged or discriminated against due to their same-sex sexual orientation. As the literature

indicates that gay men do indeed experience discrimination and barriers to their growth (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Bell et al., 2011; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Denton, 2009; Frik, 2019; Gedro, 2010; Hill, 2009; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Soeker et al., 2015), this would imply that other categories of employees, for example, heterosexual and cisgender males, are more privileged and perhaps have more prospects for professional growth and development in mainstream South African organisations.

Sedgwick (1990) also explores the notion of 'silences' which pertains to sexuality and how society speaks about sexuality. She argued that the binary definition of sexuality into heterosexuality and homosexuality is incoherent for two important reasons; one, that homosexuality is thought to be a minority group ('minoritizing view') and two, that it is gendered to be either masculine or feminine (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1). Sedgwick felt that sexual variation could not be limited to discrete locations like heterosexuality and homosexuality. Her views opened new ways for sexual and gender identities to be shaped and thought about. Sedgwick's work, although dated, still had implications in this study as we continue to encounter silences in organisations regarding the challenges LGBTI+ employees encounter and the impact that an open expression of sexual orientation may have on their professional advancement. Further to this, recent research conducted under the auspices of PsySSA has attempted to highlight and undo the silences within the field of psychology in South Africa, and to encourage the voices of South Africans who are disregarded, prejudiced and who remain vulnerable (Pillay et al., 2019). The absence of the voices of gay men in leadership in South African organisations, is one such silence that this study sought to draw attention to and explore.

Butler (1990) also focused on gender, sex and sexuality, and concurs with Foucault that sexuality and gender are both socially constructed. Butler understood gender to be determined not by who a person is but by what a person does; therefore, that gender is performative (Butler, 1990). Gender is determined by the embodiment of certain masculine or feminine standards, or behaviours prescribed by society. Butler's work focused on how gender and sexual normativity

impacts an individual's sense of self and identity, that when an individual does not prescribe to or comply with the binary classifications of masculine or feminine or heterosexual or homosexual, they are somehow considered less than human or not being a proper 'man' or a proper 'woman':

Precisely because homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abjected gender to homosexuals, that is, calling gay men 'feminine' or calling lesbians 'masculine', and because the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts, where it exists, is often also a terror over losing proper gender ('no longer being a real or proper man' or 'no longer being a real or proper woman'), it seems crucial to retain a theoretical apparatus that will account for how sexuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender (Butler, 1993, p.27).

Extrapolating from Butler's (1993) work, it is, therefore, conceivable that the 'terror' of being considered less of a leader because of one's open same-sex sexual orientation may become a barrier for gay men in achieving leadership. However, in their research, which is more recent, Barrantes and Eaton (2018) found that although there are perceptions that gay cisgender male leaders are better suited to feminine-type leadership roles, there was no evidence to support this in their study, and they found a positive advantage for gay cisgender males in leadership.

Perhaps the discrepancies between Butler's work (1993) and that of Barrantes and Eaton (2018) may be explained by considering perceptions. One could theorise that although gay cisgender male leaders may be perceived by colleagues (as Barrantes & Eaton established) to be as suited to normative 'masculine-type or gender-neutral' leadership roles as to 'feminine-type' leadership roles, their own perceptions of assuming leadership may be influenced by what Butler refers to as their 'terror' of judgement based on their open expression of sexual orientation. It was predicted that the experiences and perceptions of gay men who

have achieved leadership would reflect Butler's viewpoint. The findings of this study clarify that gay cisgender male leaders do indeed fear judgement should they openly express their same-sex sexual orientation in South African organisations. These findings are discussed in later chapters.

Some of the more recent research on Queer Theory provides further evidence for its use to underpin this study. Lugg and Murphy (2014) provide clarification of the origin of Queer Theory as it emerged from the gay activist movement. They explain that Queer Theory arose during the AIDS crisis in the USA, where homophobia led to a culture of hatred and violence against LGBTI+ communities. At the same time they struggled against oppression in the arenas of medicine, law and politics.

As the struggles of LGBTI+ communities became the focus of activists and researchers, Queer Theory grew to challenge heteronormative ideologies and practices (Lugg & Murphy, 2014). Gay cisgender male leaders have not only challenged the existing heteronormative practices and behaviour in their organisations but may also have overcome these challenges. This, therefore, connects well with the precepts of Queer Theory and makes this theoretical foundation an important background for this study.

O'Malley et al. (2018) support this by writing that one of the tenets of Queer Theory is that it insists on the investigation of exceptional situations that impact queer people. Priola et al. (2018) also suggest that Queer Theory allows for a theoretical stance which is suspicious of heteronormative reasoning and probes the categorisation of sexuality and gender.

Rumens et al. (2019) agree that studies on management and organisations provide new opportunities for Queer Theory. How gay men have achieved leadership in predominantly heteronormative organisations and in a society with a history of subjugation of minority groups, through the Apartheid system of government, will create new possibilities for understanding sexual orientation utilising Queer Theory. Rumens et al. (2019) explain that Queer Theory, when applied to research, provides a flexible and appropriate approach that challenges the

existing perspectives on sexual orientation, desire, gender, and sex in general. In an attempt to understand the role that sexual orientation plays in achieving leadership roles, it is important to view this phenomenon from a Queer Theory stance. This study endeavoured to provide a lens to broaden our understanding of the phenomenon of sexual orientation in the workplace and to investigate how it may have arisen and its impact on certain members of the employee population.

Lugg and Murphy (2014) maintain that building and discussing queer identity in social spaces is the domain of Queer Theory. The preceding opinions, and indeed the views of many of the founding theorists of Queer Theory, agree that sexuality and sexual orientation are socially constructed, which links well with the second theoretical perspective underlying this research, that of Social Constructionist Theory.

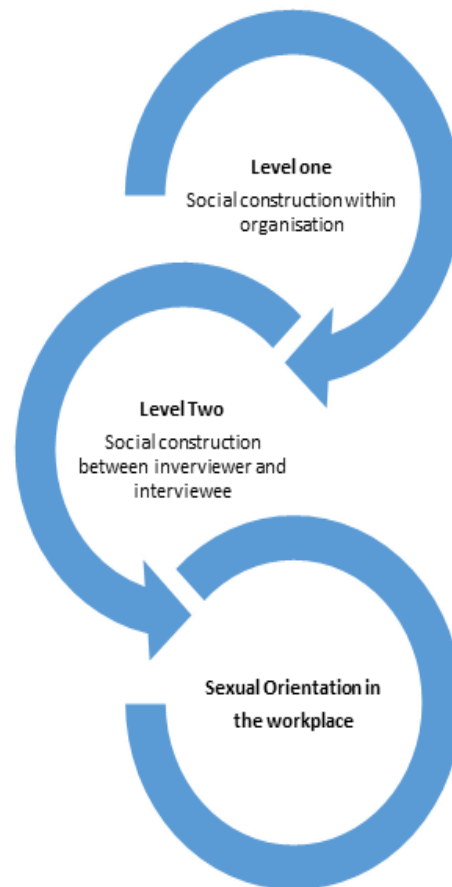
Social Constructionist Theory

Social Constructionist Theory describes how we create our own meanings through our interactions with the world and ourselves. It recognises phenomena like sexual orientation as shaped, altered, and replicated through historical processes within institutions and cultures. Beggan and Allison (2018) explain that the Social Constructionist point of view sees the importance and nature of sexuality as being derived from how we, as a culture, choose to see it. Sexual orientation can therefore be understood as a social construction with many meanings that is subject to change (Beggan & Allison, 2018; Priola, et al., 2018; Tannenbaum, 2006; van Zyl, 2009). According to Fassinger (2016),

Social constructionists, by contrast, assert that there are no innate or intrinsic characteristics of people related to sexuality and gender, but rather that an individual identifies with or is identified by sexual orientation or gender diversity because those are the labels and words, the categories, and the means of self-knowing offered to people in that culture at that time (p. 21).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) explain Social Constructionist methods as being concerned with meaning-making, utilising interpretive and qualitative methods. The interpretation of gay men's lived experiences in South African organisations and the meanings they attached to these experiences, therefore, falls within the ambit of Social Constructionism, making this a Social Constructionist study. Terre Blanche and Durrheim continue that constructionist research is not about language itself but rather about understanding the social world as a kind of language with a system of meanings and practices from which reality can be constructed.

It should be noted that while Social Constructionism is concerned with the creation of meaning, Constructionist Theory is sceptical that any researcher can be purely facilitative in allowing a participant to give their experiences and feelings without the researcher playing an influencing role (Daher et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2013; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). The meanings created from the interviews with gay men will be understood to be co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). One could therefore go so far as to say this study explored Social Constructionism on two levels: The first level explored sexual orientation as a social construction in organisations and how gay cisgender male employees construct and understand their sexual orientation within an organisation. The second level of Social Constructionism was the co-construction of the lived experiences of sexual orientation between myself, as the researcher, and the participants in the study. For this reason, Social Constructionist Theory provides a comprehensive springboard to support this study as shown in Figure 2 below which highlights the two levels of Social Construction explored:

Figure 2*Dual levels in the Social Construction of Sexual Orientation*

Just as Social Constructionism can be used to explore concepts like sexual orientation, Phenomenological Theory can assist in understanding the lived experiences of gay men and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences.

Phenomenology

The third theoretical foundation for this study is Phenomenological Theory or Phenomenology. The phenomenon under study was sexual orientation and how this phenomenon impacted the progress of gay men in South African organisations. Phenomenology is most closely related to the philosophical movement of Edmund Husserl (1931). Husserl first hypothesised and postulated that phenomenology was a qualitative approach that sought to understand the context in which the lived experiences of research participants and the meanings they make of

their experiences is understood (Alase, 2017). Phenomenology is often understood to be counter to positivist methodologies because it questions assumptions about phenomena – it seeks to describe them as they manifest themselves for the person experiencing them (McIntosh & Wright, 2019). Daher et al. (2017) explain the phenomenological school of thought as the detailed study and description of the experiences a person may have when challenged by their environment, their personal life, or objects in their surroundings.

Phenomenology and Social Constructionism were deemed compatible approaches to use in a study concerned with lived experiences of a perceived reality, as is the case with gay men and their perception of their work environment and the challenges in this space. Polizzi (2015) explains that the two approaches work well together because when the reality is socially constructed, a form of phenomenological interpretation of lived experiences takes place. This occurs because our social understanding is always based on our perceptions and interpretation of these lived experiences within a specific context.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) explain Phenomenology as a commitment to understanding phenomena in context and as they are lived. Chan and Farmer (2017) build on this explanation by describing Phenomenology as the study of personal experiences by focusing on how the world is experienced. Phenomenological inquiry is guided by an interest in lived experiences with a focus on trying to examine those experiences as they happen and without any obstruction (Smith et al., 2009).

An extension of Phenomenology is Hermeneutic Phenomenology which emphasises that to focus on the description of experiences and to implement it, one must use interpretive methods (Smith et al., 2009). Chan and Farmer (2017) provide a concise explanation for the use of phenomenology and hermeneutics as a means of understanding and interpreting the results of this study. Chan and Farmer state that used together, phenomenology and hermeneutics assist to explain and define intricate phenomenon in human experiences and

incorporating IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis), provides an effective vehicle for understanding the lived experiences of LGBTI+ people.

Hermeneutics involves the process of interpretation and in the context of this study, with the interpretation of gay leaders lived experiences (Furtak, 2019). Husserl (1927) reasoned that people are able to consciously focus on the specific thing they are experiencing in the present but that in reflecting on the phenomenon, psychological, meaning-making processes become involved (Husserl, 1927, cited in Chan & Farmer, 2018). Smith et al. (2009) refer to this process as creating 'second-order' understanding for 'first-order' experiences (p. 18). As this study explored the lived experiences of gay men, and the interpretation and meaning-making of these experiences, Phenomenological Theory and, by extension, Hermeneutic Phenomenological Theory, seemed best suited to support the study.

Affirmative Practice Theory

The fourth and final theoretical foundation for this research lies in Affirmative Practice Theory. As a practising professional seeing clients for psychotherapy, adopting Affirmative Practice Theory has been a vital part of my practice, particularly when working with individuals and couples from LGBTI+ communities. In my private practice and particularly as the researcher in this study, I adopt the PsySSA (2017) guidelines for working with sexually and gender-diverse people. At all times, I strive to be aware of the complexity of human lived experience, to acknowledge and consider the comprehensive spectrum of gender and sexual diversity and, to approach these from an affirmative perspective.

Affirmative Practice Theory can essentially be described as affirming diverse sexual and gender identities by utilising a collaborative, supportive and validating approach. The purpose of this approach is to avoid imposing related specific expectations, judgements or discrimination on clients. In South Africa, although one's sexual orientation is protected under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights (RSA, 1996), many LGBTI+ people continue to experience prejudice,

discrimination and violence in their personal lives, communities, workplaces and general society (Pillay et al., 2019).

Affirmative Practice Theory in healthcare service delivery and research with sexually and gender diverse people in South Africa has arisen due to various challenges and influences as discussed below. The International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues (IPsyNet) is an international organisation focused on promoting the rights and wellbeing of sexually and gender diverse people (IPsyNet, 2020). The American Psychological Association (APA) was the first organisation to develop and later refine affirmative practice guidelines for service providers working with gender and sexually diverse communities (McLaghlan et al., 2019). Many psychological associations worldwide followed suit, including the Australian Psychological Society and the British Psychological Society (BPS) amongst others (McLaghlan et al., 2019).

Within the same period, the literature and various South African researchers remarked on the state of healthcare services for gender and sexual orientation diverse people (Badgett, 2003; Nel, 2009; Victor et al., 2014; Victor et al., 2016). It was noted that many of the services provided were done so under the assumption of heterosexuality of clients, which resulted in a negative impact on the experiences and accessibility of healthcare services for LGBTI+ people (Nel, 2007; Nel & Judge, 2008; Victor, 2013; Victor & Nel, 2016).

The guidelines developed by international psychological associations and the various and numerous calls for South African specific affirmative guidelines for health and research professionals working with vulnerable people, incited action (Graziano, 2004; Nel, 2007; Victor & Nel, 2016). PsySSA responded to this call, first with a position statement developed by PsySSA in 2013 (McLachlan et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2019; Victor, 2017; Victor & Nel, 2016; Victor et al., 2014), and second, the development of the 'Practice guidelines for psychology professionals working with sexually and gender-diverse people' (PsySSA, 2017, p. 1).

Interestingly, Watson (2005) likened being 'queer', or LGBTI+ in current terminology, to be similar to a person in therapy. The person is in a state of change, engaging and shifting their boundaries and definitions and deconstructing and reconstructing categories of understanding. If, as Watson's (2005) states, LGBTI+ people working in an organisation are experiencing challenges in their environments and needing support, similar to a person in therapy, then incorporating Affirmative Practice Theory as a theoretical foundation for this study was important.

As this research was focused on understanding the lived experiences of gay men and, in particular, the role sexual orientation plays in their lived experiences, it was important to adopt an affirmative practice stance at all times to ensure ethical treatment of the participants and the information that they provide in the study. This study was interested in the strategies gay men employ to overcome possible barriers in South African organisations. The affirmative practice approach sees the LGBTI+ person as possessing the needed internal abilities and ingenuity to manage their challenges (Victor & Nel, 2016). By adopting an affirmative practice approach, this study was well placed to discover the intrinsic resources gay men possess and utilise to overcome barriers in South African organisations. It was also important that this study ascertain if an affirmative practice approach was adopted by the organisations the participants worked in, and this information is presented in the findings under the title *Positive Changes*.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted literature regarding sexual orientation, its expression in South African organisations, and the lived experiences of gay men. The theoretical foundations for LGBTI+ studies and LGBTI+ sexual orientation in the workplace were also explored. Focus was paid to the role that discrimination and prejudice play in shaping barriers for LGBTI+ communities' members and the expected impact these barriers and others have on the professional growth and development of gay leaders within organisations.

As is evident from this literature overview, in a South African context there is little to no research on how sexual orientation impacts gay men in leadership and particularly on how gay men overcome the anticipated bias, prejudice and discrimination reported in much of local and international research. This study endeavoured to amend this paucity of research and to provide information on the barriers and enablers that may impact gay men in their pursuit of leadership in South African organisations.

Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used for this study focusing on the methods used to address the research questions and produce and analyse the data. Furthermore, the ethical considerations of the study are explored.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

Chapter Three explores the research methodology employed in this study to answer the research questions regarding the open expression of sexual orientation in mainstream South African organisations and how this phenomenon influences the achievement of leadership for gay men. Observations of mainstream South African organisations and available literature in South Africa culminated in questions regarding the absence of gay men in senior or executive leadership positions and the absence of the voices of gay men in leadership in general. The purpose of the study was to explore how the phenomenon of sexual orientation impacts the achievement of leadership for gay men who openly express their sexual orientation.

This chapter will deal with the research questions that arose from my observations and studying the literature, the design of the research conducted, the methodology applied, and the ethical considerations. The research methodology component will discuss the instrument used to collect the data, the population under research, including the sampling technique, and finally, the management of the data and the analysis method utilised. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in the research.

Research Questions

Gay men in South Africa celebrate living in a country with one of the world's most progressive Constitutions offering the right to protection from discrimination for every person no matter their race, creed or sexual orientation, among others (RSA, 1996). It would thus be expected that the Constitution should protect the rights of gay men in all avenues of their personal and work life experiences, including that their voices be heard and acknowledged in the workplace. However, there is a noticeable absence of the voices of gay men in senior or

executive leadership in South African mainstream organisations. This absence of voices sparked an interest in me. This phenomenon became more apparent throughout my exploration of the literature and my interactions and observations in corporate and governmental organisations in South Africa. My exploration of this phenomenon culminated in the following research questions:

- What is the current visibility status of gay cisgender male leaders in mainstream South African organisations?
- How does the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation influence the achievement of senior or executive leadership roles for gay men in mainstream South African organisations?
- What are the experiences of openly gay men, relating to their sexual orientation, that may create barriers to achieving senior or executive leadership roles in mainstream South African organisations?
- Do certain gay men who have openly expressed their sexual orientation in the organisation in which they work, possess personality traits or characteristics that enable them to overcome existing barriers to achieve senior or executive leadership
- What are the extrinsic enablers in South African organisations that may assist gay men to rise above existing challenges and achieve senior leadership roles?

The research questions thus evolved into a clear focus on the manner in which certain gay men are able to overcome the expected barriers in their organisations, like discrimination and prejudice, and to excel and grow and successfully reach senior leadership roles. The qualities these gay men possess, their intrinsic attributes, and the extrinsic attributes surrounding them, like safe workplace cultures or inclusive policies and practices, became the focal point of my interest, led to this study and informed the research design that follows.

Research Design

The purpose of the research was accomplished by employing a qualitative research design based on the principles of Phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of gay men in senior or executive leadership. Van Zyl (2009) explains the value of qualitative research, which speaks to the aims and purpose of this study. He sees qualitative research as concerned with the lived experiences of people and seeking to find an understanding of these experiences. The qualitative researcher is therefore not as interested in causality as in what people believe, what they experience and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Daher et al., 2017; Hammarberg et al., 2016). Hammarberg et al. (2016) explain that qualitative enquiry utilises semi-structured, comprehensive interviews to discover the participants' views on a specific matter, that provides background and institutional information. This is particularly important in this study as information regarding the organisations that the participants work in will provide the data needed to understand workplace culture, policies, behaviour and inclusiveness practices. Exploring the lived experiences of gay men in senior leadership through individual semi-structured interviews assimilates well with a qualitative research design.

Phenomenology is best suited to exploring assumptions about phenomena, like sexual orientation in the workplace, by examining the point of view or lived experiences of members of an organisation (Alase, 2017; McIntosh & Wright, 2019; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This qualitative study sought to explore the lived experiences of gay men in senior or executive leadership. The meanings that these gay men ascribe to their lived experiences and how they express these in the interviews provided data on the phenomenon of sexual orientation and the possible barriers that gay male leaders encounter and overcome in attaining their senior or executive leadership roles.

Terre Blanche and Durkheim's' (2006) findings support the use of a phenomenological qualitative design by stating that the context or situation where an investigation is conducted is

very important when trying to understand social phenomena. Interviewing gay men who are, or were, leaders working in South African mainstream organisations provides the context to observe the phenomenon of sexual orientation in the South African workplace.

The following section will explore the methodology in this study. Emphasis will be given to the research instrument, the target population, the population from which the sample was selected, the data collection and analysis process, the reporting of the findings and the ethical considerations in conducting this study.

Methodology

Research Instrument

Semi-structured individual virtual interviews were conducted with each participant. McIntosh and Morse (2015) describe a typology of four types of semi-structured interviews. For the purposes of a study on the lived experiences of gay men who have achieved leadership positions despite challenges due to LGBTI+ sexual orientation identification, a *Descriptive/Divergent* method of semi-structured interview was selected (p. 4). McIntosh and Morse refer to this method of semi-structured interviews as an attempt to discern similarities and variances in the perspectives and lived experiences of disparate groups from the dominant discourse, in this case, the lived experiences of gay men in leadership in a heteronormative, patriarchal and biased culture reportedly prevailing in South African organisations at present.

The decision to use a virtual format for the interviews was based on the University of South Africa's policy regarding conducting research fieldwork during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, face-to-face interviews were the preferred method of interviewing the participants. As a Counselling Psychologist in private practice for many years, I am very familiar with face-to-face interactions. Though I am accomplished in virtual engagements, I find my skills in developing rapport and providing an affirmative practice environment far easier to manage with face-to-face engagements. Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) explain that rapport and a trustful

relationship need to be built with person if a researcher would like to obtain information about personal and sensitive experiences from them.

The literature states that virtual engagements limit observable information obtained during face-to-face interviews. My thoughts are reflected in Jenner and Myers' (2019) study exploring in-person interviews versus mediated interview contexts. Jenner and Myers state that although virtual video interviews are becoming more common, many researchers remain steadfast in their belief that face-to-face interviews are considered favourable. However, Jenner and Myers' findings also suggest that in circumstances where data collection is being done on sensitive subjects (as sexual orientation was anticipated to be), work or home environments may be experienced as too intrusive and threatening. They suggest using virtual mediums like Microsoft Teams® would be preferred. It should also be noted that virtual interviews allow for a greater geographical area to be covered and help to reduce costs. For this study, as no travel was needed for virtual interviews, travel costs could be kept to a minimum.

A digital recording device was employed to capture the audio during the interviews. This provided a backup system if intended speech-to-text technologies of Microsoft Teams® Transcriptions that translated speech to text in real time, were problematic. This also assisted with the process of transcribing each interview. The transcriptions formed the basis of the data collected in the study. Thereafter, the data was analysed using IPA to induce themes and meanings. After the analysis of the data, the findings of the data were reported and discussed. The following section discusses the target population and the selected participants.

Target Population

The strategy for this research was to recruit and interview gay cisgender male participants currently working in senior leadership positions within mainstream South African organisations. This requirement was an essential aspect of participant selection as it was a confirmation that there are undeniably gay cisgender male senior leaders in South African organisations, and that some gay cisgender male employees are indeed able to overcome

existing challenges in their organisations to achieve senior leadership roles. In conducting semi-structured interviews with these men, I was able to hear directly from them about their lived experiences and the meanings they ascribed to these experiences.

Therefore, in selecting one of the four senior leadership options in the Demographic Information Questionnaire (Appendix 2) I provided, Owner, CEO, Executive Manager or Senior Manager, a partial answer was provided for Research Question 1: *What is the current visibility status of gay cisgender male leaders in mainstream South African organisations?*

The participants selected from the sample of respondents were all required to be South African citizens. The purpose of including only South African citizens in the sample was that research on the South African population, and particularly the LGBTI+ population in South African organisations, is still extremely limited (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Collins, 2012; Nel, 2007; PsySSA, 2017; Reed & Leuty, 2016; SAWEI, 2019; Soeker et al., 2015).

South African organisations are required by the Constitution and its accompanying regulations to practice non-discrimination based on sexual orientation. In interviewing gay cisgender male employees working in South African organisations, this study was able to extract information regarding the effectiveness of the Constitution and its regulations in enforcing Chapter Two of the Bill of Rights (RSA, 1996) and the right to protection for all citizens of South Africa. It was assumed that multinational organisations (although operating in South Africa) would tend to incorporate laws, policies and practices pertaining to the inclusiveness and discrimination of LGBTI+ people that were required in their country of origin. It was not an aim of this study to investigate multinational organisations. However, since many of the participants had worked in both South African and multinational organisations and had lived experiences in such organisations, an unanticipated benefit of this study was to observe a comparison between the lived experiences of gay cis-gender male leaders in multinational organisations, and those in South African organisations.

Further, in an effort attempt to increase the research on the South African stage, particularly on the South African LGBTI+ population, this research determined to focus only on participants who work in mainstream South African organisations. South African organisations are those registered in South Africa as South African organisations and in compliance with South African labour and human rights laws and regulations. The use of the term 'mainstream' to describe the organisations from which the participants were selected, was intentional. A mainstream organisation is understood to be one that may be public or private, that has a stable hierarchical structure, is a potential employer of people, regardless of their race, gender, and sexual orientation, among others, and whose company policies and procedures are guided by and compliant with constitutional law.

An organisation working solely in the arena of LGBTI+ rights or support would be expected to embrace inclusive and affirmative practices, which would include LGBTI+ leaders and particularly gay male leaders to a disproportionate degree from mainstream organisations. Leaders in these organisations would, therefore, not qualify to participate in the study. The purpose was to explore gay cisgender male leaders who openly express their sexual orientation in mainstream South African organisations not those working in LGBTI+ environments.

The participants were required to self-identify as cisgender males with a same-sex sexual orientation to be considered for the study. The individuals selected for this study all openly identified as cisgender males and had an openly revealed, same-sex sexual orientation in their respective organisations.

The following section will explore the sampling method and population from which the sample was selected.

Population and Sampling

The population from which the participants were chosen were senior organisational leaders or business owners who were classified as South African citizens and, at the time of the participant selection, were either currently employed in a mainstream South African organisation

or had been employed in a mainstream South African organisation within the past five years. They were, moreover, expected to self-identify as cisgender male and gay.

Convenience and snowball sampling were employed to obtain 11 qualifying and consenting participants. One of these 11 participants was selected for a pilot study to assess the recruitment process, the semi-structured questionnaire format and question construction. It was envisioned that the pilot study would allow for refinements or alterations to the question construction and format should it be required. The participant was selected to be the respondent for the pilot study due to his extensive work experience in South African organisations. Unfortunately, it had been seven years since he left the employment of a mainstream South African organisation which disqualified him from the sample according to the demographic requirements. However, due to his experience as a researcher, psychologist and business owner and valuable lived experiences as a gay cis-gender male who has worked at various levels, including in the role of a chief executive office, in a South African organisation, he was requested to participate. Interestingly, after data collection and analysis processes, the lived experiences that emerged from the pilot interview were so consistent with and similar to those of the other participants it was decided to include his interview data in the main body of the findings.

The richness of the data and data saturation were reached with 11 participants. The recruitment process for participants who qualified for the study was challenging. Despite engaging academic institutions, members of the LGBTI+ community and registered LGBTI+ organisations to assist in identifying and referring potential participants, the process was demanding. The cisgender male participants were selected from a range of ages and race group representation to safeguard representation across the South African populace to provide data that is representative of a diverse group of gay men.

In South Africa there are four major racial groups, Black/African, Coloured, Indian/Asian, and White (Statistics South Africa, 2021). PsySSA (2017) explains that “critical race theory tells

us race is not a biological truth – and of course culture is made and remade every day” (p. 33). However, there is limited research covering all racial race group representation in South Africa, particularly in LGBTI+ communities. By studying gay men from all race group representations, this study began to address this paucity of research. Pillay et al. (2019) indicate the necessity for such research stating that research should provide an intersectional analysis of LGBTI+ studies in the field of psychology and how these studies engage with matters of race. Due to the nature of South African history and its past where people were excluded based on their racial profile (Timm, 2016, p. 96), this study encouraged participation from all race groups in the country.

The above notwithstanding, it should be noted that the recruitment of Black African participants proved to be extremely taxing. Despite direct requests from a comprehensive network of LGBTI+ organisations and affiliations, and other participants who were selected, it took over five months of continued and repeated recruiting efforts before two willing Black African participants were identified. PsySSA (2017) states that the intersection of racial and cultural factors plays an integral role in defining one’s sexual orientation. It is, therefore, conceivable that racial and cultural intersectionalities could impact the open expression of sexual orientation in social environments like organisations. Perhaps this explains the demanding process of recruiting Black African participants for this study.

Whitfield et al. (2014) describe two pieces of relevant information regarding racial minority groups, even if those groups identify as part of LGBTI+ communities. The first is that racial minority groups in LGBTI+ communities experienced higher levels of discrimination than White LGBTI+ people. The second is that racial minority groups report higher levels of discrimination based on their race and sexual orientation. It would appear that, as PsySSA reported, the intersection of the different identities of Black African and same-sex sexual orientation may result in higher levels of discrimination. This could therefore explain why Black African men are more hesitant to participate in research that could potentially expose them to

discrimination. Brown (2011, cited in Nkosana & Van Der Walt, 2021) wrote that many Black African executives who identify as part of LGBTI+ communities expend significant effort and time hiding their personal lives to appear as heterosexual. This may even imply avoiding workplace events or colleagues. Although Brown's research was conducted in the USA, it is conceivable that the Black African senior managers in South African organisations behave in similar ways.

In order to provide a representative sample that would include age range, participants were selected based on their age group. Only three age ranges, those between 30 and 39 years, those between 40 and 49 years and those between 50 and 59 years, were eventually chosen. Initially, participants in the age ranges of 20-29 years and 60- 69 years were also intended to be interviewed; however, as the recruiting process progressed, no participants from these two age groups indicated a willingness to participate. Speculation about this phenomenon resulted in the discovery that minimal literature regarding the intersection between age and senior leadership exists, which may be an area for future research in South Africa.

A final sample of 11 suitable participants was identified after data saturation was reached. All potential participants were provided with an information sheet and informed consent form (See Appendix 1). The information sheet and consent form assisted in clarifying the purpose of the research, identifying appropriate participants and obtaining informed consent from each participant however, further verbal explanations were provided to those participants who requested it.

Data Collection

Data were collected through various methods. An initial biographical questionnaire (Appendix 2) was completed where each potential participant needed to indicate details such as age, race and role in the organisation. Once a sample had been selected, each participant was interviewed using virtual interviewing software of Microsoft Teams®. The semi-structured interview questions consisted of specific questions to elicit information on the lived experiences

in the journey to achieving senior or executive leadership roles (Appendix 3). Further probing questions were utilised where necessary to obtain clarity and to enhance participants' data. All interviews were recorded and transcribed post-interview. Once all data were collected and data saturation was achieved, the intensive analysis of the data began.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed, and researcher observations of behaviour and environment during the interview were included in the data. Exploring phenomena relating to gay men's lived experiences of leadership was the main focus of the data analysis. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to analyse the data.

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA originated in the field of health psychology but has become popular in many other fields of psychology. IPA could be referred to as psychology applied to the real world. Smith et al., continue to explain how valuable research questions dealing with meaning-making and peoples' experience of phenomena are when applying IPA. Research questions that are best suited to IPA typically involve personal meaning-making and sense-making of questions relative to a specific group of people experiencing a particular phenomenon (Smith et al.). IPA is an analysis methodology often used in Phenomenology. The focus of Phenomenology is on lived experience. The aim is to understand phenomena as they are experienced by the individuals having the experience, thereby accessing their lived world (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011).

Alase (2017) provides another motivating factor for the use of IPA in qualitative studies, explaining that IPA allows participants to talk about their lived experience in whatever manner they feel comfortable and without any alteration or punishment. IPA, therefore, allows the researcher to hear the most profound manifestation of the subject's lived experiences.

IPA study is said to balance two elements: the ability to give voice to an experience, and to make sense of the experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The analysis should not only be descriptive, but it must also be interpretative (Smith, 2011) and anchor the interpretations in the

participant's account. The process of IPA includes "a double-hermeneutic, whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith, p. 10). In this study, the following steps were utilised to achieve a double hermeneutic analysis:

- To become acquainted with the data and to engage with it (transcripts and researcher observations).
- To generate themes from the data and important categories or representations. Hycner's explicitation process (Hycner, 1999) will be utilized as below, and coding of the data is performed using open, axial and selective coding techniques (Creswell, 2013).
- Identifying and clarifying the context where the phenomena occur, including the researchers' context.

Five phases of Hycner's (1999) explicitation process were utilised to guide the interpretive phenomenological analysis and to produce themes from the interview transcripts.

These five phases were:

- Phenomenological reduction and grouping;
- Defining elements of meaning;
- Clustering of units of meaning to form themes;
- Extracting themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary; and
- Combining phenomena regarding lived experiences into themes (Hycner, 1999).

Following Hycner's (1999) explicitation process, the themes were coded into findings using the processes described below. Data were coded using open, axial and selective coding and categorised so that sense could be made of the essential meanings of the phenomena ascribed by the participants and the researcher together, of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013):

- Open coding is a process of reducing the data to major categories of information that appear to describe the phenomenon under investigation;

- Axial coding involves putting data back together in new ways by making connections between categories; and
- Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category and then systematically relating it to the other categories. It can be considered the storyline that generally describes the entire phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Strategies Employed to Ensure Quality data

Kleiman (2004) offers strategies to include in a qualitative study to ensure data quality. Below is a checklist of questions provided by Kleiman that the researcher can answer which can be considered a critical analysis of the findings. The following questions were considered once the analysis had been concluded:

- Were concrete descriptions obtained from the participants;
- Has a phenomenological reduction been maintained;
- Have any critical meanings been discovered;
- Has a structure been communicated to the reader; and, finally
- Has the raw data confirmed the findings (Kleiman, 2004)?

Bracketing was also employed in the analysis process to avoid researcher bias. Tufford and Newman (2012) explain that bracketing can be used to prevent deleting information due to biases which may contaminate the research process.

The analysis of the data contained various steps as well as checks and balances to ensure the quality and validity of the data. Every care was taken to provide accurate and reliable data for the reader to understand and for future LGBTI+ studies to replicate if necessary.

Reporting the Findings

All reporting was performed using a qualitative writing style consistent with Social Constructionist and Phenomenological research. The aim was to produce writing that is easily

understood and can be read as a narrative detailing the lived experiences of gay men in senior or executive leadership. Data presented in a narrative format assisted with the phenomenological methodology of double hermeneutics. It allowed the participants to express their lived experiences but also promoted the process of meaning making while responding to the interview questions. The approaches of Phenomenology and Social Constructionism described in Chapter 2 provided an apt theoretical basis for analysing the lived experiences the gay cisgender male participants, their perceptions of their work environment and the challenges they faced in this space.

Findings provided empirical data on sexual orientation, the lived experiences of gay men in the workplace and on the barriers gay men encounter and have overcome to become leaders in mainstream South African organisations. Specific attention was paid in the analysis to extract the enablers that impacted the achievement of senior or executive leadership roles, which were explored and reported precisely.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of crucial importance in all research in the social sciences that involve human subjects (Themba Lesizwe, 2005; Knight, 2019; Tsan & Nguyen, 2019). This study was conducted under the social sciences umbrella of the university as it focused on people working in organisations. An essential ethical concern which must be considered and implemented in all studies involving LGBTI+ people is that the study itself and all its aspects, for example, the research question and the implementation, do not in any way reproduce the oppression of LGBTI+ community members (Chan & Farmer, 2017). Caution was taken to assure that the research question indicated the desire to explore any prejudices or discrimination against gay men in the workplace. In order to ensure that the right of all participants to feel accepted and that their experiences were acknowledged and important, an

affirmative practice approach was adopted throughout the research process and in all engagements with participants.

In studying how gay male leaders have overcome potential barriers in their workplaces, this research also hopes to contribute to the field of Emancipation psychology. Emancipatory psychology has to do with the liberation of people from being controlled socially (Joubert, 1998). The Emancipatory psychology model understands that through the interaction of the researcher and the participants, a reality is created (Joubert, 1998). How the participants were treated during this study was an important factor. At all times it was important for me to retain an affirmative, accepting and supportive stance. Meyer and Bayer (2013) explore the importance of ethical analysis of data and findings. They claim that incorporating ethical analysis implies that the dignity and diversity of the participants were respected, and the interviewing process attempted to reduce prejudice through the affirmative stance (Meyer & Bayer, 2013). The central aim of the research findings is to positively impact the treatment and management of gay men in mainstream South African organisations. Therefore, the study falls under the ambit of Emancipatory psychology.

A vital aspect of any social science research is informed consent. To protect the rights and dignity of all participants, I informed them, both verbally and in writing, about the purpose of the research and the role they and the researcher would play in the study. This process is important so that all participants realise that their participation is offered willingly and that they were not coerced or pressured into being a part of the research (Campbell, 2020). Participants were requested to complete an informed consent form (Appendix 1) which clarified the following aspects of the research process and the ethical stance:

- **Autonomy:** participants were informed of their right to participate or withdraw from the study at any time freely.
- **Confidentiality:** participants were informed about confidentiality and assured of anonymity in all the findings.

- Nonmaleficence: participants were informed of potential harm due to the personal and sensitive nature of exploring their experiences in the interviewing process. Pro Bono counselling services via organisations such as OUT LGBT Wellbeing were offered to those participants who requested such assistance.
- Beneficence: participants were informed of the potential benefit of the study and how it could impact the manner in which organisations in South Africa manage their gay and LGBTI+ employees. Participants were also informed about how discussing their resilience and skills at overcoming barriers in the workplace could through this research, potentially assist other gay men on their journeys to leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the methodology utilised in this study. The research context was discussed, and the research design and questions were examined. The research methodology followed, including the research questions, the data collection and the analysis of the data using the IPA method, was explained. The chapter closed with ethical considerations. In Chapter Four, the findings will be presented and discussed while providing answers to the research questions.

Chapter Four

Findings and discussion

Introduction

This research sought to investigate the lived experiences of gay men in South African organisations and the impact that same-sex sexual orientation that has been openly expressed in the workplace, may have on progression into senior leadership positions. The focus was on gay men working in South African organisations; however, several participants had experiences working in multinational organisations which allowed data to be extracted regarding the differences and/or similarities in lived experiences of gay men in South African organisations compared with gay men working for multinational organisations in South Africa.

This chapter will explore the barriers and challenges that influenced the advancement and development of the gay cisgender male participants working in mainstream South African organisations. However, the analysis of the lived experiences simultaneously offers instances that signify the innate strengths and environmental support initiatives that can assist gay men in their pursuit of leadership. Barriers and enablers are revealed to be an intricate tapestry of context-driven processes that become evident as the findings of the lived experiences of senior gay leaders, are presented.

The findings begin by focusing on the demographic summaries which is followed by the main body of the findings. The findings are categorised under five main themes, which evolved from the analysis process with each theme further separated into 22 sub-themes featuring the words and phrases used by the participants to describe their lived experiences. A detailed discussion and interpretation of each theme and sub-theme of the findings follows its description. Periodically, emphasis is placed on how the findings relate to and serve to address the research questions.

Demographic summaries

Table 2 was constructed to provide an overview of the participants' demographic information and an examination of the following categories: Industry, Leadership category, Geographical location, Race representation, and Age distribution.

Table 2

Overview of Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Industry	Leadership category	Geographical location	Race representation	Age Distribution
Johan	Medical	Executive Management/ CEO	Western Cape	White	50-59
David	Research	Executive Management	Free State	White	50-59
John	Education	Executive Management	Gauteng	White	50-59
Akito	Scientific	Executive Management	Gauteng	Indian/Asian	30-39
Athol	Financial	Senior Management	North-West	Coloured	30-39
Krish	Financial	Executive Management	Free State	Indian/Asian	30-39
Jan	Pharmaceutical	Executive Management	Gauteng	White	40-49
Daniel	Fast-moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)	Executive Management	Free State	White	40-49
Ajay	Financial	Senior Management	Gauteng	Indian/Asian	30-39
Jabulani	Financial	Employee/Forum Leader	Gauteng	Black African	30-39
Thato	Pharmaceutical	Manager/ Forum Leader	Gauteng	Black African	30-39

Single-name pseudonyms were selected from a sample of names for each specific racial group to ensure anonymity, and these were used to identify each of the eleven participants. While every effort was employed to make the interviews uniform, semi-structured questions allowed me to ask follow-up questions or make statements to the participants to elicit additional information concerning their lived experiences. This process served to deliver on the IPA aim of seeking to balance how the participants gave voice to their lived experiences and how they were able to make sense of these experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

Each of the eleven participants complied with the study's qualifying criteria as South African citizens. One participant was born outside of South Africa in the UK but had lived and worked in South Africa, and for South African organisations, for over 15 years and was subsequently granted South African citizenship. All participants reported either working for or having worked in a mainstream South African organisation in the past 5 years. The decision to focus solely on South African organisations, particularly mainstream South African organisations, was based on the understanding that these organisations would exhibit the prevailing attitudes and values of most organisations in South Africa with regards to sexual orientation. However, an unintended outcome of the collected data allowed for a comparison between South African and multinational organisations, because a number of participants had experiences working in both types of organisations.

Each participant indicated that they openly expressed their sexual orientation in their current workplaces; however, many of the participants were not open about their sexual orientation at certain times in their careers. The lived experiences of these participants, therefore, required a more thorough explanation and are explored and discussed in detail under the theme of Personal Impact.

All participants identified as cisgender males with a same-sex sexual orientation. In the case of one of the participants, a bisexual sexual orientation was initially indicated on the demographic intake form. However, when this was explored with the participant, he indicated

that as a young man, he had identified as bisexual but recently (in the past 10 years), he has consistently identified with a same-sex sexual orientation. The sexual identification categories selected by participants (same-sex, bisexual, heterosexual and asexual) were utilised as one of the primary identifiers for the selection of the final sample. However, this research in no way seeks to neglect or diminish the understood and recognised fluid nature of sexual orientation and identity over the lifetime of the participants. Diamond (2016) justifies the need for a fluid understanding of sexual orientation by describing that for some people their pattern of attraction to same-sex, opposite sex or both sexes is relatively constant over their lifetime. For others however, their pattern of attraction may change over their lifespan.

Seven industries are represented in the demographic data in Table 2. The highest proportion of participants hailed from the financial industry. It could be argued that this figure indicates that the financial industry is more inclusive and supportive of gay cisgender male leaders. However, due to convenience and snowball sampling methods employed in the study, and because one participant in the financial industry referred me to three colleagues who worked in the same industry and were later selected to participate, caution was employed in drawing conclusions.

Following the general description of the demographic data above, an in-depth look at the distribution of leadership categories, the geographical location of participants, the race representations and age distributions amongst the participants is conducted below.

Leadership Distribution

The research population was a sample of senior or executive leaders, or previous leaders (within the past 5 years), in South African organisations who identify as gay men. Two respondents indicated their role in their respective organisations as lower than senior management, which would therefore have disqualified them as potential participants. However, in both cases when their roles in their respective organisations were explored with them in greater detail, the participants indicated that although they were not functioning at senior or

executive leadership levels in terms of their organisation's hierarchy, they were both senior leaders in the LGBTI+ forums within their respective mainstream organisations. As such, both these participants had direct influence and responsibility for all employees in the organisation and reported directly to the chief executive officer (CEO) of their respective organisations. These two participants were also from the Black African race group, which, given the difficulties in recruiting members from this group, made them extremely valuable to the study in terms of observing the lived experiences of all races in South Africa. These two participants were therefore included in the sample.

Three participants indicated experience in more than one leadership category within the past five years. They had therefore held more than one level or role in an organisation. Nevertheless, at the time of the selection process, all 11 participants had worked in a senior leadership position within the past five years. It should be noted that the pilot study participant had worked in senior leadership within the past seven years prior to the participant selection, which initially disqualified him from the study. However, as mentioned, his lived experiences coincided so well with those of the other ten participants, that a decision was made to include his experiences in the findings.

The leadership categories selected by participants are summarised in Figure 3 for ease of reference. Although there are only eleven participants in this study, due to three participants having worked in more than one leadership category in the past five years, the sample size of the leadership distribution is based on fourteen responses, therefore $N=14$, rather than 11 as is the case for all other demographic data discussed.

Figure 3*Percentage per Leadership Category (N=14)****Participants' Geographical Location***

Geographical location was a further construct explored utilising the self-reported demographic information requested from the participants. While every effort was made to recruit participants from all nine provinces, particularly the economic hubs of Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), after months of recruiting, no representatives of the target population from Eastern Cape, KZN, Limpopo, Northern Cape and Mpumalanga were encountered. As snowball and convenience sampling methods were employed, this could explain why most participants were from the Gauteng region. As each participant was interviewed, they were requested to identify other potential candidates for participation in the study. It would be expected that many of these referrals would therefore work in a similar geographical area to the referrers.

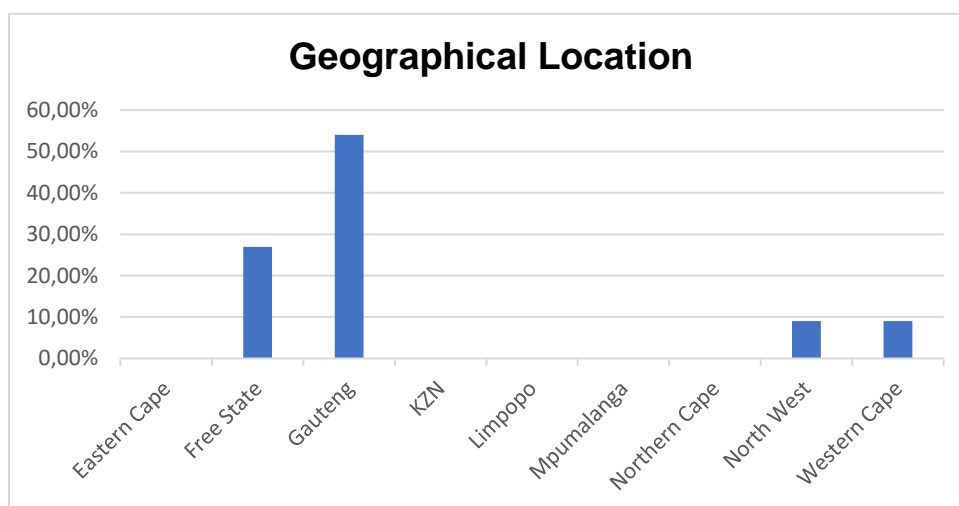
Nyeck et al. (2019) suggest that geographic location may account for differences in access to labour markets and employment opportunities which may partially explain why South

Africa's most prominent economic hub, Gauteng, would have the highest number of gay cisgender male leaders. However, assumptions that Gauteng has South Africa's largest gay cisgender male leaders would be premature. Further empirical research is needed on the differences in the number of gay cisgender male leaders in rural, suburban, and urban areas as well as the various economic hubs in South Africa, to make this assertion. It should be noted that two participants marked their geographical origins in the KZN Province. However, at the time of the interviews, both participants lived and worked in Gauteng Province. This may support the notion that geographical areas where the labour market and job opportunities are greater will attract and generate a greater number of organisational leaders, including LGBTI+ leaders. However, further studies would be required to support this statement.

Figure 4 provides a representation of the geographical distribution of participants. The percentages of participants from each province are indicated in the chart. As evident in Figure 4. the highest number of participants hailed from the Gauteng province, followed by the Free State province. A similar number of the participants resided in the North-West province and the Western Cape province.

Figure 4

Percentage per Geographical Category (N=11)



Race Representation

Information regarding the distribution of race representation in the sample is recorded in Figure 5. As stated in the previously, participants were recruited from all major race categories in South Africa. Black Africans were a particularly difficult sub-group to gain access to and to find willing participation. Discussions and requests for referrals were held with members of numerous organisations working in LGBTI+ communities including the magazine, Gay Pages SA, the national non-governmental organisation 'Out' Wellbeing, SAWEI and members of the LGBT+ Forum (www.lgbtforum.org). After five months of recruitment efforts, two Black African participants were recruited and selected from referrals provided by another participant; however, they both worked in the same organisation. Snowball sampling was, therefore, an appropriate method to obtain the envisioned profile, which included representation of all the major race categories in South Africa.

The representation of race was skewed towards White participants. This may indicate that there are more White gay cisgender male leaders in South African organisations. Vaccaro and Koob (2019) found that forms of gender and sexuality oppression are often knitted with other forms of oppression, like racism, and form a dominant culture that normalises certain dominant groups, like White males, and marginalises all other groups. Reflecting on the history of South Africa during the Apartheid era, racial inequality may explain the skewed representation of White participants. Nyeck et al. (2019), in a South African study under the umbrella of The Williams Institute, note that the higher the level of financial stability, the more likely LGBTI+ individuals are to be open about their sexual orientation to data collectors. It would follow that those gay men working in leadership would be more open about their sexual orientation, but this did not seem to be the case. The difficulty in recruiting gay cisgender male leaders, particularly Black African leaders, indicates that in South African organisations, financial stability is not a sufficient motivator to reveal one's sexual orientation.

However, one of the participants responded to a question regarding the poor representation of Black African men willing to participate in the study.

Thato said:

[I]t's only now that the younger generation, or maybe my generation are proudly coming out. But the previous generation, the generation before me, they ended up getting married to women just to hide, so they only do it, they are gay secretly, so, they're not out. They are known as married men, to women with kids and everyone but never openly gay. So, most of them in executive levels, I think they're in that, in that area (p. 395).

In support of the above statement, I experienced a similar challenge in that few contacts made during the recruiting stage could identify Black African gay cisgender male leaders that they knew about or were aware of. These contacts included individuals involved in LGBTI+ organisations, people working with LGBTI+ communities and LGBTI+ professionals working in mainstream South African organisations. The absence of these voices resonates with continued stigma and fear of victimisation and marginalisation that emanates from many South African organisations, particularly for the Black African portion of the population.

According to Reygan and Lynette (2014), there are persistent differences in the interpretation of sexuality and gender in African versus Western societies. The concept that same-sex sexual orientation is not an African concept is prevalent throughout South Africa and other African countries. This may account for the challenge in obtaining Black African men for this study's sample. Aksoy et al. (2019) found that White gay men experienced proportionately less of a ceiling to their professional growth than do men from racial groups which may explain the struggle with recruiting Black African participants for this study.

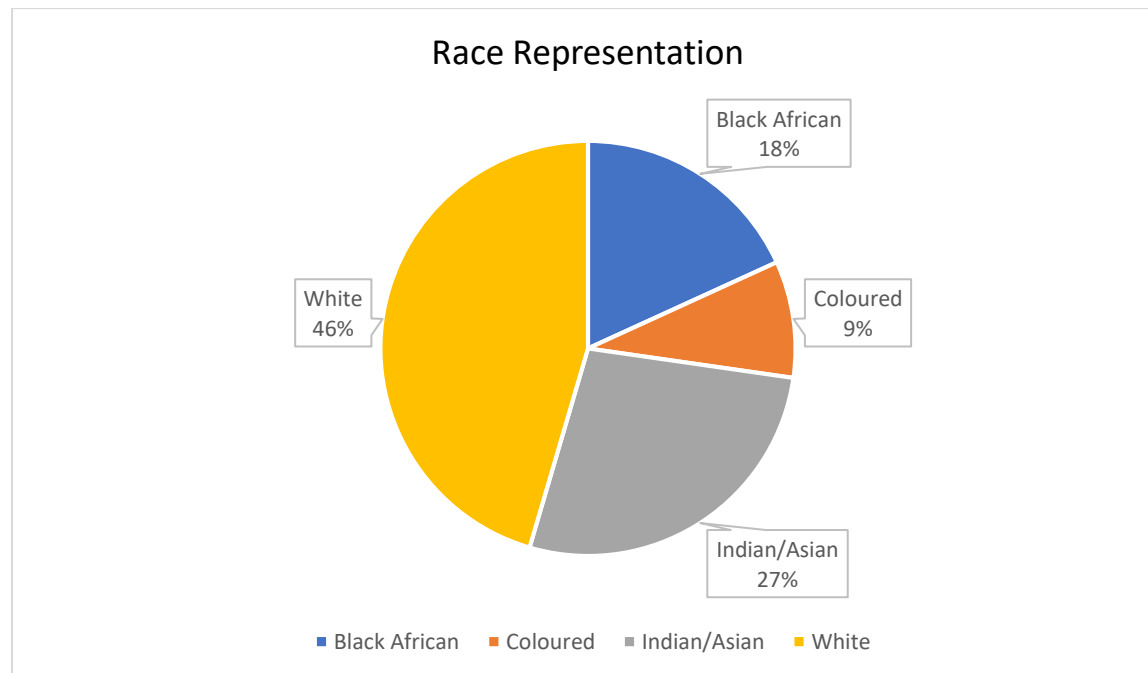
Similarly, this statistic may indicate that even in modern day South Africa, the previous Apartheid and colonial dispensations and the contributions hereof, have led towards Black Africans, although understood to be a numerical 'majority' in the population, to remain a

'minority group' in leadership in South Africa organisations. Perhaps a combination of factors intersected to influence the population demographics of this study. Whatever the root of this phenomenon, the absence of the voices of gay cisgender male Black African leaders in mainstream South African organisations is deafening.

The pie chart below shows the racial distribution of the research sample. White cisgender males represent the largest portion of the sample followed by the Indian/Asian community, the Black African community and finally the Coloured community.

Figure 5

Race Representation in Sample (N=11)



Age Representation

The representation of age groups from the sample is presented in Figure 6. The sample included participants from the following age categories: 30-39, 40-49 and 50-59. Although every attempt was made to have participants from all the age group categories, two age categories 20-29 and 60-69, were not represented in the sample. While these age groups are not represented in the study, caution should be used to generalise that there are few or no gay

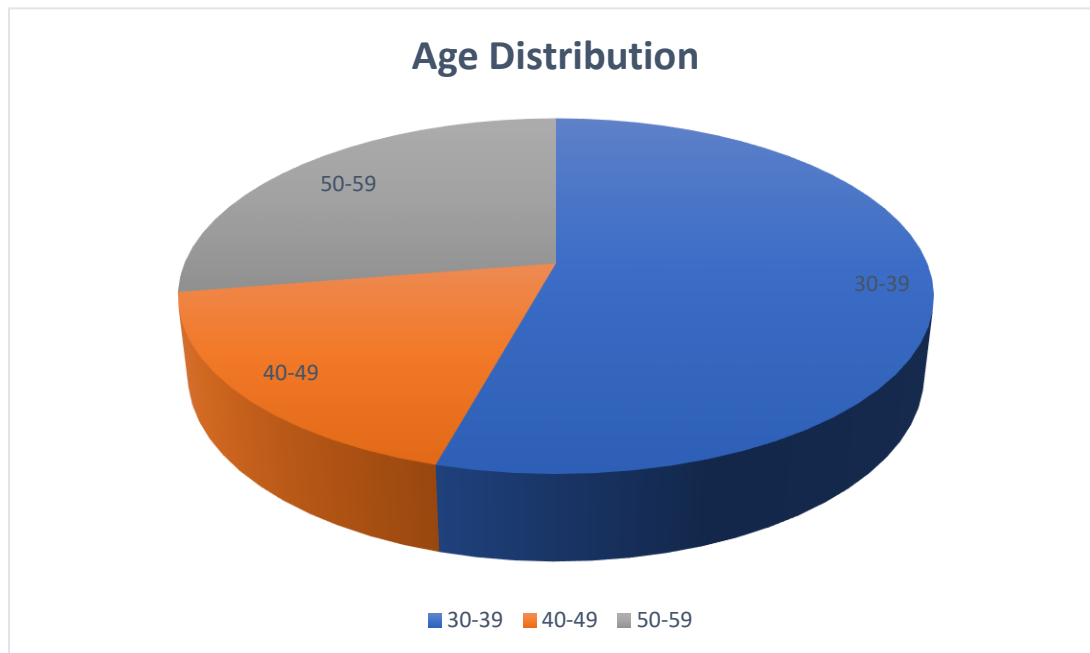
cisgender male leaders in mainstream South African organisations in these age categories. However, it could be argued that the age range between 20-29 would, in most cases, be considered too young for senior management positions.

Furthermore, in our ageist society, from ages 60 onwards, many people are expected to go on retirement – at least in South Africa. Rudman (2015) is of the opinion that negative beliefs about the traits of older people leads to prejudice and marginalisation of these age groups. It may also be possible that this older age category of gay men are those who grew up during the previous Apartheid dispensation, infamous for its discriminatory policies regarding minority groups (PsySSA, 2017; Tebele, 2013, Thorpe, 2018) and that that, too, may contribute to personal experiences of being closeted or not revealing sexual orientation in the workplace. This may clarify the absence of voices from the 60 and above age group.

Similarly, the size of the sample and the sampling method may likewise account for these statistics. A significant proportion of participants came from the 30-39 age group. Three participants in this age group held executive positions while the remaining three held senior or middle management positions, but with direct influence on the leadership of their respective organisations. As a snowball sampling method was used, no specific preferences were given to any age group in the selection process. Calasanti (2005) explains that different age groups achieve identity and power according to how a society views age. This may account for the higher number of younger leaders as opposed to older leaders. As older leaders leave South African organisations due to ageist policies and pressures, younger leaders gain more power and enter leadership roles. Subsequently, the implications of most participants coming from younger age groups may hold valuable information on the future for younger leaders and particularly gay cisgender male leaders, in mainstream South African organisations. This trend may provide an interesting topic for future research. Although the size of the sample does not allow for generalisations, this statistic remains a noteworthy observation.

Figure 6

Age Distribution of Research Participants (N=11)



The demographic information above provides an overview of the sample and the participant characteristics. The lived experiences explored during the semi-structured interviews (Appendix 4) with the participants will now be explored according to the themes and sub-themes that emerged. These comprehensive findings will be coupled with a discussion and interpretation of each theme and sub-theme.

Themes Among Lived Experiences

The main themes and sub-themes emerging from the IPA analysis of the data are presented in Table 3. Seven main themes and twenty-two sub-themes were identified. Following Table 3 a detailed presentation of each theme and its corresponding sub-themes will be explored and discussed. A wide range of themes emerged from the lived experiences of gay

leaders, which seem to impact their achievement of leadership in South African organisations. From the manner in which openly gay men are impacted by the industry they work in, to organisational culture and the role their personal attributes can play in achieving leadership, the themes seem to support many of the assertions made in the literature. Each sub-theme introduces a specific insight and is contextualised using quotations from the participant interviews, with each participant's quotation preceded by their pseudonym.

Table 3

Findings: Themes and Sub-themes

Findings	
Main Themes	Sub-themes
Organisational Culture	Unsafe Work Culture Boys' Club Unspoken/Subtle Prejudice Racism Overshadowing other Prejudice Stereotyping
Current Organisational Challenges	Generational Differences Limited and Limitations of LGBTI+ specific Policies Superficial Inclusion/Box Ticking Gay Men in Leadership Increased Number of Employees Residing Under the LGBTI+ Banner Geographical Location of Organisations Impacts Disclosure
Personal Impact	Repeated Coming-out Challenges Impacts on Career Progression

Personal Attributes	Authenticity Challenges Actor Role Self-confidence and Self-belief Confrontation of Prejudice
Industry Standards	Industry Type and Inclusivity Multinational Organisations
Positive Changes	Existing LGBTI+ Friendly Programmes Changes in Inclusivity in the World of Work
Future Organisational Needs	Supportive Top-down Culture Needed in South African Organisations

The first theme to be explored is that of *Organisational Culture*. Following the presentation of the theme of organisational culture, the sub-themes under this theme will be presented with the subsequent discussions. This process will be repeated for each of the seven main themes and 22 sub-themes.

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture can be defined as an integrated pattern of human behaviour that is unique for that organisation and arises as a result of survival in and assimilation with its environment (Martins & Coetzee, 2007). The culture in mainstream South African organisations does, in many instances, have a direct influence on feelings of prejudice and discrimination experienced by gay cisgender males in their achievement of leadership.

The following sub-themes highlight the impact of organisational culture on many of the participants lived experiences, evidencing that organisational culture may be a defining characteristic of the barriers to advancement into senior leadership that gay cisgender males experience. The first sub-theme explored is the experience of many gay men that the workplace culture 'Unsafe'.

Unsafe Work Culture. The following excerpts represent the lived experiences of participants who found that the organisational culture in their respective organisations had a negative influence on their experiences and it felt unsafe for them to be open about their sexual orientation or to divulge information about their personal lives:

Athol said,

I was open, so everybody knew about it [sexual orientation], but I always still felt like a bit of an outsider. I left as well. Uh, I didn't fit. I didn't like the culture, so I left (p. 250).

Likewise, Jabulani said,

That we have to create a safe space, no doubt, but my experience of the organisation...may be completely different to someone else, and I think that's what the challenge is, that's what the, really the challenge is. How do we ensure that consistency in experience? Or feeling that support? (p. 348).

John noted,

So, there are people who, I think, put up with the [South African] Constitution essentially, but in their private views, they may hold a different view. And if those people are on committees and if they hold positions of authority, it is possible that some of that prejudice could impact somebody (p. 374).

John also opined,

Gay men might also be bullied in certain contexts, and that's despite having all of these policies in place (p. 379).

Daniel expressed that,

Certain team members in the more, you know, the blue-collar range of company, I won't really act on it [sexual orientation] or show it or discuss it (p. 276).

Daniel furthermore felt,

But trying to instil a change in the culture is difficult. And it's the culture of the

company that makes it hard to actually allow yourself to be freely open about your sexual orientation and to move up (p. 279).

Krish stated that,

[A]t that point I wasn't really open about my sexuality at work and, and, and still quite not sure about whether it would be acceptable (p. 399).

Thato remarked,

[E]specially when it comes to the ablutions, the toilets, because it can be a safety thing and it can also be a comfortability thing. So, restrooms are still marked as for women and these are for men, and these are paraplegic. But you end up finding a lot of gay men going into the paraplegic restrooms because they don't belong in any of the two (p. 394).

Johan opined that,

We cannot legislate against prejudice. You can't. I personally think what you do is systemically, you're setting up a situation of us and them. You're setting up the situation where you're going to see an increased level of aggression and an increased level (and that what we're seeing), an increase in hate crimes in our country and it's partially because of the prejudice (p. 427).

Johan also said,

So, talking about a corporate culture and how do we change that? We know corporate cultures are like families. To change our corporate culture... You literally have to fire the whole unit or redistribute them, and try again because it's like that, culture sits and even if there's only one person that culture takes hold of them (p. 430).

For some participants, culture had a different and more positive influence providing an alternative viewpoint on how organisational culture can be experienced as 'safe' and can offer a supportive and affirmative environment for LGBTI+ communities:

David declared that,

[W]alking into the [financial organisation] head-office in Sandton. [The financial organisation] just feels inclusive. I don't know if that's being done intentionally or not, but it feels warm, it feels welcoming to everybody (p. 301).

Similarly, Akito said,

[My company] sponsored PRIDE this year and you know everyone at the office knows my sexuality and knows that I'm gay and I just felt comfortable to reveal that because we just have that culture that allows me to be my true self (p. 231).

Organisational culture, therefore, seems to have an important role to play in the experiences of gay men with specific reference to their openness about their sexual orientation and comfort disclosing personal information. In much of the literature, the emphasis is on how organisational culture limits openness about sexual orientation and that there is expected prejudice and discrimination should sexual orientation be divulged (Allan et al., 2015; Beggan & Allison, 2018; Denton, 2009; Fassinger et al., 2010; Ragins et al., 2007; Reed & Leuty, 2016). However, based on some of the participants' lived experience, culture can have a significant and positive influence on gay men and may thus assist in the journey to achieving leadership.

The second construct that may also be considered related to organisational culture is that of the 'Boys' Club'. This term was used by several participants to express their experiences of feeling different from or not fitting into, or being invited into, the 'Boy's Club' in their respective organisations.

The Boys' Club. For many of the participants, the workplace culture created a particularly discouraging environment but was specific to the workplace and different from other social environments. In many instances, this type of workplace environment is referred to as a 'Boys' Club', 'boy's' team' or 'cabal'. This term donates a gender-specific component which may indicate that in some mainstream South African organisations, senior and executive leadership

is experienced to be dominated by males or that workplace culture tends to be more in tune with male interests and practices. One could even go so far as to say the Boys' Club is a heteronormative workplace culture, mostly within the leadership arena, where gay men feel uncomfortable and to which gay men are often denied admittance. The excerpts below indicate how this 'Boys' Club' culture is experienced:

Athol stated that,

They don't see you as part of the Boys' Club, but they see you as this outsider that exists, you know. And that has always been the most prevalent thing for me in my career up to now is that, uh, with other heads and executives...they seem to have this club where they belong to, and you just can't fit into that normativity because I am different, and I will always be different (p. 247).

Athol also stated that,

You have to be part of the Boys' Club. If you're not, you will be marginalised guaranteed (p. 265).

John opined that,

So, you'[v]e essentially got a kind of cabal of people who hold quite conservative views. And in a situation like that, you may very well find yourself [as a gay cisgender male] hitting a ceiling (p. 377).

Likewise, Daniel said,

When you start getting down to the old Boys' Club, it's not easy. It's not easy to actually just come out and say you are gay. You would rather just keep your personal life personal (p. 272).

Krish declared,

I mean, this team was pretty much like an all-Afrikaans boys' team who all go hunting together... so I wasn't very open about my sexuality because I, I could see that it would have probably been frowned upon and the team would have not

[have] known how to assimilate me into the team (p. 399).

Similarly, Johan revealed,

Yeah, they wanted me because I was a rainmaker. I was good at making money.

They just didn't want me in a position of power or on their little pretty little AGM

[Annual General Meeting] annual report. They just didn't want me there (p. 424).

The 'Boys' Club' culture seems to create a limiting and frustrating workplace environment for many of the participants. A 'Boys' Club' culture is characterised as a group of people, often men and leaders in organisations, who only allow others with the 'correct' characteristics or profiles to enter it. The idea that gay men may be different from this group, are not accepted into this group and experience this group, and the culture they represent, as negative and a barrier to leadership, was a repetitive theme that emerged from the experiences of the participants. This finding may also link to the sub-theme of *Stereotypes* discussed below and what Barrantes and Eaton (2018) refer to as preconceived ideas regarding gay men and their unsuitability for 'male' leadership roles due to them being seen as more like women and thus not suited to joining the 'Boys' Club' where male, heterosexual characteristics are dominant. Unfortunately, this 'Boys' Club' often seems to be situated in the upper hierarchy of organisations. Although one could consider merging this sub-theme with the following sub-theme of subtle or unspoken prejudice, it was decided to keep it separate due to the number of times the participants used the specific phrase, 'Boys' Club'.

The following sub-theme is that of an *Unspoken or Subtle Prejudice* which is often experienced by gay men in organisations. It explores those subtle behaviours, comments and exclusionary practices that often make gay men feel unwelcome, unsafe and discriminated against.

Unspoken or Subtle Prejudice. The literature often mentions subtle or unspoken prejudice that remains in South African organisations. Otis and Harley (2016) state that in many predominantly heterosexual environments, sexual orientation may result in certain minority

groups experiencing subjugation and prejudice. Carrim (2019) explores the impact of gossip, stating that it can be positive or negative (malicious). According to Carrim, minority groups, like gay men, may still be vulnerable to negative gossip which can sustain discrimination. Therefore, negative gossip can too be considered a subtle form of prejudice. This subtle prejudice was interpreted by many of the participants as negatively impacting their lived experiences in their respective organisations:

Athol said,

But still there were these people who silently didn't sort of accept you [as a gay man] (p. 246).

Athol also said,

They'll keep quiet about it and then they won't engage you further... My staff or colleagues, people look at me and will frown upon me because it's [being gay] not their norm, no. And they can't say anything, they can't overtly discriminate against me, but I will feel that (p. 252).

Jabulani opined that,

Maybe the prejudice would only be happening in the corner and would really hardly ever get to our [LGBTI+ Forum] table (p. 339).

Likewise, John mentioned,

That's not to say that there isn't a kind of a quiet, a quiet sort of a prejudice that may exist... and you kind of notice the sort of gossiping and snickering in the corner, and that kind of thing that's still going on (p. 373).

Daniel said,

But you know, I wouldn't openly just divulge it [sexual orientation] to them because of, I suppose, the fear would be of prejudice thereafter (p. 277).

Ajay stated that:

So, you go to your HR [Human Resources] saying I've been discriminated

against because I'm gay and they go to your boss who says, no, it's not because they're gay, it's because their work is useless. They find all these issues. And then, that changes the conversation. HR says you're claiming discrimination and there's actually a workplace performance issue. Uh, and I think, I think there we've got a real policy hole and we have a lack of precedence. I think in both case law and CCMA [Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration] law (p. 217).

Furthermore, Krish said,

[E]veryone was very accepting [of same-sexual orientation] at face value. But I think there was definitely some corridor talk [gossip] from some of the senior male dealmakers, and I could sense that I wasn't being included in some of the cycle [bicycle] events that the straight guys would go to and I could see this very subtle, a sort of subtle disassociation (p. 400).

Daniel held that,

There was a guy, we were similar age and he had come later than me. However, because he was heterosexual, and he was planning to get married, he got promoted far quicker than I was (p. 389).

Akito also stated,

But then, when she got involved in some of the decision making around PRIDE events, there was subtle things that she said to me that I did not like. For example, she came up to me one day and said, Akito you should have told the office not to bring in kids to the PRIDE parade because she thought that you know it's going to influence kids negatively to be around gay people at the PRIDE parade (p. 232).

Flowing from the subtle, unsafe culture, which is often hard to identify but seems to be perceived by many gay men as present in their organisations, is the impact of racial

discrimination in organisations. It is felt by some participants that due to the Apartheid history of South Africa, racial discrimination may have had an obscuring effect on other forms of discrimination that may have been taking place during that time and since.

Racism Overshadowing other Prejudice. South Africa's history of Apartheid led to the legal separation of the different race group and the regulation of sexuality. Normative sexuality was influenced and sustained by the European settlers and their belief system (Nyeck et al., 2019). However, some believe that due to the severity of control during the Apartheid era, other minority groups and their struggles tended to disappear under the atrocities of racial prejudice (Balfour, 2016, Pillay et al., 2019). Some participants discussed how sexual orientation and, in fact, many persistent challenges within LGBTI+ communities became 'lost' or disappeared under the torrent of racial and gender inequalities in South Africa.

Krish declared that,

[U]nfortunately SA history of race, it definitely feels like it's been a bit of like a pall over [overshadows] a lot of other issues, like this blanket or cloud that sometimes we forget to ask the other important questions around gender identity, around LGBTQ people, but also, you know, often even in terms of women, women empowerment, and women employment equity in the workplace (p. 412).

Athol stated,

[W]e talk about, race, you know... and they're trying to create awareness of better. Because if you have more knowledge then you break down your own prejudice in your mind. I think they should include LGBTQ plus all that stuff into those diversity and inclusion talks (p. 262).

Likewise, John said,

[A]t the moment we're busy setting up gender sensitivity workshops and race sensitivity workshops. But no one is setting up with sort of like, uh queer sensitivity workshops yeah (p. 377).

The above statements bring to light an issue that speaks directly to the research questions regarding present-day barriers to gay men achieving leadership and how an openly expressed sexual orientation in the workplace impacts them. Should the needs of LGBTI+ communities, and their struggles have become 'overshadowed' by the, admittedly, vital emphasis on racial and gender inequalities in South African organisations, then it would follow that these communities and the coming out process in South African organisations, would be attributed less important or perhaps even discouraged. Directing organisations to consider and enforce the constitutional rights of LGBTI+ communities may be seen as impeding and derailing the necessary focus on existing gender and racial discriminations and lead to these communities being seen in a negative light which may, in turn, impact the achievement of leadership for the communities' members.

As organisations are encouraged, indeed mandated, to consider and enforce the rights of LGBTI+ communities, it would appear that many of these communities' members are stereotyped as having certain characteristics or needing to assume 'appropriate' roles. Stereotyping is often based on misunderstandings and biased views about members of LGBTI+ communities and may lead to assumptions and limitations for these members in their achievement of leadership roles. Pellegrini et al. (2020) state that sexual prejudice and stereotyping result in a phenomenon where sexual minority groups face increased obstacles in achieving supervisory and senior managerial positions, compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Pellegrini et al. explain that the stereotypical perception that gay men possess a lack of fitness for leadership roles may contribute to the absence of gay men in leadership and may explain why some gay men experience a ceiling to their professional growth as discussed by Aksoy et al. (2019).

Stereotyping. Participants in the study reported various lived experiences related to being stereotyped by colleagues and leaders of their organisations. Being stereotyped may be experienced by some gay men as a form of microaggression. According to Nadal et al. (2016),

stereotypes may influence the use of statements or behaviours that can be understood as microaggressions towards gay men and other LGBTI+ people. Stereotyping can thus be understood as a form of microaggression.

Some participants experienced members of LGBTI+ communities as appearing to benefit or comply by attempting to 'fit' themselves into stereotypical or 'acceptable' LGBTI+ roles, in some cases even exaggerating their behaviour to 'fit' into these roles. The literature corroborates the experiences of LGBTI+ communities that they may be exposed to stereotyping by others in their organisations (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Buddel, 2011; Nel, 2007; Nyeck et al., 2019; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Soeker et al., 2015; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). Below are some excerpts from the interviews with participants detailing their experiences of stereotyping on their journey to leadership:

Athol said,

And they look at the gay man as flamboyant, as the gay man that is not taken seriously. You can't take him seriously. He can't think strategically because his mind is probably in the gutters all the time. That's the view (p. 255).

Krish expressed that,

[E]ngaging with women colleagues where there's a certain sense that, OK, we can tell Krish anything because he's gay, but in essence I'm still a work colleague as well, so I should always be treated like a work colleague. And I don't really want to know certain things about your personal life just because I'm a gay man (p. 406).

Jan declared,

So, I think it has also had limitations on where you can also relocate to and which areas you, you can work and with which clientele you can work and where your job is going to be? Because if I've got a gay guy that is very flamboyant working for me for example, I'm not necessary going to send them to one of my Muslim

clients in Durban (p. 358).

Similarly, David said,

[T]here was an expectation because you are gay, you probably wouldn't have children, therefore you would never want to take leave over Easter and Christmas or other school holiday times (p. 300).

Thato mentioned that,

[S]tereotypically homosexuals are classed in with your single people with no family and partying and not being serious, always being jolly. Yes, we are jolly, but we know where to draw the line, but those opportunities are the opportunities that we are deprived of (p. 388).

Akito revealed,

And there was also another instance where we sat down for lunch at the PRIDE parade and then she says so, 'Akito', when did you decide to be gay? And, I said, you know it's not really a choice to be gay. Once again, it's just like ignorance that came out (p. 232).

As mentioned, some gay cisgender males found it beneficial to assume the roles that many heterosexual people view as stereotypical for gay men. These men could be seen as overcompensating to achieve integration into the organisations. deLeon and Brunner (2013), in their study on educational leaders and their lived experiences, found that many leaders who identify with a same-sex sexual orientation, experience their sexual orientation as a defect. These men will tend to exaggerate heterosexual behaviour to be seen as equal to their heterosexual colleagues. The theme of LGBTI+ people overcompensating to fit in or feel equal to their heterosexual counterparts is supported in both South African and international research (Campbell, 2020; Denton, 2009; Nel, 2007; Van Zyl, 2009). The following quotations evidence the attempts by some of the participants to fit into a stereotypical role or perhaps even overcompensate to feel fit for the roles they assumed:

Johan explained,

So, he played the wife role. I played the male role. I was the income earner. He was the housewife... So, we literally played that role. So, I think that made a big difference (p. 419).

Similarly, David said,

I have noticed in various companies, gay men and lesbians overcompensating, and perhaps trying to fulfil a stereotype in order to make people around them feel comfortable...I think some people put barriers on themselves... and I think the biggest barrier now comes from people overcompensating, which tends to create prejudice (p. 298).

For some participants, some roles appeared to be stereotypical for members of the gay community. However, where the above roles seemed thrust upon the gay men to fit in, the experience of Akito below seems to indicate that some stereotypical characteristics that gay men are assumed to possess may be experienced as holding positive attributes:

Akito disclosed,

I was recently at an Out and Equal conference, and I attended a session about how gay people have a superpower because they can read the room better because we had to do that to survive (p. 234).

For some gay men, there were stereotypical roles that were perceived to be stumbling blocks to progression. However, Krish appeared to feel that some gay men are limited as much by their own preconceived ideas of being a gay cisgender male in an organisation as by the heterosexual community:

Krish divulged,

Often as LGBT people we perceive there to be certain barriers that exist but whether or not they are actual barriers, and they are limiting us from being authentic and progressing, is a question mark (p. 408).

Through the analysis of the participants' lived experiences, it would appear that stereotyping may still occur in South African organisations, and it may at times, lead to negative outcomes for LGBTI+ communities and gay men attempting to achieve leadership. This is supported in the literature (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Benjamin and Reygan, 2016; Cavalier, 2011; Harley & Teaster, 2016; Nadal et al., 2016; Ng & Rumens, 2017; Pellegrini et al., 2020). Pellegrini et al. (2020) explain that stereotyping may result in perceptions that certain groups of people possess characteristics that are inappropriate for leadership which may have a negative impact on their probability of being chosen as a leader.

However, some evidence exists that stereotyping does not always lead to negative outcomes or discrimination. It may lead to assumptions that place gay men and other LGBTI+ communities in a favourable light with positive characteristics that are valued in the workplace.

Gay men may also be imposing stereotypes on themselves, which may result in workplace experiences as limiting and creating barriers. However, if one understands stereotyping as a form of microaggression, it may be possible that gay men imposing stereotypical roles on themselves may relate more to the concept of internalised homophobia and a lack of integration of same-sex sexual identity than workplace barriers. Nadal et al. explain that LGBTI+ people with a strong sense of identity are better able to manage microaggressions.

Certain factors in an organisational culture, like those of an unsafe culture, the Boys' Club culture, subtle forms of prejudice, an overshadowing focus on Race group representation, and stereotyping, have been shown to have a significant influence on the experiences of gay men in leadership and may even create barriers for them. Culture may even be perceived as negative due to internalised homophobia and a struggle to accept a same-sex sexual orientation person. However, organisational culture can also have a positive influence on gay men. The culture of an organisation can be perceived as welcoming and inclusive, and safe for gay men and the larger LGBTI+ communities. Buddel (2011) found that when a work environment in

experienced as safe, the disclosure of sexual orientation was observed to have favourable results like commitment to the organisation and satisfaction in their careers. One could, therefore, go so far as to infer that a safe work environment may create fertile ground for the development of gay cisgender male leaders.

Focus will now be given to the various challenges that may be present in organisations and which many gay men perceive to be barriers to achieving leadership roles.

Current Organisational Challenges

A central theme that emerged from the lived experiences of the participants was related to organisational challenges that impacted these gay cisgender male leaders. Those organisational aspects that impact gay men negatively are amongst the sub-themes of this section. They are generational differences, limited and the limitations of LGBTI+ supportive policies, superficial inclusionary practices, the low number of gay men in leadership, the growth of the LGBTI+ population and the geographical location of the organisation. This first of these sub-themes, *Generational Differences* is explored and discussed below:

Generational Differences. The findings of the analysis provide differences in the perceptions and experiences of different age groups of gay cisgender male leaders. Certain participants understood that different generations of gay men have different experiences of being a gay, cisgender males working in South African organisations. For most of these men, coming out or being open about sexual orientation is determined by your generation. In the literature, Fassinger et al. (2010) explain that affirmative workplaces allow younger generations of LGBTI+ leaders to reveal their sexual orientation under more favourable circumstances than previous generations of LGBTI+ leaders. Drawing on the work of Epstein (1998) and Ghaziani (2017), gay men from different generations have very diverse experiences of their sexual orientation and the implications of being open about their same-sex sexual orientation. Younger generations of gay men are reclaiming and self-labelling themselves with terms like 'queer' as a means of challenging heteronormative discourse (Epstein, 1998). Many gay men from older generations,

however, refrain from using such terms due to the negative connotations associated with the past and living during periods like the Apartheid era. Ghaziani's (2017) work on sex cultures examined the changing attitudes towards homosexuality in different periods of the past as compared to the present, noting that increasing assimilation of gay men into straight culture and vice versa. For instance, where older generations of gay men may have chosen to live in neighbourhoods or areas considered gay-friendly or accepting of gay men, younger generations of gay men are assimilating into "straight" neighbourhoods that may previously have been considered unaccepting of gay people. The younger generation is, therefore, perceived to have more freedom to express their sexual orientation openly, while older generations are more likely to struggle or to simply not reveal their sexual orientation, at all, in the workplace:

Daniel explained,

With my age group, with growing up and matriculating in '93, it [sexual orientation] still was very subdued, it wasn't an easy thing to even discuss.

Where I think now with bringing it into leadership forum [a meeting of leadership and employee groups to discuss issues like LGBTI+ challenges], for the youngsters, I feel they have an opportunity (p. 278).

Likewise, Ajay said,

So, there's people like me trying to do it the good old-fashioned way, and then there's a very young group that doesn't play that way. They'll ask you to change things tomorrow. So, I think there's a societal pressure that's going to come very hard and very fast (p. 222).

Thato also held that,

[I]t's only now that the younger generation, or maybe my generation are proudly coming out. But the previous generation, the generation before me, they ended up getting married to women just to hide, so they only do it, they are gay secretly, so, they're not out. They are known as married men, to women with kids and

everyone but never openly gay. So, most of them in executive levels, I think they're in that, in that area (p. 395).

Akito disclosed,

So, the only South African organisation I've worked for was [a financial institution]. And you know, when I look back on that experience, I just thought that they had a lot of older people in the organisation and because of the age gap, I did not feel comfortable about coming out to anyone at the office (p. 233).

It would appear that generational differences do, in fact, impact gay men in South African workplaces. Working in environments where senior leadership is from the older generation impacts on gay men and their willingness to be open about their sexuality. It is also true that some men falling under the older generation of leaders, perhaps those who grew up during the previous dispensation of Apartheid, with all its discriminatory practices, were far less likely to divulge their sexual orientation in the workplace than are younger generations of employees. It is important to consider that gay men who grew up during the Apartheid era may have been exposed to certain viewpoints which were rife during this period. Gay men were considered criminals because same-sex sexual orientation was considered a crime (Nel, 2007, Rumens et al., 2019). They were considered sinful in that same-sex sexual orientation was considered against the Christian religion, and they were considered sick in that a same-sex sexual orientation was considered perverse (Badgett, 2003; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Nel, 2007). One can only speculate about the internalised homophobia that resulted from these viewpoints. Nel (2007) explains that internalised homophobia occurs when a person accepts and internalises the perceived or real judgement of others and the community or society as a whole, and then begins to define themselves in terms of how the other views them. It could therefore be predicted that gay men who grew up in the Apartheid era would be very susceptible to internalised homophobia which may, in turn, impact their openness regarding their same-sex sexual orientation.

The generational gap may explain some of the causes for gay men to withhold information about their personal lives and their sexual orientation; however, it would appear that there are limited policies in South African organisations protecting the rights of LGBTI+ communities, which may too, impact openness regarding same-sex sexual orientation.

Limited and Limitations of LGBTI+ specific Policies. Few, if any, LGBTI+ favourable policies exist in South African organisations to support and protect these communities. Although the South African Constitution and various other Acts and regulations provide for the protection of the rights of all people and groups of people in the country, it would appear that this does not translate into specific policies protecting the rights of LGBTI+ communities in mainstream South African organisations, like those that support inclusivity in terms of race and gender (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Nyeck et al., 2019; Tebele, 2013). The following excerpts explore the lived experiences of participants which could be directly linked to the absence of policies specifically geared towards the protection and support of LGBTI+ communities:

Jabulani said,

I don't see it [policies] happening in our communities with the LGBTI, I don't see the inclusion. I don't see it. We can talk about it as much as we want. It's not happening, so it's not effective because we have very little policies that support the agenda so, it's like lip service (p. 346).

John declared that,

[A]t the moment we're busy setting up gender sensitivity workshops and race sensitivity workshops. But no one is setting up with sort of like, uh queer sensitivity workshops, yeah (p. 377).

Ajay mentioned that,

HR people had never been trained on how to deal with the LGBTI+ people. They don't have the vocabulary; they don't have the tool kits; they don't know where to

start (p. 197).

Ajay also said,

[L]ook at what we've done for physical disability in buildings, we've got ramps and labelled bathrooms, disability toilets...We did nothing of the same for the LGBT+ community (p. 206).

Krish stated,

I don't think policies and procedures you know are being updated to take into account LGBTQI rights enough currently, and it's not seen as a pressing matter. It's not given priority (p. 413)

Similarly, Jan stated that,

[I]n South Africa, we are probably one of the best protected and legislated in the world in terms of how advanced we are, but that doesn't mean it's happening in the workplace. In theory it's good, but in practice there may not be the environment that we want to create (p. 363).

Thato declared,

I don't think there's ever been one [LGBTI+ policy] that's written or acknowledged...None whatsoever, none that I can pinpoint. It's just a policy that governs everyone. There's no specification on who it impacts and how it's going to be executed (p. 393).

Similarly, Johan said,

Yeah, this is where we talk about diversity versus inclusion, so certainly diversity had the seats, but gays were not included, they didn't have voices (p. 425).

It would appear that for many participants, there is an absence of protection and support for gay men in South African organisations. For some, this is due to a lack of training and education of human resource officers. For others, it is that, while good, regulations do not filter down into organisational policies and practices. Whatever the reason, although South African

legislation offers protection of LGBTI+ rights, organisations seem to lack the workplace policies and practices that support and protect LGBTI+ communities similar to those that most organisations are implementing to provide protection for previously disadvantaged race and gender groups.

Perhaps the following sub-theme can explain the absence of policies that protect the rights of LGBTI+ communities. Many participants felt that South African organisations were superficial in their implementation of supportive LGBTI+ policies and the protection of LGBTI+ communities. They felt that these practices were more box-ticking exercises than practices that improved the support and protection of these communities.

Superficial Inclusion/Box Ticking. The findings indicate that in many South African organisations inclusivity and protecting the rights of all employees, and particularly LGBTI+ employees, is often a superficial process. It could be compared to simply trying to tick the right boxes to meet the expectations of regulations and the South African Constitution, but there is little true commitment to protecting the rights of the LGBTI+ communities and other minority groups. Tayar (2017) researched diversity and inclusion programmes in various organisations from several countries including the USA, Canada, UK and other European nations. Tayar observed that when there is only superficial commitment to change, LGBTI+ people are seldom positively impacted, and this also negatively impacts on the focus in areas where prejudice persists.

South Africa, too, has a benchmarking index that organisations implementing LGBTI+ inclusivity programmes can choose to participate in. This index is known as the SAWEI. Despite the exceptional work of this index, there remains a tendency in South African organisations to encourage superficial and emblematic conformity, in terms of inclusiveness policies and practices, rather than authentic change.

The excerpts below provide evidence that the trend observed in international organisations of apparent superficial commitment to inclusiveness, is also present in South

African organisations:

Ajay declared,

So, it [inclusiveness] wasn't a lived culture. It was very typical corporate washing [being made to look better than it is] (p. 199).

Likewise, Jabulani proclaimed,

It's not happening. I don't see it happening in our communities with the LGBTI, I don't see the inclusion. I don't see it. We can talk about it as much as we want. It's not happening, so it's not effective because we have very little policies that support the agenda so, it's like lip service [saying things that are not followed up with action] (p. 346).

Ajay revealed,

But above me there's, there's no protection because there's nobody up top who's, who's got the back of the people there. They just do lip-service but there is no true advocacy (p. 214).

Johan said,

So, it's this kind of window dressing kind of a thing that you have. So, the Diversity Committee, you know, it makes sure that we include everybody, I mean at least in team building shit where people have to climb. So, your staff and you know that's all nonsense. That's just window dressing (p. 426).

Johan also said,

I personally think legislating against prejudice is a foolish mission. I think what you do is you just teach people to become slyer and the problem with that is that it becomes a tick box exercise because that's ultimately the best way to conform to legislation, so nothing has to change (p. 426).

This finding indicates that not only do gay men and other members of LGBTI+ communities experience continued prejudice, but that even those South African organisations

that have committed to implementing inclusiveness programmes may only be demonstrating a superficial level of effort to implement these programmes than trying to inspire actual change for their LGBTI+ employees. This phenomenon may also explain the following sub-theme where the focus is on the limited number of gay men in leadership.

Gay Men in Leadership. Participants in this study were selected for their role in leadership positions in mainstream South African organisations, showing that certain LGBTI+ people do, indeed achieve leadership. However, these participants also claim to have experienced a glass ceiling in South African organisations that can be restrictive to members of LGBTI+ communities attempting to achieve leadership. The excerpt below details the experience one gay cisgender male employee encountered:

Ajay proclaimed,

[I]t's super interesting like the fact that myself and my friends across all these organisations couldn't find a single [LGBTI+] person that we know of, not a company secretary or at board level, nothing, nothing, nothing (p. 220).

However, it was the experience of other participants that there are minimal restrictions on gay cisgender male employees to reach leadership positions. This implies a contradiction to other findings that prejudice, and barriers, still exist in South African organisations that prevent the achievement of leadership. Excerpts from these lived experiences are presented below:

Daniel narrated,

[T]here was a gay man, in leadership, quite senior in management realms within [a technological company], but he didn't lead any forums or anything here in terms of allowing non-prejudice, but he definitely made it into leadership, and I don't think there was any there any sort of roadblocks or anything. I think the consulting environment was very open to allowing you to progress through those barriers (p. 278).

David revealed,

I don't think I've ever really, in the recent 20 odd years, experienced any barriers or obstacles (p. 287).

Interestingly, David also stated that,

I don't walk into a room and say hi my name is David and I'm gay... (p.292)

and proceeded to say,

I think that lesbian and gay men have to compromise [their sexual orientation or authenticity], even today, within an organisation (p. 299).

David's experiences seem to indicate that although he himself experienced little in the way of barriers to his achievement of leadership, he does acknowledge that many gay men, and other LGBTI+ employees, must often compromise their sexual orientation or authenticity to achieve leadership. This appears to agree with what John had to say. For John, there are gay men in leadership positions in mainstream organisations; however, these men conceal their sexual orientation in that they hold the position but are not open about their sexual orientation:

John declared,

It's almost as though there's a hidden presence of gay people in leadership. Um, and it might be interesting to try to, to unpack what's going on there (p. 368).

It would appear that for some gay men, achieving leadership is a relatively straightforward process in terms of the impact their sexual orientation has on being a leader and being open to others about their sexual orientation. However, for some, becoming a leader in South African organisations means concealing your sexual orientation. The responses of the Black African participants and the literature seem to indicate that for Black African's, concealing sexual orientation is even more common (Aksoy et al., 2019; Reygan & Lynette, 2014).

The following sub-theme of the *Current Organisational Challenges* theme discusses the increasing number of employees falling under the umbrella of LGBTI+ communities.

Increased Number of Employees Residing Under the LGBTI+ Banner. One participant mentioned some interesting statistics that have arisen in his work within the LGBTI+ communities in organisations. As workplace communities and, by extension, societies become more accepting and adopt a more inclusive understanding of what constitutes sexual and gender diversity. As the younger generation of employees, who openly express their LGBTI+ identities, enter and progress in our organisations, more and more people are beginning to fall under the umbrella of LGBTI+ communities. As this growth occurs, the need for inclusivity policies and strategies for LGBTI+ communities will become more and more vital in South African organisations:

Ajay opined that,

[There are] interesting studies where young people are in these spectrums, where about 50% of them are falling into some sort of queer spectrum. So, it's not a one in seven problem. We know it's a one in two-person problem and that's right up there with gender. That's up there and now I've got a big problem. There's no longer a small problem (p. 221).

Indeed, should the current trends of younger employees identifying with and supporting LGBTI+ communities continue, workplace policies and practices will be forced to adapt to accommodate this increasingly large group of employees who do not identify with heteropatriarchy.

The next sub-theme falling under *Current Organisational Challenges* is that of *Geographical Location of Organisations Impacts Disclosure*.

Geographical Location of Organisations Impacts Disclosure. The geographical area where an LGBTI+ person resides can impact the inclusivity of the organisations and communities. Certain countries and certain geographical areas in South Africa are noticeably less inclusive than others and this can impact the experiences of gay men in achieving leadership or being open about their sexual orientation. The experiences of Akito, Jan and

John provide some examples of this phenomenon:

Akito explained,

And so, I told four of them. The fifth person I did not tell and the reason why I didn't tell, and he is the person I report to currently, I did not tell him because he stays in Dubai (p. 230).

Similarly, Jan stated,

So, I think it [sexual orientation] has also had limitations on where you can also relocate to and which areas you, you can work and with which clientele you can work and where your job is going to be? Because if I've got a gay guy that is very flamboyant working for me for example, I'm not necessary going to send them to one of my Muslim clients in Durban (p. 358).

Jan also stated,

And I think about that, and Pretoria people find it a bit more difficult to understand the mixed relationship [people from different race groups], while in Joburg where I live, in my complex, we are 14 units and we've got three mixed couples that live here. So, people really don't care that much, you know. So, I think geographical location can have a huge impact (p. 366).

John revealed that,

I realise all the time, for instance, that my experience is so different from someone who lives in a Township. And you know, I can go to a restaurant in my area and hold my now husband's hand if I want to, I don't have to, but I can. But I know that there are parts of the country in which you would still be very scared to do that (p. 376).

Solomon et al. (2015), incorporating the work of Swank et al. (2012), found that LGBTI+ people in rural communities report more experiences of prejudice and stigma than those from urban areas. Denton (2009) found that where a person resides, and therefore possibly also

works, relates to whether LGBTI+ people were open about their sexual orientation and determined how they lived both their personal and professional lives. The literature supports the view that the location of an organisation will impact the disclosure of sexual orientation as evidenced by the above excerpts. However, participant experiences seem to point to the fact that many of the challenges relating to location seem based on the assumptions one makes about the location and the people who live and work there. These assumptions could be interpreted as creating barriers for gay men. This may similarly indicate that gay men tend to project stereotypical heterosexual viewpoints and heteronormative prejudices on certain people living in certain areas without tangible proof that this is indeed the case. As Nadal et al. (2016) found, further research is needed to understand the impact that geographical location and regional differences have on how LGBTI+ individuals experience disclosure of sexual orientation and microaggressions towards them. Nadal et al. (2016) state that while most studies on LGBTI+ communities are conducted in metropolitan areas, little is known about rural areas.

Baird (2010) explored same-sex sexual orientation in the North-West Province in South Africa. His research found that although collectively over 80% of men and women were out about their sexual orientation, over 35% of men and 64% of women sought to conceal their sexual orientation from others. While this research provides interesting data, studies in all provinces and areas of South Africa would be required to assess the differences in openness regarding sexual orientation between rural, metropolitan and urban areas.

As many of the participants in this study work, live or have moved to major metropolitan areas, their experiences may differ from people in rural areas. Further research does seem to be needed to understand this phenomenon.

This concludes the theme of *Current Organisational Challenges*. The following theme is *Personal Impact* and how the disclosure of sexual orientation in South African organisations may result in gay men portraying certain behaviours and lead to certain outcomes on a personal

level.

Personal Impact

The findings indicate that there is a personal impact on openly gay men who work and progress through mainstream South African organisations. This impact may be related to decisions regarding, for instance, the disclosure of sexual orientation or personal information, which some experience as impacting their career progression and growth in these organisations. For others, there is a direct influence on career progression that comes with disclosing sexual orientation. Disclosure of sexual orientation may thus be seen to have career-limiting or career-promotion implications for the gay men who choose to do so.

Repeated Coming Out Challenges. For some the coming out process or disclosure of sexual orientation must be repeated with each change in position or level in the organisation or with each move to another organisation. The decision to be open about sexual orientation is thus something that needs to be confronted repeatedly and is not a single event that happens in the life of an LGBTI+ person:

Athol disclosed,

I never disclosed anything about my sexuality and then I came out, because I had to come out all the time in a different organisation and this organisation, I came out again (p. 250).

Ajay explained,

And the other thing that we don't tell LGBT+ people is that you come out all the time, every time we change jobs, change departments, or get a promotion, you have to come out again (p. 213).

For most LGBTI+ persons, there is a decision to be open about their sexual orientation or to choose not to reveal their orientation in the workplace (Bell et al., 2011; Bouzianis et al., 2008; Buddel, 2011; Chung et al., 2015; Einarsdóttir et al., 2016, Fassinger et al., 2010; Ozeren, 2014; Ragins et al., 2007; Reed & Leuty, 2016; Van Den Berg, 2016). Badgett (2003) refers to

this decision as a conflict that each person needs to work through while Van Der Berg refers to this as the 'dualism' of coming out (Van Den Berg, 2016, p. 25). The conflict is between the fear of prejudice and discrimination if they choose to be open about their orientation and the invisibility of their genuine selves if they choose to hide their sexual orientation. As the excerpts show and the literature confirms, this dilemma of revealing sexual orientation is one that many gay men face in the workplace and it is not a single occurrence but one that must be repeated (Lidderdale et al., 2007). Ozeren, (2014) explains this process stating that an implication of coming out in the workplace is that LGBTI+ people are pressured to repeat the coming out process each time they change jobs. This finding shows that there remain existing barriers for gay men in the South African workplace, and these barriers may impact their careers and even their progression in the organisation should the disclosure of sexual orientation be met with discrimination and prejudice. The following sub-theme discusses the *Impact on Career Progression* that openly revealing sexual orientation in the workplace may have on gay men.

Impact on Career Progression. For some gay cisgender male employees, there is an impact on career progression that comes from disclosing sexual orientation. The findings of this study and the lived experiences of gay men, even those who have achieved senior leadership roles, seem to support the literature that indicates that disclosure can have career-limiting impacts (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Denton, 2009; Green, 2003; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018; McNamara et al., 2021; Morton, 2017; Nel, 2009; Soeker et al., 2015). However, the findings also indicate an alternative viewpoint that for some gay men career advancement can be assisted through the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation. This viewpoint is discussed, and the experiences of these gay men are explored, towards the end of this section.

Athol declared that,

And embedded prejudice [about sexual orientation] does influence, unfortunately, the decision making when they want to bring somebody into that executive level

(p. 248).

Athol also revealed,

And when career opportunities come, then they have this prejudice [against same-sex sexual orientation] that oh, this guy is not going to fit into the cohort of [executive] members you see because, but they won't say it's because he's gay...that's where it becomes very career limiting (p. 253).

Daniel stated that,

[T]o be freely open about your sexual orientation and to move up. Yeah, and I think that can inhibit an individual's ability to progress in their career (p. 279).

Similarly, Ajay disclosed that,

[O]ne of the reasons I left banking was exactly because I was concerned that my LGBT+ community status would hamper my career and I left at that point, at the peak of my career (p. 200).

Johan opined that,

[I]n terms of succession planning, I should have just moved in, which I'd been preparing for, for three years, had been attending board meetings, etc. They decided to bring in somebody from the outside whom they knew. A man who has a wife and two kids, which I did not have (p. 418).

Johan also proclaimed,

Well, the biggest one was that I was denied advancement by the directors of [a retail solutions company] because of my sexual orientation...from different parts of the company, I experienced a wide variety of discriminations from just completely ignoring me, so not responding to emails and that sort of thing, to people talking so that I could hear and making comments about me. And so that sort of thing happens quite a bit (p. 422).

In addition, Johan said,

[T]hey were prepared to lose me. They were prepared to let that business suffer rather than follow their own succession plan and put me in that position. And so, this is the glass ceiling issue as well, a pink ceiling is of course a thing (p. 424).

Although this study focuses on the lived experiences of one subgroup of LGBTI+ people, namely, gay men, it cannot be ignored that other LGBTI+ communities experience similar barriers to their growth and progression. The excerpt below reveals what Rothmann and Simmonds (2015) explored in their article on the exclusion of sexual and gender diversities that are considered non-normative or other-than heterosexual. This can lead to the 'othering' or disregarding of LGBTI+ individuals and their experiences (Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015, p.117). When the norm is heterosexual, LGBTI+ individuals may be ignored or silenced in the workplace. This can lead to a lack of understanding and acceptance of LGBTI+ individuals, and further perpetuate discrimination and violence:

Ajay narrated that,

[A] CEO of one of the large divisions of a listed group ... had gotten fired because she was an open and out lesbian in her organisation and it was fine under previous management but then the management changed, and the new management didn't like what she was and within two months she went from being celebrated to getting a candid letter saying resign or we are going to fire you (p. 213).

For some gay men, heteronormative language is internalised and becomes a part of how they speak about LGBTI+ communities and even about themselves. Thus, for some, an element of personal limitation may occur because of this internalised heteronormative and prejudicial language. Although this study did not explore the impact of the internalisation of heteronormative language and how this may affect career progression, this may be a valuable topic for further research.

Jabulani stated,

No doubt, there are some limitations to be the 'G' [gay], to being the 'G' word in the organisation (p. 340).

As mentioned, for some gay men, revealing their sexual orientation in the South African workplace had a positive effect in that it served to advance their careers. The following excerpts from the interviews show how certain participants had lived experiences that were positive due to their openness about their sexual orientation:

Jan disclosed,

So, I think for me it's [openly expressed sexual orientation], it's given me a lot of advantage in life and work specially and you know, it's always been in my favour (p. 356).

Likewise, Krish stated,

But I think that the good to a larger extent overshadows the bad, in that you know, even in the current organisation I've been in, I've been quite accepted. And I think as an LGBTQ person in leadership, I think I've been given, in essence, it's been seen as a positive thing, and it's been seen as a strength rather than a weakness, which is fantastic, but I think also as a LGBTQI person, the onus is on that person to take the initiative, to live their truth in the organisation (p. 414).

Furthermore, Ajay revealed,

[T]he executive who hired me said, "You're exactly the kind of diversity we're looking for, not just based on ethnicity or whatever, your CV is strong, and we love you. Your skill set is strong, and you bring a diversity that that we don't have". And that kind of implied that, that [sexual orientation] was a bonus, as opposed to something that they had to deal with from a culture perspective (p. 200).

This finding implies that although many gay men experience open same-sex sexual orientation in South African organisations as an impediment to their career progression, for others, it is the open expression of their same-sex sexual orientation that has enabled them to reach senior leadership and was a preferred attribute for recruitment into certain organisations.

To understand what enables certain gay men to achieve senior leadership despite the expected barriers to their progression, the personal attributes and strengths of gay men who have accomplished senior leadership were explored. The analysis process highlighted various sub-themes under the main theme of *Personal Attributes*. These sub-themes are explored in the next segment of the findings. The focus will be on personal attributes and how these can have both a negative and a positive influence on the advancement of the careers of gay cisgender male employees. This theme will address the research question regarding the personality traits or characteristics of gay men that have assisted them in overcoming the barriers presented in the literature and the findings of this study.

Personal Attributes

An important question explored in the study was what characteristics or intrinsic strengths may affect the advancement of the careers of gay cisgender male leaders and assist them in attaining senior or executive roles in South African mainstream organisations.

Authenticity, flexibility to act as the role demands, self-confidence or self-belief and the ability to confront people evidencing prejudice are four of the main sub-themes that arose from the interpretation of the data:

Authenticity Challenges. The ability to be oneself and behave authentically and in a genuine manner within the workplace was a central theme for many of the participants to achieve leadership successfully. It would appear that to live an authentic life and be themselves in their place of work would be ideal for gay men. Green (2003) states that openly revealing sexual orientation affirms one's identity and facilitates the integration of the same-sex sexual identity. It leads to openness and candour in personal relationships allowing a person to feel

authentic and can improve personal and psychological performance. The following excerpts from the participants' lived experiences provide support for the notion that being authentic in the workplace may assist gay men in achieving leadership roles:

Jan expressed,

But I do think, one thing is important and that is being accepting of yourself, right? Being comfortable around it and confident in who you are. I think it's an advantage that a gay person has, if you're authentic about it. I think authenticity is very, very important (p. 360).

Likewise, Jabulani felt that,

Being real in the workplace, also makes it [achieving leadership] slightly easier (p. 335).

Krish opined that,

[T]he onus is on that person, to take the initiative, to live their truth in the organisation.... You've got to drive your authenticity in the workplace and regardless of what the consequences may be, you should aim to always be authentic and, and in essence see that as your strength (p. 414).

David stated,

I think also try not to play to the stereotype. Don't become a character or caricature of a gay person, you know... Be yourself (p. 307).

Thato said,

I don't believe in coming out. I just believe in you being your authentic self and when you are there you don't shy away from answering questions thrown at you from any angle (p. 388).

Similarly, Akito recommended,

Just be open and just live your full self. Don't hide. Be someone that is a role model (p. 235).

Furthermore, Thato suggested,

[If] you're trying to hide from everyone, you won't be able to reveal yourself truly to everyone and letting them see your potential. So, being out to yourself and being comfortable with who you are, it goes a long way (p. 387).

Distinct from the above experiences, it would appear that the workplace environment made it impossible to be authentic for some. The resultant experiences appear to be a lack of advancement in their careers and frustration:

Athol revealed that,

I had to sacrifice a lot of my stuff that I wanted to do...I couldn't be my authentic self. I could never speak about what I did on the weekend...I had to fit into their world. I'd always fit into this normative world where I'm a good Muslim boy that goes to Mosque on a Friday and follows his religion (p. 256).

Krish declared,

I didn't want to be discriminated upon or made to feel that I wasn't good enough, but it was frustrating to me because I found I was not living authentically at work (p. 399).

Moreover, David asserted,

Yeah, I think that lesbian and gay men, lesbians, and gay men have to compromise, even today, within an organisation (p. 299).

Whether it assists gay men in their achievement of leadership or if it impedes their progression up the hierarchy to leadership, the personal attribute of authenticity has a significant role to play in the lived experiences of gay men in South African organisations. The following sub-theme may appear to contradict the attribute of authenticity, but for many gay men, having the ability to act in a certain way or to portray a certain characteristic, even if they are not authentic, may, in fact, also serve to advance their careers and help them achieve leadership.

Actor Role. Some gay men, it would appear, feel driven to act in certain ways to

achieve their goals. This seeming assumption of the role of an actor, as in a pantomime, exhibits a skill of flexibility in different environments needed for some gay cisgender males to progress into leadership:

Johan disclosed,

I was senior management, so I dressed that part and I and I played the part in the kind of heteronormative role which was part of the succession. So now, I was the 'moffie' that did not go into hairdressing (p. 421)

Daniel expressed that,

I'm also a very good actor. You know, I can mould and fit myself into it, whatever the environment needs me to be. That's helped me progress but also in a way sometimes it makes me feel like I'm not always at my true self (p. 280).

Furthermore, Krish opined that,

I think many gay men have it. It's that ability to be a bit of a chameleon. You can choose how to assimilate into any almost any environment. But it can have a flip side to it, a dangerous side, where you know you don't have an authentic identity because you're constantly putting on that chameleon mask and choosing to show certain sides of your personality and not just being present and being yourself (p. 408).

Johan revealed,

So, my ability to play the heteronormative role while at the same time giving some of the benefits of what's expected from your gay best friend (p. 419).

Johan furthermore disclosed that,

I, intuitively understand how to move and how to shift the masks, and I can do that quite easily (p. 428).

Being flexible and able to act in a certain way to fit into expected roles within the organisation or to provide comfort for fellow employees and leaders, may well be a helpful tool

for gay men to possess. This may even assist them in achieving leadership roles. However, as one participant stated, there is a risk of losing the ability to be authentic. According to Green (2003), this may impact the assimilation of the same-sex identity and may also impact interpersonal relationships and the personal and psychological functioning of these men.

Authenticity may appear to be an ideal attribute for gay cisgender male employees in achieving leadership; however, not every South African workplace environment can provide fertile ground for authentic LGBTI+ expression of sexual orientation. The attribute of *Self-confidence and Self-belief* may therefore be required to assist gay men in overcoming the existing barriers to leadership. This attribute was identified in the lived experiences of several of the participants and is therefore the next sub-theme to be explored.

Self-confidence and Self-belief. Coupled with the ability to be authentic, many successful gay cisgender male leaders in the study exhibited self-confidence and a strong self-belief. These traits serve gay cisgender male leaders well in progressing up the organisational ladder in South African organisations. Below are excerpts of the experiences of these successful gay leaders:

Athol declared that,

To operate at that level, from MANCO [management level] upwards, you have to have a certain level of confidence, you can't second guess yourself, you know (p. 259).

Likewise, Jabulani revealed that,

Not a lot of black people speak the way I do and have a lot of confidence to the degree that I do (p. 334).

John asserted that,

I guess one thing [one attribute needed to be successful] is simply a kind of self-belief and self-esteem (p. 375).

Similarly, David disclosed,

Uh, so it's respect for myself. I think that's a quality I have. Refusing to take no for an answer (p. 305).

Thato also revealed,

And I'm also very assertive, well, I think I am very assertive in my teams and I'm very dedicated. So, dedication and transparency (p. 390).

Akito recommended,

So just be brave and be a role model out there so others can see you and you don't have to be a leader to do that. Anyone can do that (p. 235).

Akito continued,

That's the only characteristic that I can think of because as soon as you're out there, people do take notice of you and that increases your chance of getting that leadership position and people start to know you (p. 237).

Likewise, Johan opined that,

[A]t some point in terms of privilege or power it becomes about your confidence in yourself. I think more so than about the potential consequences (p. 435).

In contrast, a lack of confidence and belief in oneself, may, have a limiting effect on career advancement in South African organisations. Jan's lived experience provides an account of the effects of poor self-belief and -confidence:

Jan disclosed that,

[T]he big thing for me is that when I was a bit younger, I was a bit insecure, I did struggle with accepting the gay thing myself and that was the reason that my career didn't progress as fast as it should because I thought I don't deserve to necessarily move on. So, there was one stage that I was my own worst enemy because I felt I didn't deserve it (p. 359).

Self-confidence and self-belief seemed to assist many participants in accomplishing senior leadership roles. It would also appear that lacking this attribute may impede growth and

advancement to leadership. The attributes of authenticity and self-confidence and self-belief seem to work well together. Perhaps they are the attributes required by gay men to allow the following sub-theme of *Confrontation of Prejudice* to be possible.

Confrontation of Prejudice. As the findings suggest, prejudice in mainstream South African organisations continues to affect gay cisgender male employees. Those gay men who have successfully negotiated the discriminatory challenges within these organisations, display a particular skill in confronting these prejudices and challenging heteronormative thinking. What follows are statements exhibiting the experiences these cisgender male leaders have had which may have positively contributed to their career progression into senior leadership:

Athol declared that,

My colleagues respect me, my subordinates respect me, my seniors respect me and, and if you don't respect me, I'll take you on (p. 259).

John asserted,

So, I think that a certain amount of just resilience as well.... I'm not going to countenance the possibility that I have any less of a chance of something because I'm gay (p. 375).

Likewise, David narrated,

Richard came up to me and said, "So you could have knocked me down with a feather when you introduced me to your hubby. I would never have thought in a million years you were gay," and I said, "Let me tell you why that response is actually quite offensive. Because how would you feel if I said I would never have thought in a million years you are straight." Uh, so whenever I had encountered something like that, I would just throw it back at them and say look you know is it really relevant? (p. 293)

David also opined that,

Yeah, so I think you've got to be more tolerant, and I think you have to be

prepared to challenge because that is something I indeed did (p. 307).

Thato asserted,

Listen, stop looking at me as a homosexual. Look at me as a human being who's doing their job not the homosexual managing you (p. 391).

The above quotations and discussion appear to indicate that personal attributes play a significant role in the achievement of leadership for gay men. The ability to be authentic in the workplace, to possess confidence and belief in oneself, to be flexible to assume the roles needed by the organisation and to be able to address prejudice when confronted by it all seem to be attributes that assisted the participants in achieving senior leadership roles. Perhaps these attributes are the founding characteristics young gay men seeking leadership roles needs to acquire or develop.

This concludes the findings related to personal attributes. The following theme relates to the present standards in industry relating to the open expression of sexual orientation in the workplace. The focus will be placed on the type of industry LGBTI+ people work in and on whether the organisation originated in South Africa or if it is a multinational organisation and how this can impact the achievement of leadership.

Industry Standards

What emerged from the interpretation of the data was that certain industries, and the organisations in these industries, determine the measure of inclusiveness for openly gay cisgender male employees. The country of origin of these organisations may play a specific role in how inclusive they are experienced to be by gay cisgender males. First, the findings indicate how different industries are experienced as more or less inclusive and second, how the country of origin of an organisation may impact the experiences of inclusivity. The participants' experiences indicate that multinational organisations appear to have more favourable environments for gay cisgender male employees to thrive and grow.

Industry Type and Inclusivity. In certain contexts, and industries, gay men appear to

experience continued discrimination and prejudice, which were felt to be career-limiting in that these experiences were perceived to prevent advancement in these organisations. The following excerpts highlight this sentiment:

John opined that,

Gay men might also be bullied in certain contexts, and that's despite having all of these policies in place (p. 379).

Daniel revealed that,

Certain team members in the more, you know, the blue-collar range of company, I won't really act on it [sexual orientation] or show it or discuss it (p. 276).

Similarly, Ajay revealed that,

I did most of my career in banking...was completely not out back then. I mean this was early 2000's. No way in hell I could have had a career and been out. And I knew that, I kept it to myself (p. 196).

Jan narrated that,

I've got a friend of mine, a very good friend working in the steel industry. I mean, there's no way he will ever come out at the work and say that he is gay (p. 358).

In some instances, the participants experienced the size of the organisation as having an impact on the inclusivity or limits thereof:

Daniel felt that,

So, yes, large corporates are far more progressive in their way. However, like I said to you, there's still that undertone...[w]ithin those organisations that sometimes will inhibit someone to come out (p. 286)

Ajay disclosed that,

I had to ask myself questions like, am I going to work in a smaller company? Because then I can be more open and people don't care, or do I work in a big company, and you know, kind of get blanketed by the sheer number of people (p.

210).

Furthermore, Krish expressed that,

I think given the fact that we're a small team, it's very easy to identify if there's misalignment in cultural values and then correct it (p. 407).

The distinction between organisations originating in South Africa and those originating and having their head offices outside the borders of South Africa but having offices in South Africa i.e., multinational organisations, was an interesting development that emerged from the data. The next sub-theme under the umbrella of *Industry Standards* explores the distinction between these two types of organisations.

Multinational Organisations. The study was concerned with gay men who worked in mainstream South African organisations and how revealing their sexual orientation impacted their achievement of leadership. An important demographic requirement was therefore that the participants needed either to work in a South African organisation or to have worked in a South African organisation within the past five years. The rationale for this requirement was that the participants' experiences should be recent and relevant to the current climate for gay men in mainstream South African organisations. However, in the interviewing process, it became clear that over 60% of the participants had experiences working for multinational organisations. These organisations had their head offices outside the borders of South Africa. This data allowed for an unanticipated comparison between mainstream organisations originating in South Africa and multinational organisations with origins outside South African borders. What emerged from this comparison was that there is a preference for gay cisgender males to work for a multinational organisation rather than a South African organisation based on the differences in experiences of inclusivity and safety to be open about sexual orientation.

The lived experiences of those participants who had worked in multinational organisations seemed to differ from those who had only worked in organisations originating in South Africa. For those who have solely worked in South African organisations, the general

experience seemed to be one of feeling unsafe to be open about sexual orientation for fear of prejudice and a negative impact on their career progression. Athol describes his experience of working in a mainstream South African organisation as follows:

Athol disclosed that,

[N]obody knew about my sexuality, I was very much in the closet about being gay. And I did that for very, very long time...I was still quite young, and I can't remember but I was in my late 20s. And at that time my boss was a Muslim, so I'm Muslim as well. And I think a lot of the stigma of not wanting to come out because I was so afraid of what he would think of me... and a lot of my colleagues were Muslims as well and a lot of my clients and I was always afraid... And I was really afraid that they would reject me or, or not treat me with the same kind of dignity and respect that they treated other people (p. 244).

Those who had experiences working in multinational organisations on the other hand, or organisations originating outside South African borders, seemed to experience being open about their sexual orientation in these organisations as a positive experience and that the cultures of most of these organisations made it safe to be open about their sexual orientation. Akito explained his reasoning for choosing multinational, as opposed to South African organisations, as follows:

Akito explained,

And, and that's why I think I'm more attracted now to going to multinational organisations rather than South African based organisations. Because as, as I mentioned previously, I worked for [a financial institution] and I know that even though [this financial institution] had a PRIDE info resource group, it wasn't as, you know, there wasn't a lot of support behind it, like there would be events, but events would be, you know, attended by a minimum amount of people (p. 230).

Ajay highlighted some differences between South African originating organisations and

multinational organisations:

Furthermore, Ajay expounded,

What we found, let's call it about eight years ago, when we started doing the push for corporates to start LGBT programmes [in] Africa. The companies that ended up doing it, uh, had offices overseas. Multinationals but the foreign multinationals (p. 202).

Ajay also declared,

Definitely, and that's really quite interesting because we've got greater constitutional protection and workplace protection in South Africa but we're having people overseas tell us how to apply LGBT+ workplace fair practices (p. 220)

Akito continued to explain that most USA-based multinational organisations have support groups for many different minority groups, and this makes being openly gay a positive move for career progression:

Similarly, Akito expressed,

I actually came out at [a financial institution] because if you work for American multinational companies, you will know that they do focus a lot on employee resource groups and so there is one for almost anyone in a company. So, if you're black there is a black employee resource group or PRIDE employee will have a resource group (p. 229).

Structures like LGBTI+ employee networks and support groups have become increasingly popular in large multinational organisations in the financial and technology sectors (McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018). It is interesting to note that Akito began his early career in one of the organisations McFadden and Crowley-Henry list as large corporates with LGBTI+ affinity groups.

It is dangerous to generalise these findings as Daniel pointed out. The USA-based

company he had worked for previously did not make him feel comfortable being open about his sexual orientation. Daniel felt that this discomfort might have been linked to the size of the organisation, indicating that it was a small multinational organisation and was known to be a conservative company with conservative views. However, as explored earlier, geographical location may also impact the inclusivity of organisations in that area. Daniel's experience may also be ascribed to the locality or state in which the headquarters of this organisation was based.

Daniel expressed,

[I]f we do comparisons ourselves, even us [South Africa] compared to the Americans like the Texans for example, it's just not at all that easy to show your sexuality openly there. In a first world country, you would think that would not be the case (p. 284).

Jan began his career in a multinational company and found being out about his sexual orientation a positive experience and assisting in his growth. David, similarly, experienced the multinational organisation he worked for as positive. Below are highlights of these experiences:

Jan revealed that,

I've always been, I mean, you know open about my sexuality. Even if I go for interview, I'm very upfront about it. I always say, if they, if they for some reason, they don't want me in the interview process, then I'm not a right fit for that organisation and I would rather miss out on that opportunity... You know we are all equal and I'm not, and I'm not a normal guy in the sense of the word. I'm different. If we can do that and we all different right? And that makes creating a much more diverse and inclusive culture. So, I think for me it's, it's given me a lot of advantage in life and work specially and you know, it's always been in my favour (p. 355).

Likewise, David stated that,

I would say at [a consultation company I worked for], it's not that they provided assistance but that, and I can only talk for the South African operation, I can't speak for other countries, but they created an environment that was safe and inclusive for everybody, not just for gay people (p. 309).

Akito opined that,

I don't think there are any limitations at [the technological organisation I work for], or even at [the financial organisation I worked for], that make gay people incapable of achieving leadership. I think it's actually encouraged for gay people to achieve leadership. Well, you know, if you are gay at [a multinational technology or financial organisation] or any in USA multinational, there's a lot more support for you, than a person who is straight (p. 232).

The type of industry and the geographical location of the organisations' headquarters seem to have some significance for gay men. It would appear that South African organisations have some way to go to reach the levels of inclusiveness of multinational organisations that originate outside of South Africa, particularly in those that originate in the USA, the UK and Europe. This is not to say that no South African organisations are doing well regarding inclusivity and gay men achieving leadership. Many of the participants in this study currently work in mainstream South African organisations, and they have achieved leadership. This may indicate that South African organisations are increasing their awareness, and some are already implementing inclusiveness strategies and policies. This positive trend was apparent in some of the experiences of the participants as reflected in the findings relating to positive changes in South African organisations discussed below.

Positive Changes

It would appear from the findings that LGBTI+ affirmative policies and support are beginning to become a priority in some South African organisations. The world of work in South

Africa is slowly making changes in their processes indicating a budding awareness of LGBTI+ difficulties as well as the value that these communities bring to organisations.

Existing LGBTI+ Friendly Programmes. In some organisations in South Africa, programmes are currently being implemented that support and encourage the LGBTI+ communities. There are also organisations in South Africa, such as the LGBT+ Forum (www.lgbtforum.org), working extremely hard to encourage the implementation of LGBTI+-friendly practices in mainstream organisations. This was accomplished by developing the SAWEI, a competitive assessment process in which South African organisations can participate to assess their inclusiveness processes. It also provides information that South African organisations can use to benchmark their processes. These organisations appear to adopt an affirmative practice approach to managing their LGBTI+ employees. Below is a quotation from Ajay who is involved in the LGBTI+ Forum (www.lgbtforum.org):

Ajay explained that,

Every two years we do a survey and in that survey we, we rank each organisations gold, silver or bronze as being LGBT+ friendly employers to work for... now you must go explain to your boss why you didn't get gold... so there's also this kind of peer pressure that was created (p. 202).

In some South African organisations there are already affirmative and existing programmes encouraging LGBTI+ awareness and support. These programmes, such as mentorship, diversity and inclusiveness training programmes, are making inroads into supporting LGBTI+ communities. This relates to the Affirmative Practice Theory and its guiding principles of providing a safe and supportive environment. Some South African organisations are beginning to adopt an Affirmative Practice approach to managing their LGBTI+ employees as shown by the excerpts below:

Akito stated that,

I know that at [the technological company I work in], we have mentorship

programmes. Uh, so I know that at PRIDE they also try and link senior leaders, gay leaders with junior staff members so they can sort of see what the journey has been like for senior leaders, and then sort of get inspiration and knowledge required by doing that (p. 236).

Akito continued to say,

I think that every year they also do training to ensure that you understand the importance of diversity and being there's a chief diversity officer as well, so she would you know, make announcements and stuff too for us to understand why it's important to have diversity, so there's a lot of support here (p. 237).

Furthermore, Johan opined that,

So, first thing I think that are most important are mentors. People that already had good reputations in the industry that saw potential in me that liked what they saw, and they took me under their wing (p. 418).

The SAWEI index makes some recommendations that South African organisations can implement to become more inclusive and responsive to LGBTI+ concerns and rights. They “recommend that LGBT+ matters are explicitly included in all programmes or training relating to diversity and inclusion, particularly upon induction of new employees” (SAWEI, 2019, p. 17). They further suggest that in conjunction with training, focus should be on creating a culture of inclusiveness, open communication where LGBTI+ employees are encouraged to become visible to others (SAWEI, 2019). The purpose of the recommendations is to ensure genuine change so that procedures for inclusiveness are not followed purely as a form of compliance or as the findings previously explored, a superficial ticking box exercise. Interestingly, two of the participants mentioned mentorship programmes as a helpful tool and communication regarding inclusivity and diversity. It would appear that some South African organisations are using the guidelines of the SAWEI index to implement LGBTI+ strategies; however, other findings in this study also suggest that very few companies are able to prevent prejudice and discrimination.

Perhaps changes are taking place to protect LGBTI+ communities in the workplace, but this process is moving sluggishly. The following sub-theme will focus on the changes that are occurring in the world of work, albeit at a gradual pace.

Changes in Inclusivity in the World of Work. Changes are beginning to arise in the world of work which are seen as positive moves towards inclusivity and support for LGBTI+ communities. These changes are perhaps indicative that these organisations are adopting an affirmative practice approach. Daniel mentioned how some organisations are moving in the right direction while Krish sees changes but states that the progress is slow and that more needs to be done in South African organisations to become competitive with international organisations:

Daniel purported that,

I think we are moving in the right direction, and I think it's that prejudice and that fear of coming out or being open with your sexuality is diminishing (p. 284).

Similarly, Krish felt that,

There's a couple of South African corporates that are trying to drive inclusivity through diversity, but I still think we do have a little bit of a way to go before we could say we are on the same level as many of the international multinationals (p. 410).

The message seems clear; progress is being made to create organisations in South Africa where inclusiveness and LGBTI+ rights are encouraged, but more could be done at an increased pace. A possible solution that emerged from the participants' lived experiences is that what organisations need is a senior leadership that is involved and supportive of inclusiveness and diversity programmes, initiatives, and policies. This sub-theme will be explored under the central theme of *Future Organisational Needs*.

Future Organisational Needs

The participants' experiences highlighted one specific need in mainstream South African organisations that could potentially assist in implementing programmes of support: Mentorship

and inclusiveness. This is referred to as a “supportive top-down culture” approach. This approach will be explored below and various excerpts from the participants’ lived experiences seem to support this potential solution.

Supportive Top-down Culture Needed in South African Organisations. This approach entails senior leadership in an organisation to be seen to directly support and become involved in LGBTI+-friendly practices and programmes. Below are quotations extracted from the experiences of the participants which appear to support this sentiment:

Athol stated that,

Culture is top down here. They can say what they want. Culture comes from the top down (p. 262).

Ajay narrated,

[T]he CEO found out about this [my sexual orientation] and he walked into my office, and he said, hey, I want you to start an LGBT programme here... So, I thought that was really profound leadership. And it’s not employee driven. It’s kind of CEO instruction, so it’s a very different level of support (p. 197).

Jan explained that,

Executive sponsorship I think is huge. Now that I’ve experienced both the employee driven and the executive sponsor driven. The employee driven is the slow grind while the executive sponsorship makes things happen very quickly (p. 216).

Jan also opined that,

A leader normally determines the environment and the pace. So, if your leader is not supportive or not an ally of this [LGBTI+ support], you’re gonna have a problem, right? So, I think that is the main thing (p. 363).

Finally, Johan expressed that,

Changing that culture implies knowledge and implies leading by example. It’s not

about processes and procedures and diversity committees, and it's none of that... Meaning that none of these policies and procedures and team building things work. And continue to give him information because people are like 3-year-olds. They learn by repetition and by example that's it. So, if top management do not set the example nothing will happen (p. 430).

Numerous participants mentioned the notion of a supportive top-down approach as an important aspect of any inclusiveness programme. That the participants, who are all in senior or executive roles in their respective organisations, hold similar views on this point, which indicates that the validity of this as a likely solution for South African organisations to create workplaces that support and encourage LGBTI+ employees to achieve leadership. Buddel (2011) succinctly explains what may be required to create a workplace that is inclusive and caters to LGBTI+ communities, which includes the need for supportive senior management:

[Create] a place where GLB people can feel safe, employment equity exists, and coworkers embrace all forms of human diversity. This would entail establishing senior-level support for GLB initiatives and ensuring that non-discriminatory policies exist, advocating for equity concerning employer-provided employee benefits, engaging in conscious-raising dialogue so that heteronormative practices and comments are challenged and not accepted, and where inclusive language is the norm, fostering supportive teams and employee-supervisor relationships, supporting GLB and other formal or informal minority support groups, and educating workers and celebrating all forms of diversity during mandatory training sessions (p. 143).

Concluding Comments

The findings seem to support the work of Balfour (2016), where he discusses the disclosure of sexual orientation in leadership. Balfour (2016) states that disclosure could mean

exclusion from leadership and that achieving leadership may involve the concealment of sexual orientation. However, the work of Ragins et al. (2007) suggests that this phenomenon is more intricate. The expected consequences of revealing sexual orientation are balanced by internal processes within a gay cisgender male applying pressure to achieve authenticity and by environmental factors that either punish or support disclosure of sexual orientation utilising an affirmative practice approach. It would also appear that previous positive workplace experiences and positive responses from colleagues and leaders also play a role.

The experiences of some of the participants regarding workplace culture and environment as being supportive and positive therefore seem to have a role in the achievement of leadership. Perhaps, the phenomenon of gay men in leadership is multifaceted. Internal pressures to be authentic and their true selves, coupled with the fears or punishment or prejudice on one side and previous positive or negative experiences and the workplace environment and culture on the other side, all determine if gay men reveal their sexual orientation in the workplace and achieve leadership with an openly expressed sexual orientation.

It should be noted that although Pro Bono counselling was offered to all participants of this study, should they feel that it was needed, none of the participants indicated a need for counselling during or after the interviews were conducted.

While many barriers may remain to the advancement and development of members of LGBTI+ communities in mainstream South African organisations, the lived experiences of the participants indicate that internal strengths and various support programmes can make a difference for gay cisgender males and other LGBTI+ communities, allowing them to reach their potential and senior leadership roles within their organisations.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, provides a meta-perspective of the study. Attention will be given to the summary and the limitations of the study. Finally, concluding remarks will be offered bringing the study to a close.

Chapter Five

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

This concluding chapter serves as the summary of the study and the conclusions drawn from the findings. It grounds the findings in the literature and shows the contribution of the study to the slowly emerging field of psychological research into LGBTI+ communities in the context of the South African workspace. This study strove to create new research to enable change in South African organisations and to encourage workplaces that embrace policies and practices that are affirmative, inclusive and supportive of LGBTI+ people. It sought to explore the lived experiences of gay men, who, due to their willingness to live authentic lives and their bravery in revealing their sexual orientation, are creating visibility and understanding towards LGBTI+ people in the world of work. It aimed to obtain the first-hand experiences of the mainstream South African workspace and to understand how the experiences of gay cisgender men living with an openly expressed same-sex sexual orientation may have impacted their achievement of leadership.

The summary of findings is followed by my reflections and learnings through the process of conducting the study within LGBTI+ communities and the emergence of the findings. After that, the study's limitations and implications for future research are explored, followed by a conclusion. The summary begins with a focus on the literature and to determine in what manner the findings support and differentiate this study from the literature and previous research.

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings will incorporate the main themes that emerged from the analysis process and will be separated into six categories:

- Prejudice and discrimination barriers

- Personal and organisational attributes
- Barriers and enablers explored
- Achievement of leadership
- Sexual orientation in South African organisations
- Apartheid and its impact on LGBTI+ leadership visibility

Subsequent to the summary of the findings a conceptual model of the main risk factors (barriers) versus the protective factors (enablers) will be presented see Figure 7.

Prejudice and Discrimination Barriers

The literature is clear that globally, as in South Africa, LGBTI+ communities remain vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination in the workplace (Badgett, 2003; Badgett et al., 2007; Bailey et al., 2016; Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Buddel, 2011; Chung et al., 2015; Fassinger et al., 2010; Kuyper, 2015; Meyer, 1995; Morton, 2017; Ng & Rumens, 2017; Nyeck et al., 2019; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Pichler et al., 2015; Soeker et al., 2015). The findings suggest that gay men do indeed continue to experience prejudice and discrimination in South African organisations which can impact their achievement of leadership roles. This impact is often observed through the organisational culture present in an organisation and how this culture may allow for certain barriers to emerge, which impact the professional development and growth of LGBTI+ employees, and gay men in particular. It was found that organisational culture may result in prejudice and discrimination towards gay cisgender male employees, should the following conditions be present:

Organisational Culture. The findings indicate that organisational culture may be a central feature of organisations where gay cisgender male employees experience barriers to their development. These barriers seem inexorably linked to the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation. The first organisational culture barrier found to impact gay men is if they experience the organisational culture as unsafe. Hill (2009) warns that an unsafe working

environment may lead to discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation and even encountering a ceiling to the advancement of the careers for gay men in these environments. Findings reveal that an unsafe organisational culture plays a role in gay men's unwillingness to disclose and remain open about their same-sex sexual orientation, which is consistent with existing research and literature (Allan et al., 2015; Beggan & Allison, 2018; Denton, 2009; Fassinger et al., 2010; Hill, 2009; Ragins et al., 2007; Reed & Leuty, 2016). Many gay men appear to experience organisations as unsafe when they feel as if they do not fit in or belong; if they feel that there is inconsistency in how they are managed and treated compared to other (often heterosexual) employees; if they experience bullying in the workplace; if they feel that being themselves (openly revealing their same-sex sexual orientation) may not be acceptable; and if they experience discrimination or marginalisation.

However, participants in this study also demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness and resilience during their early life, often beginning during their time in school, which allowed them to navigate the often-hostile heterosexist environments they found themselves in. David provides an example of this in the following excerpt from his interview:

You know, when I was at school like remember the boy sitting next to me at school when I was about 13/14 who I sat next to for five years, turning to me and saying, you queer and I said, well, you asking me if I'm homosexual. Umm yeah, I said yes, I am gay, and the rest of the class were cool with it (p. 313).

What is particularly striking about this is that many of these experiences took place prior to their work identities and leadership roles, suggesting that these individuals were challenging and disrupting heterosexist and cisnormative contexts from an early age. Through the examination of the experiences of these gay men, it becomes clear that they were able to draw upon a range of personal and social resources to challenge heterosexist and cisnormative norms. For example, some participants spoke about seeking out supportive peers and mentors who helped them to feel validated and affirmed in their identities, even in the face of bullying or

harassment from their peers (Francis, 2021). Others described the importance of developing their own sense of self-worth and self-respect, which enabled them to resist and push back against heterosexist and cisnormative expectations.

What is noteworthy is that many of these strategies and resources were not explicitly tied to work identities or leadership roles. Rather, they were deeply ingrained in the participants' personal values and beliefs and were honed through years of navigating complex social contexts. As such, these experiences suggest that the ability to challenge and disrupt heterosexist and cisnormative norms is not solely the purview of those in leadership or authority positions, but rather is something that can be cultivated and practiced by individuals at all levels of an organisation.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of recognising and valuing the experiences and perspectives of individuals from marginalised communities. By doing so, organisations can create more inclusive and equitable environments, where all individuals feel empowered to challenge and disrupt harmful norms and to contribute to positive change.

Organisational cultures where what is repeatedly referred to by participants as, a 'Boys' Club' culture exists, gay men and their career progression appear to be negatively impacted. Therefore, the presence of a 'Boys' Club' organisational culture creates another barrier for many gay men. A 'Boys' Club' culture is reported to be a culture demonstrating heteronormative and patriarchal perspectives of leadership where gay men who openly express their same-sex sexual orientation tend to feel uncomfortable and are treated as outsiders. They are often denied admittance to the higher levels of leadership in these organisations and, as such, experience a ceiling to their growth and development into senior leaders. This finding corroborates previous literature in terms of the negative effects of heteronormative cultures on gay and lesbian people and their professional careers (Rumens et al., 2019).

The second organisational culture factor that can affect gay men and their journey to senior leadership is the presence of unspoken or subtle prejudice. Otis and Harley (2016)

discuss the impact of sexual orientation on certain minority groups stating that they may experience obvious or subtle forms of subjugation and discrimination due to their sexual orientation. Gay men continue to encounter various subtle forms of discrimination and prejudice, which create barriers to their career progression, often through exclusion. These subtle prejudices may take the form of silent exclusion from workplace activities or groups, gossiping or laughter aimed at gay men or other LGBTI+ people, ill-informed comments about their behaviour, relationships, and interests or simply an unwelcome feeling that many gay men experience in the workplace. Carrim et al. (2022) describe the impact of gossip on minority groups like LGBTI+ people as a tool that can be used to maintain homophobia in the workplace. Gossip can therefore be understood as a subtle form of prejudice. While gossip may be positive or negative, when it is negative or malicious in its presentation or use, especially against LGBTI+ people, it can serve to suppress their alternative sexual identities (Carrim, 2019; Carrim et al., 2022). Gossip therefore can result in a barrier for LGBTI+ people in South African organisations. Francis and Reygan (2016) refer to these subtle forms of discrimination and prejudice as microaggressions.

A third organisational culture factor which may create barriers for gay men in their achievement of leadership could be placed at the door of the Apartheid in South Africa. Due to the overwhelming influence of race-based exclusion and its impact on organisations and society, many minority groups and their challenges disappeared or became overshadowed by the need for transformation and racial equality (Balfour, 2016; Pillay et al., 2019). Members of minority groups like gay men, and the challenges they experience in the South African workplace, are often neglected or seen as impeding and derailing the necessary focus on existing gender and racial discriminations, which, may in turn, result in these groups being seen in a negative light. Should their challenges and struggles be regarded as less important than other transformational processes, gay men may continue to be negatively influenced by adverse elements of organisational culture, and their progression into senior leadership is likely to

encounter significant barriers.

The final factor of organisational culture that influenced the achievement of senior leadership for gay men was a culture of stereotyping. In this type of organisational culture, gay men are seen to lack the qualities, characteristics, and abilities that senior leaders require to be successful. Various studies and literature exist regarding the stereotyping of gay men in the workplace (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018; Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; Buddel, 2011; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Nel, 2007; Nyeck et al., 2019; Soeker et al., 2015; Vaccaro & Koob, 2019). The findings indicate that gay men may be stereotyped as flamboyant and incapable of making strategic decisions or incapable of working with certain kinds of clients or customers. A lack of knowledge and understanding may also result in stereotyping gay men leading to expectations that they can only suit certain occupations, personal- or leadership roles that are often understood as 'feminine'.

A workplace culture fraught with stereotyping behaviours may influence gay men in various ways. Gay men may choose to withhold personal information or hide their same-sex sexual orientation; they may also choose to exaggerate the stereotypical behaviours and characteristics expected of them or accept the roles (however inappropriate or mistaken these expected roles may be) to fit in and to put those around them at ease. Pellegrini et al. (2020) studied the interaction between sexual orientation and gender stereotyping and found that gay men who were stereotyped as 'feminine' were viewed as less effective leaders than gay men who were stereotyped as 'masculine'. Stereotyping gay men can therefore create significant barriers to their achievement of senior leadership as they may be seen as ineffective leaders. Through the findings, this study sought to enhance the understanding of organisational culture and its negative influence on gay men. Wilks et al. (2022) assert that South African studies tend to place too much emphasis on the adversity that LGBTI+ people experience and too little on those resilience factors that may assist them overcoming existing challenges.

The focus of the next finding attempts to cast some light on resilience factors that may

assist gay men in overcoming existing prejudices. The findings indicate that certain gay men in the study sample appear to have a very different and positive experience of organisational culture. They expressed that certain organisational cultures may provide a safe space for affirmative experiences where gay men feel comfortable revealing their same-sex sexual orientation and being authentic in the workplace. Soeker et al. (2015) assert that workers are more likely to view an organisation as safe to reveal their sexual orientation if there are existing non-discrimination policies. The positive experiences of workplace culture that these men reported did indeed appear linked to institutionalised policies like sponsoring or supporting the PRIDE movement, providing inclusiveness and sensitivity training to staff and management, and providing mentoring programmes from senior, supportive, and affirmative leaders. Buddel (2011) states that a safe work environment may create a fertile ground for gay men to openly express their same-sex sexual orientation resulting in commitment to the organisation and satisfaction. A safe and accepting organisational culture may be an integral component the development of resilience traits in gay men and the advancement of their professional careers in South African organisations.

The findings further support the existing body of literature and suggest that there are various other challenges in South African organisations may incite prejudice and discrimination against gay cisgender male employees, including:

Current organisational challenges. The findings of the study highlight certain organisational challenges that may create barriers for gay men in their pursuit of senior leadership roles. There appear to be generational differences which impact gay men in the organisations they work in. Working in environments where the leadership are from older generations can inhibit gay men from revealing their same-sex sexual orientation. Perhaps as mentioned earlier, the Boys' Club culture plays a role here. Older generations of leaders may be understood to support and encourage patriarchal and heteronormative practices. Gay men working under this type of leadership seem hesitant to divulge their sexual orientation.

Similarly, there is a perception that older generations of gay men tend to hide their sexual orientation in the workplace. The findings support Fassinger et al. (2010), who assert that younger generations of gay men can reveal their same-sex sexual orientation in the workplace under conditions that are much more supportive and favourable for them. The fears of discrimination and lack of career progression that serve to prevent older generations of gay men from revealing their sexual orientation in the workplace, may be dissipating. Despite this, generational differences do appear to impact gay men in the workplace and may indeed create a barrier for some men.

A second organisational challenge emerging from the findings is the limited LGBTI+ affirmative and supportive policies in South African organisations. Although the South African Constitution and legislation offers progressive and inclusive protection for the rights of LGBTI+ communities, organisations seem to lack workplace policies and practices that support and protect gay men (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016; SAWEI, 2019). While much work has been done in South African organisations to correct the legacy of Apartheid inequality in terms of race and gender, few workplace policies and practices exist that support and protect LGBTI+ communities. Many participants in the study experienced the lack of LGBTI+-friendly policies and practices as a barrier to their career progression and achievement of senior leadership roles. The findings in the study support previous research by Benjamin and Reygan (2016) who found that the implementation of legislation relating to sexual orientation and gender identity was superficial despite the South African Constitution providing a positive climate for inclusiveness.

The third challenge in South Africa organisations that impact gay men and their quest for senior leadership roles may well be linked to the superficial implementation of legislation for the protection of LGBTI+ people. The findings indicate that gay men find little true commitment to protect and support them and their careers in the South African workplace. They, therefore, continue to experience challenges relating to prejudice. The finding is consistent with research

conducted internationally that found that LGBTI+ employees who work in organisations that superficially implement change to protect the rights of LGBTI+ employees, continue to experience discrimination and marginalisation (Tayar, 2017). It would appear that from a distance many organisations in South Africa hold an affirmative practice approach to managing LGBTI+ people, indicating that they support Affirmative Practice Theory as the foundation of their inclusiveness policies and practices. However, the lived experiences of the participants indicate that this affirmative approach may be superficially implemented. This implies that Affirmative Practice Theory is not yet fully integrated into how these organisations approach and apply their inclusiveness practices and policies. Perhaps more time is required for Affirmative Practice Theory to be fully accepted and integrated into the South African workplace but until such time, gay cisgender male employees and other LGBTI+ people will continue to be confronted with barriers to their professional development.

The fourth challenge within South African organisations is the low numbers of gay men in leadership. SAWEI (2021b) found that there is a void of out LGBTI+ leaders in South African businesses and organisations, resulting in few role models or advocates in the senior leadership of organisations to encourage rising LGBTI+ talent. The findings of this study indicate that although some gay men do achieve senior leadership roles, these men acknowledge and are aware that many gay men, and other LGBTI+ employees, must often compromise their sexual orientation or authenticity to achieve leadership. Many gay men must conceal their sexual orientation to achieve senior leadership roles, none more so than those who identify as Black African in South Africa (Aksoy et al., 2019; Reygan & Lynette, 2014). Therefore, a gay cisgender male employee who wishes to be open about his same-sex sexual orientation and remain authentic to the person he is, may encounter barriers to his career growth and progression when working in South African organisations. However, this is not to say gay men cannot successfully navigate through these barriers. Should gay men rely on their own and social resilience factors, they can not only manage but progress despite these barriers. The

participants in this study, through their achievements and leadership positions and their reported learned resilience in their early lives, reveal that this is possible.

An interesting development reported in findings that is slowly impacting South African organisations, is the growing number of people who identify as part of the LGBTI+ community or see themselves as allies to these communities. As organisations in South Africa become more accepting and inclusive in their policies and practices, and as members of LGBTI+ communities develop their internal enablers and their willingness to live open, authentic lives, the LGBTI+ population in organisations is likely to grow. Should this trend continue, organisations in South Africa will be required to ensure sufficient focus and support are provided to this increasing number of employees who do not identify with patriarchal and heteronormative ideals. However, as indicated by data from the participants and reports from LGBTI+ organisations regarding LGBTI+ forums in organisations and evaluation processes like the SAWEI, progress is being made in South African organisations.

The next organisational factor that may influence gay men's professional career advancement is geographical location. Existing research supported by the findings of this study indicates that gay men working in organisations in rural areas may experience more homophobia and discrimination than those working in urban areas (Solomon et al., 2015; Swank et al., 2012). A distinction between various urban cities in South Africa was also drawn, suggesting that the geographical location of a city where an organisation is found may determine how inclusive and accommodating of LGBTI+ communities it may be. Carrim et al. (2022) explored Black African people and their experiences living in Black African townships. These townships are a remnant of that segregation of settlements, based on race, which was commonplace in the Apartheid era yet persists in democratic South Africa today. Their findings suggest that gossip in these geographical areas is rife and if Black African LGBTI+ people deviate in their behaviour in any way, the community and their families are swiftly told about this (Carrim et al., 2022). The findings of Carrim et al. indicate that LGBTI+ people living in

townships and suburbs in urban areas, may have very different experiences of revealing their sexual orientation. The findings in this study suggest that gay men view inclusive and accommodating geographical areas as those areas where it is safe for them to reveal their same-sex sexual orientation; however, more research into geographical areas and spaces and their impact on LGBTI+ people revealing their sexual orientation, is needed. As Denton (2009) states, the geographical location where a person works may influence how they live their personal and professional lives.

The type of industry the organisation operates in can have an influence on the inclusiveness policies and practices of the organisation. Soeker et al. (2015) state that social norms are sometimes prescribed in certain workplaces, creating expectations for a worker in a specific role to which he must adhere. When a cisgender male employee discloses their same-sex sexual orientation, there may be a lack of understanding in the workplace because he is seen to have violated the social norms of that role and workplace.

These findings suggest two things: firstly, that norms relating to sexual orientation can be and are created in social spaces like the workplace and secondly, that in certain industries, for instance, in the steel industry or the banking industry in South Africa, some gay men experience not only the organisation operating within a certain industry as unsafe, but the industry itself is experienced as unsafe for them to express their same-sex sexual orientation openly. Similarly, in the sporting industry, some sports organisations are also perceived as unsafe for gay men to reveal their same-sex sexual orientation. While the Constitution and regulations may be progressive and inclusive, the findings and current research indicates that certain industries remain exclusionary and unsafe for gay men to express their same-sex sexual orientations openly. The industry itself may therefore be considered a barrier to the advancement of the careers of gay men. However, the findings from the experiences of the participants also reveal that many gay men simply chose to leave such organisations rather than subject themselves to the prejudices in these industries or the workplaces in these

industries. As Ajay stated:

Where like, one of the reasons I left banking was exactly because I was concerned that my LGBT plus community status would hamper my career and I left at that point, at the peak of my career (pg. 208).

An unanticipated benefit of the findings was that they provided data allowing for the comparison between South African organisations and multinational organisations. The findings indicate that many gay men experience multinational organisations, as more inclusive and accommodating of LGBTI+ people than organisations originating from within South Africa. Some participants went so far as to say that after working in a multinational organisation, they would never return to working in an organisation that originated in South Africa. This finding provides a unique insight into how South African organisations and their inclusiveness policies and practices are perceived compared to multinational organisations. The data suggests that South African organisations have some way to go before they will be considered as safe for LGBTI+ people as multinational organisations are regarded. This finding may therefore provide an interesting foundation for future enquiry.

The final organisational challenge highlighted by the findings is that many gay men experience organisations lacking support and involvement from senior leadership of the organisation. Senior leadership in South Africa organisations are often perceived to be giving limited to no attention to LGBTI+ policies, practices and programmes. The finding supports the literature that senior leadership support and involvement in LGBTI+ affirmative initiatives and inclusivity practices are an integral component for a safe working environment (Buddel, 2011). The leadership approach of leading by example was reported to be of paramount importance for a workplace culture of inclusiveness and support for LGBTI+ people.

The following findings relate to the *Personal and Organisational Attributes* that may enable gay cisgender males to overcome existing barriers in South African organisations to attain senior leadership roles.

Personal and Organisational Attributes

While the findings confirm what the literature reports regarding prejudice and victimisation, they likewise suggest that it is not universal in all South African organisations for gay men to experience barriers to their advancement. The findings reveal that it is, indeed, possible for gay men to overcome existing barriers by utilising intrinsic enablers that may assist them in overcoming or minimising prejudice and victimisation and/ or the impact thereof. These intrinsic enablers or attributes are authenticity, the flexibility to adjust to the challenges of the workplace environment, the possession of self-confidence or self-belief in their abilities to lead well and finally, the strength to confront prejudice by challenging colleagues and leaders who exhibit prejudiced assumptions and beliefs.

Another trait certain gay men possess is the courage to leave an organisation that does not allow for inclusiveness and the professional development of LGBTI+ people. They are prepared to seek work elsewhere in different organisations with safer and more supportive workplace cultures to grow their careers. The abovementioned attributes or intrinsic enablers appear beneficial in allowing certain gay men to achieve senior leadership in the South African organisational landscape, despite prejudicial workplace cultures. The findings, therefore, address the research question *“What are the personality traits or characteristics of gay men who openly express their sexual orientation in the workplace, that may enable them to overcome existing barriers to achieve senior or executive leadership?”* Certain gay men do, indeed, possess intrinsic characteristics that assist them in achieving leadership roles in South African organisations. Gay men who possess the attributes that enable them to overcome barriers, could be regarded as resilient or possessing personal resilience. However, Meyer (2015) cautions that should too much focus be given to intrinsic enabling attributes, a case of “blaming the victim” may arise. Gay men who do not or cannot rise above the existing prejudice and marginalisation challenges in their organisations, may be blamed for this. Meyer continues by stating that to focus solely on individual resilience allows for social responsibility towards the

protection of minority groups to be avoided.

However, the intrinsic attributes of gay men may not be the sole enablers in achieving senior leadership and overcoming existing barriers in South African organisations. The findings infer that certain organisational factors may likewise contribute to gay men's achievement of leadership. Certain industry types are more inclusive and supportive of gay men reaching leadership than others. For instance, multinational organisations originating outside South African borders but employing South African people, in general, appear to provide safer and more inclusive work cultures and are often the preferred employers for gay men. This may indicate that although South Africa enjoys a progressive and inclusive Constitution, the reality for gay men working in South African organisations is that prejudice and discrimination continue to plague LGBTI+ employees.

Another encouraging factor that enables gay men to achieve leadership is the existing gay-friendly workplace policies and practices that certain South African organisations are already employing. Some South African organisations are working hard to become increasingly inclusive, through programmes like SAWEI, workplace mentoring, inclusiveness training and the involvement in LGBTI+ programmes and practices. The result is that gay men are able to flourish and reach the highest echelons of leadership in these affirmative and inclusive organisations.

It is conceivable that the resilience factors enabling gay men to achieve leadership and overcome existing prejudices and barriers lie not in the hands of the gay men with their intrinsic enablers, nor is it the enabling factors within the organisation. It is feasible that a combination of both intrinsic characteristics and organisation attributes, coupled with those of the community in which the organisation operates, may provide the answer to resilience for gay men in South African organisations. Meyer (2015) explores individual and social responsibility as important elements of resilience. Ungar and Theron (2020) discuss the concept of multiple systems interacting to assist the individual to cope when confronted with challenges, while Wilks et al.

(2022) explore resilience as multisystemic processes that create a system to assist individuals or communities in coping with challenges. Current research supports the concept of multiple systems working in conjunction with each other to create resilience and enable gay men to overcome organisational barriers and to reach senior leadership roles.

The following section speaks specifically to the barriers gay men may encounter in South African organisations but also to the enabling factors that may assist these men to progress and advance into leadership roles.

Barriers and Enablers Explored

The findings support the international body of literature suggesting that barriers like discrimination and prejudice and a ceiling to the professional growth gay men can achieve, do indeed exist and influence these employees and their pursuit of leadership (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Bell et al., 2011; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Denton, 2009; Frik, 2019; Gedro, 2010; Hill, 2009; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Soeker et al., 2015). The research question “*What are the experiences of openly gay men, relating to their sexual orientation, that may create barriers to achieving senior or executive leadership roles in mainstream South African organisations?*” is thus addressed by the research findings. However, the findings also suggest that gay men may possess certain intrinsic attributes that assist them in pursuit of senior leadership. Similarly, some organisations—unfortunately more multinational organisations than mainstream South African organisations—provide mentoring programmes, enforce inclusive policies and programmes and create working cultures that are experienced as safe for LGBTI+ communities and their members. Another workplace practice that may lead to workplaces construed as safe and accommodating for LGBTI+ people and their career progression is senior leadership who lead by example and are openly supportive of LGBTI+ affirmative policies and practice.

In conclusion, the above findings indicate that barriers that hamper the achievement of senior leadership roles for gay cisgender males may indeed exist in South African organisations. However, certain intrinsic attributes of gay men and certain organisational

practices and policies may enable gay men to avoid or overcome these barriers and enable them to reach senior leadership positions. It may be that these enablers work in isolation to assist gay men, or it may be that multiple systems of resilience are needed to assist gay men. Whatever the case, certain gay men can rise above the existing challenges in mainstream South African organisations and progress into senior leadership roles.

The following section deals with the achievement of leadership roles and how this may be accomplished given the often-negative influence of openly revealed same-sex sexual orientation on many gay men and their careers.

Achievement of Leadership

Little research is available in South Africa regarding to the influence of prejudice and discrimination on the professional growth and development of LGBTI+ people in South African organisations, particularly in the realm of leadership (Benjamin & Reygan, 2016). The assumption in much of the literature and evidenced by the findings is that gay men with an openly expressed same-sex sexual orientation continue to encounter a ceiling in terms of their career advancement (Aksoy et al., 2019; Badgett, 2003; Buddel, 2011; deLeon and Brunner, 2013; Denton, 2009; Gedro, 2010; Green, 2003; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Soeker et al., 2015) The findings therefore address the research question: *“How does the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation influence the achievement of senior or executive leadership roles for gay men in mainstream South African organisations?”* The findings suggest that the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation does have a negative influence on the achievement of leadership for some gay men. However, the current literature also indicates that given a supportive and inclusive culture, gay men may flourish and grow their careers (Buddel, 2011; Soeker et al., 2015). The findings, and indeed the participants in the study, provide conclusive evidence of what the literature proposes. Some gay men undeniably succeed in achieving senior leadership positions in South African organisations. The implication is that certain circumstances exist where gay men can grow and develop to attain the highest levels of leadership in South African

organisations. The participants in this study evidence this contradictory finding merely because they fulfilled the criterion in terms of achieving senior leadership levels in mainstream South African organisations despite revealing their same-sex sexual orientation to their respective organisations.

In seeking to answer the research question “*What is the current visibility status of gay cisgender male leaders in mainstream South African organisations?*” the findings provide part of the answer. While some gay men do manage to achieve senior leadership in South African organisations, even these men have struggled and had to overcome organisational barriers in their professional development to attain these positions. The findings also indicate that obstacles like prejudice and marginalisation continue to plague gay men and influence their career progression.

This study found some explanations for the absence of the voices of gay cisgender male leaders, particularly Black African gay cisgender male leaders. It is evident in the literature and from the findings of this study that for some gay men, in certain South African organisations, openly expressing same-sex sexual orientation will hamper their professional growth, development and their achievement of senior leadership roles. These gay men may choose to conceal their sexual orientation to gain the senior roles they desire. They may even go to the extreme of heterosexual marriage and having children with their wives to fulfil what they perceive to be the heteronormative role demanded of leaders by unsafe and exclusive workplace cultures. Zernehel and Perry (2017) describe this behaviour as ‘hypermasculine’ and suggest that men exaggerate heterosexual traits and behaviours and male gender roles to fit into their environments (p. 3). These men, while having achieved leadership and some even identifying as gay cisgender males in their private lives, are invisible to society and therefore skew LGBTI+ leadership statistics towards lower numbers. Their silenced voices may also thwart the hopes and dreams of many younger gay cisgender male employees who wish to become leaders in South African organisations but lack visible examples of previous

generations of gay men who have successfully navigated the challenges of rising to senior leadership. The concealment of their same-sex sexual orientation to protect their careers may thus provide the answer to where the gay male leaders are and why we do not hear about or from them.

The following section deals with sexual orientation in South African organisations and will explore the findings concerning sexual orientation in the workplace.

Sexual Orientation in South African organisations

As the main focus of the study relates to openly expressed sexual orientation, the findings produced further information. As stated, the literature asserts over and over again that gay men who openly express their sexual orientation in the workplace can expect to encounter barriers to their professional growth and achievement of leadership roles in organisations.

For many participants, there were times when they felt safe to be open about their same-sex sexual orientation in their workplaces, while at other times, they were unable to do so due to the unsafe workplace culture or other organisational and personal challenges. Based on the findings, which are supported by the literature, the decision to be open about sexual orientation or coming out in the workplace, is related to feeling safe and accepted (Hill, 2009). This phenomenon became increasingly interesting to explore as the lived experiences of the participants were diligently analysed. Their sense of the prevailing organisational culture and their perceptions of a safe culture or acceptance from colleagues and management, seemed to play a particularly significant role in deciding to be open about their sexual orientation or not. The perception that the organisation is affirming of LGBTI+ people can become an integral factor in gay cisgender males' decision to reveal their orientation. If, at any time in their careers, gay men experience that their sexual orientation may lead to negative consequences for their career progression or lead to prejudice from colleagues or senior management, they are unlikely to reveal it to the organisation. However, revealing one's same-sex sexual orientation can be understood as a behaviour that can change over a person's lifetime and through changing work

environments. At times gay men may feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation, while other times, or in other roles, they may not feel safe to do so. This implies that sexual orientation in organisations is a fluid construct, and this fluidity could be partially dependent on the perceived safety and acceptance of the culture of that organisation.

The decision to reveal one's sexual orientation in the workplace or not to reveal it implies that gay men may need to repeatedly come out or repeatedly make the decision to reveal their same-sex sexual orientation in an organisation as they move from one post to another or should they move from one organisation to another (Ozeren, 2014). The findings suggest that gay men do have to repeat the coming out process in their organisations but also that they may fluctuate between revealing their sexual orientation in some positions in the organisations they are working in and deciding not to reveal their sexual orientation in other positions or new organisations. Thus, being open about or revealing same-sex sexual orientation to members of an organisation is not stable and is not a single occurrence which affirms previous studies involving the coming out experience where it is understood as a process of events rather than a singular one (McCormick, 2015).

Furthermore, once a gay cisgender male person decides to reveal their same-sex sexual orientation to their organisation openly, this may typically become their preferred method of engaging in future positions within that organisation. This appears to be the case even if the gay cisgender male works in what may be considered an unsafe South African organisation. It is also interesting to note that certain participants were less accepting of unsafe working environments and resigned or left organisations where they felt unsafe or unable to be authentic with regards to their sexual orientation. However, for certain participants, while the workplace culture and safety were necessary, they would remain working in these organisations despite the challenges and barriers. Their perception was that their same-sex sexual orientation would hamper their progression and professional growth opportunities, so they withheld information about their sexual orientation. Perhaps this could further explain why Black African men in

leadership seldom reveal their sexual orientation in the workplace and are, therefore, less visible. Their perception of the organisational culture may be that it is so unsafe for them that they prefer to remain secretive about their sexual orientation.

Sexual orientation and its impact on gay men in leadership appear to remain challenging for South African organisations. Gay men continue to be confronted with barriers to their professional growth and advancement due to their sexual orientation which may result in them withholding personal information from the workplace as a means of protecting themselves and their careers.

The following section will explore the impact that the Apartheid system of government has had on LGBTI+ people and their achievement of leadership.

Apartheid and Its Impact on LGBTI+ Leadership Visibility

The findings and the literature agree that Apartheid and the repercussions of its discriminatory and prejudiced laws and policies became a national priority. The racial injustices needed to be redressed, but unfortunately, this process led to minority groups, like LGBTI+ communities and their challenges, being viewed as less important. The struggles of these minority groups largely disappeared under the daunting task of transformation, and this oversight seemed to occur not only in the larger society but in the South African workplace as well (Balfour, 2016; Pillay et al., 2019). The result may provide further evidence as to why LGBTI+ people continue to experience discrimination and prejudice in South African organisations despite the protection of the Constitution and other laws and acts. It cannot be ignored that the Apartheid era was filled with the subjugation of people based on certain characteristics, often related to race. However, the subjugation also impacted any group who did not fall within the accepted hypermasculine and heterosexual ideal (Pillay et al., 2019).

People falling outside these ideals, particularly people with same-sex sexual orientations, were often portrayed and treated as sick, criminal or sinners/evil (Nel, 2007). Many gay men in organisations in South Africa today, may have been exposed to these categorisations when

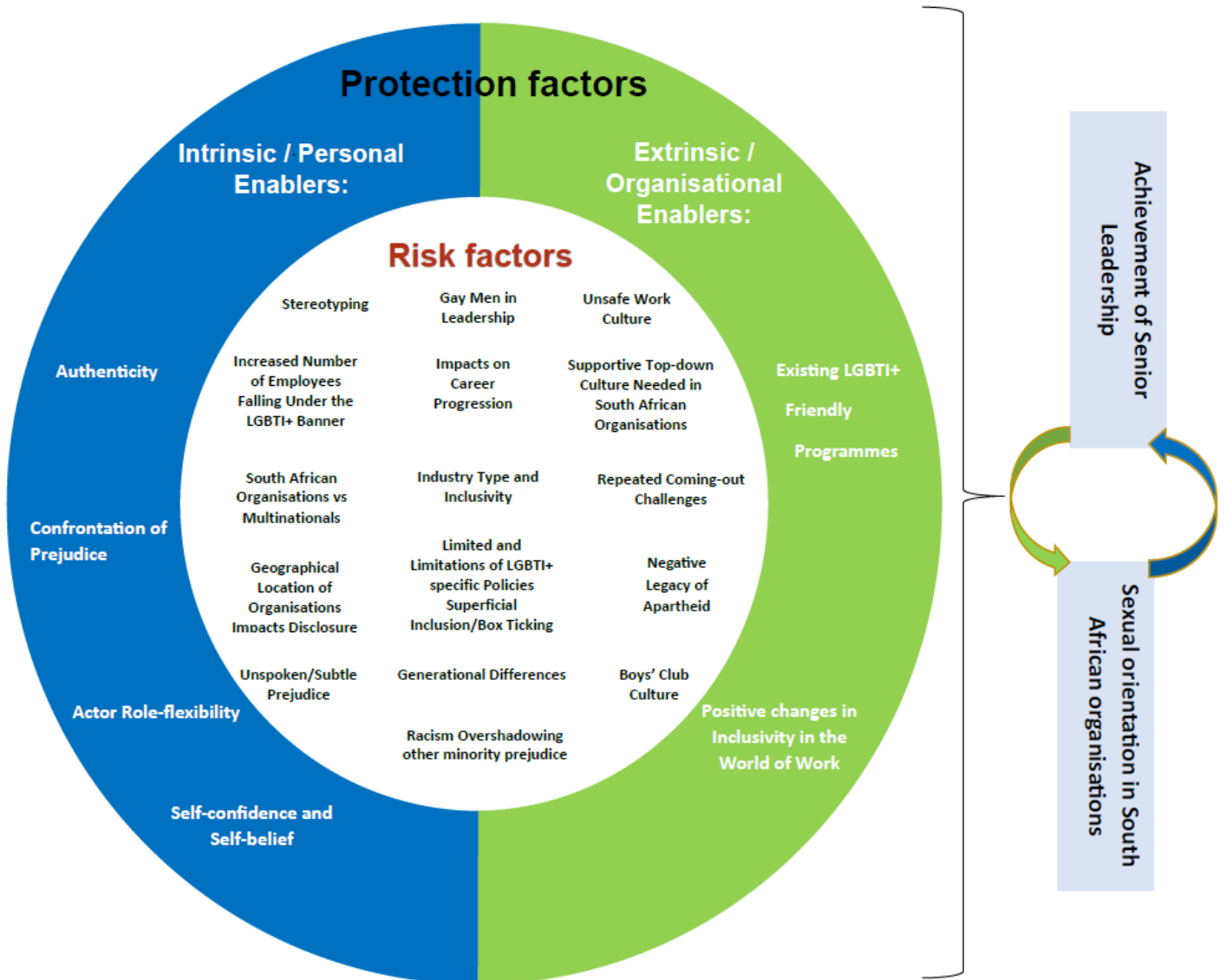
growing up and may, in turn, have internalised these into their perceptions of themselves. This resulting internalised homophobia continues to impact social spaces like the workplace and the open expression of same-sex sexual orientation. Social Constructionist Theory provides an avenue to understand these findings as internalised homophobia and the negative attitudes towards the self that emerged. These negative attitudes towards the self were socially constructed through the interaction of gay men with their exclusionary environments, and the meanings they attributed to them. Thus, the impact of Apartheid continues in LGBTI+ communities and in the social spaces where they live, work and construct their realities.

However, the impact of Apartheid does not appear to be a universal factor in the treatment of gay men in South African organisations. Some of the participants had positive experiences in the South African workplace, which would indicate that inclusiveness and support of gay men, specifically but also LGBTI+ people in general, is considered a priority in some South African organisations. Although participation in the annual SAWEI project is limited (SAWEI, 2021a), it is envisioned that should more South African organisations participate in projects like this, previous prejudices and exclusionary policies and practices for LGBTI+ people will reduce or cease.

A conceptual model for barriers (risk) factors and (enablers) protection factors based on the above findings is presented below. This model assumes that there are certain factors that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes or risks, and other factors that decrease the likelihood of negative outcomes or enhance positive outcomes. As this study explores sexual orientation in South African organisations and how this links to leadership, the following model presents the barriers that effect the achievement of leadership as risk factors. Similarly, it presents the enablers which are reported to assist gay men in achieving leadership as protection factors.

Figure 7

Conceptual Model of Study Findings



The following section explores the contributions of this study to the field of psychology and discusses the value of the findings for South African organisations.

Contributions of the study

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the role that sexual orientation plays in the achievement of leadership roles for gay men who openly express their same-sex sexual orientation to the members of their organisation. One of the intents was to discover the barriers or challenges that remain within mainstream South African organisations, and how these may impact gay men and their achievement of senior leadership roles. More importantly, however, was the objective to discover how gay men may successfully overcome these challenges by engaging enablers, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that allow them to grow and develop their professional careers.

The study revealed that gay men, particularly Black African gay men, continue to experience prejudice and other challenges when openly expressing their same-sex sexual orientation. They continue to be confronted with barriers to their professional growth and their attainment of senior leadership roles. To facilitate an understanding of the findings, exploring the intersection of leadership in South African organisations, and sexual orientation would be helpful. The findings indicate various levels of influence experienced by gay men, which may negatively impact their achievement of senior leadership. They similarly indicate that different categories of gay men, for instance, Black African gay men or different generations of gay men, may experience or perceive the impact on their career progression due to their sexual orientation to a greater or lesser degree than others. We must consider that gay men with their intrinsic attributes, the working context or environment and the workplace factors that may enable gay men or inhibit them, combine to create a situation where prejudice and discrimination may be experienced. Drawing on the intersectional model of LGBTI+ microaggressions, the findings of this study assist in creating understanding of the “breadth, depth and scope and complexity” of the prejudice and marginalisation of gay men, how they respond to it and how it impacts the achievement of senior leadership roles in South African organisations. (Vaccaro & Koob, 2019, p. 1317). Intersectionality describes the interaction of

various elements of identity and the variety of ways they may overlap to generate discrimination which can impact a person in many interconnected ways (McLachlin et al., 2019; PsySSA, 2017). As we explore the workplace context with its unique interactions of identity, social norms and behaviour, regulations and environment, the simple notions of workplace barriers or discrimination burst into complex and intricate concepts altering what it means to be a gay cisgender male in the workplace.

This study, therefore, contributes to the limited scientific knowledge on the role that sexual orientation can play in the achievement of leadership for gay cisgender males in mainstream South African organisations. It details the intersectionality of multiple factors in the environment and identity that may contribute to gay men experiencing prejudice and marginalisation and their response to it. It provides valuable information for organisations, assisting them in understanding the increasingly visible and vocal LGBTI+ portion of their workforce and the challenges that exist for them. This may further assist South African organisations to create, change or adapt existing human resource policies and practices to allow these organisations to become LGBTI+ affirmative and supportive workplaces.

The findings of the study furthermore contribute to the knowledge base on the intrinsic and extrinsic enablers that may assist gay men in overcoming the existing challenges for LGBTI+ employees in South African organisations. The intrinsic skills or characteristics like authenticity, self-confidence and self-belief, the ability to confront prejudice and the flexibility to manage different workplace cultures provide much-needed information for the development of young gay cisgender male employees. The findings regarding extrinsic enablers like LGBTI+ friendly policies and practices, programmes such as mentorship, diversity and inclusiveness training, and organisations employing top management support for inclusiveness programmes may likewise enable younger generations of gay men entering and working in South African organisations, to flourish and grow. The findings can therefore be employed to provide a platform for training, preparing, and mentoring young gay men, and potentially other LGBTI+

employees, to navigate the South African organisational milieu.

Lastly, the study draws the attention of the academic community to the continuing plight of LGBTI+ communities, and gay men, in their pursuit of success and equality in mainstream South African organisations. It highlights the challenges faced by this portion of the workplace population and, through the lived experiences of the participants, it points to the existing gap between the laws and regulations of the country and how these regulations and laws are implemented in support of LGBTI+ employees in mainstream South African organisations.

Researcher Reflections and Learnings

The absence of the voices of gay cisgender male leaders in South African organisations was the spark that ignited my interest in this study. Having located and spoken to participants in the study who have not only worked in mainstream South African organisations, but have achieved senior leadership within these organisations, has given me hope: hope that change is happening for LGBTI+ communities in South African workplaces (even if South African organisations tend to lag behind multinational organisations in their inclusiveness practices); hope that gay men and other members of LGBTI+ communities can flourish and grow in some South African organisations; and hope that under the right circumstances and with certain personal attributes (which appear possible to cultivate), gay men have a chance to achieve their aspirations and dreams of senior leadership roles.

Furthermore, this study touched me personally with regards to the importance of LGBTI+ affirmative policies and practices in South African organisations but also in terms of the availability of support for members of LGBTI+ communities. As a psychologist working in private practice, I strive to provide affirmative support for LGBTI+ people in all the work that I do, in my practice and in the organisations that I engage with. I try to remain constantly aware of how a supportive network of people and professional help may play some small role in assisting LGBTI+ people to reach their career goals.

During my 30 years in the South African working environment, both in corporate

organisations in South Africa and governmental departments, I have encountered negligible support or even acknowledgement of LGBTI+ people and their challenges. In learning about the difficulties presented through the lived experiences of the participants and their journeys to senior leadership, my own challenges arising from internalised homophobia and the extrinsic limitations within South African workplaces and the prejudices still present there, were evoked. Feelings of anger and fear, frustration and helplessness became unwelcome companions during the collection and analysis of the data. Certain questions were often in my mind while I confronted the data, questions like: How can such challenges continue to impact gay men and other LGBTI+ people in our modern democratic society?; How could a country with such a damaging and unequal past continue to tolerate the humiliating, prejudicial and limiting practices and behaviours still confronting so many LGBTI+ people's lives?; How can leaders in South African organisations continue to victimise and ostracise certain groups of employees, given our inclusive and world-renowned Constitution?

I have learned that workplace challenges remain for many LGBTI+ communities in South African organisations. Prejudice continues to impact and limit the careers of many LGBTI+ people. I have also learned that there is hope, that there has been change and there is more coming. I have learned that people who identify with or as part of LGBTI+ communities are becoming more visible and more vocal about their needs and, optimistically, will become harder and harder for South African organisations to ignore. I have realised that organisations alone cannot bear the full responsibility for gay men and other LGBTI+ people in achieving leadership. Each person from these communities has a responsibility to develop themselves and their skills, confront prejudice, voice injustice, and provide an example and role model to younger people in their communities. I have realised that the work is not done and that with my experiences and understanding, I have a responsibility to continue to address and bring the challenges of LGBTI+ people in the workplace to the attention of the academic domain and to South African organisations in general.

Limitations of the Study

Perhaps the most significant limitation of the study is that it researches only one portion of the rich and ever-deepening pool of LGBTI+ communities, that of gay men. It is assumed that there may be similarities in the experiences of marginalisation, exclusion, discrimination and victimisation for all members of LGBTI+ communities. However, as PsySSA explains in their *Practice Guidelines for Psychology Professionals Working with Sexually and Gender-Diverse People*, “[T]he possible differences between persons who claim these labels and those to whom these labels may be assigned ought not to be trivialised. The respective issues, experiences and needs of these people may, in fact, differ significantly and in several respects” (PsySSA, 2017, p. 7). Just so, the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that may enable other members of LGBTI+ communities to achieve leadership in mainstream South African organisations, may differ from the findings but may be a valuable area for future study.

A second limitation of this study is that it is focused on the individual lived experiences of gay men in leadership. The problem with this type of focus is that it can lead to what Meyer (2015) refers to as a “blame the victim” attitude. Gay men who encounter the challenges often faced by LGBTI+ communities in South African organisations, may be expected to be resilient and have the ability or skills to engage in enabling behaviours and overcome these challenges. If they fail, it can be viewed as something they ‘ought to’ have done and also ought to have achieved.

Meyer (2015) continues by claiming that too much focus on individual resiliency, detracts from social or societal responsibility to protect vulnerable, disadvantaged populations and shifts the focus away from the stressor itself to the individual’s response to the stress. The responsibility of leaders and organisations in South Africa cannot and should not be ignored. There remains a risk that this study may provide the means for the blame of the lack of gay male leaders in South African organisations, to be laid at the feet of gay men alone. There is an

intersection of circumstances that lead to prejudice and marginalisation of gay men. Perhaps, there needs to be intersectional, multisystemic resilience responses from the individual, the organisation, the environment and, socio-political contexts to create a practical and enduring solution to this ongoing problem (Nadal et al., 2016; Vaccaro & Koon, 2019; Wilks et al., 2022).

The third limitation is that this was a qualitative study with a small sample of participants, and generalisability was not the aim. However, the purpose of the study was to begin a discussion on the phenomenon of sexual orientation in mainstream South African organisations and how this phenomenon can impact LGBTI+ communities in achieving their career goals and aspirations, particularly in attaining leadership roles. However, it is hoped that the findings of this study may spark an interest in further research and provide a helpful tool that members of LGBTI+ communities can utilise to grow and develop their careers and work lives in mainstream South African organisations.

It should be noted that this study requested participants to select their current geographical location based on where they were currently working. However, a few participants had lived most of their lives in a different geographical location from where they were currently working. Had sufficient detail been requested during the demographic intake, valuable data could have been provided on the impact of geographical areas on the inclusiveness/ LGBTI+ leadership practices of organisations in these areas. Perhaps future studies could explore the geographical location of LGBTI+ leadership in South Africa to understand the inclusiveness of organisations in various regions of South Africa, including rural, suburban and urban areas. The migratory patterns of the members of LGBTI+ communities to urban areas where leadership is more probable and the impact of geographical location on career progression in general, could also be important future research and may further assist members of LGBTI+ communities in planning their future careers and where they may choose to reside and work.

Implications for Future Research

The internalisation of heteronormative language (internalised homophobia) utilised by LGBTI+ employees may have some impact on their self-belief and even on their career progression. This topic arose from the findings of this study where one participant preferred to not even to use the term 'gay' during the interview and repeatedly referred to being gay as the 'G-word.' Language and its use may provide an interesting avenue for future research in LGBTI+ studies. How gay men speak or language about themselves and their careers, may have some impact on their professional development and growth within South African organisations. This may be influenced by the language and speech employed by leaders and other members of organisations or even the lived experiences of these gay men growing up in certain families and communities.

It was observed from the ages of the respondents of this study that there were a higher number of younger participants than older participants. Due to purposive and snowball sampling, these statistics may be an isolated occurrence. However, this may be an interesting topic to explore in future research. The following research questions could be addressed in future studies:

- Are there more younger gay cisgender male employees in leadership positions than in previous generations?
- Are younger gay men more open to participating in related studies?
- Are younger gay men more open about their sexual orientation and thus appear to be more numerous in research on this community in mainstream South African organisations?
- Are younger gay men better equipped to overcome the existing barriers in mainstream South African organisations?

A further lens that may provide valuable future research is the differentiation between the

experiences of gay men in the workforce before the advent of democracy in South Africa and the experiences of those who joined the workforce after the advent of democracy. The findings suggest that Apartheid and its legacy of exclusion may continue to impact gay men and other LGBTI+ people. A comparison may provide information on how the South African democratic system has impacted on sexual orientation, gay men and, their experiences in the workplace.

A challenge brought up by many of the participants was the absence of a supportive top-down culture in the leadership of South African organisations. It could be valuable, to have further enquiry into the impact that senior leaders that encourage and participate in supportive and inclusionary LGBTI+ practices and programmes, may have on the LGBTI+ population in South African organisations. This could potentially bring about the changes to the landscape of South African workplaces that many of the gay men in this study felt were needed.

Research into the differences and similarities between organisations originating in South Africa versus those originating outside its borders may provide valuable data to South African organisations in benchmarking their inclusionary LGBTI+ policies and practices with international trends. It may also provide further data on the effectiveness of current regulations to protect the rights of LGBTI+ people in South African organisations.

As this study limited its focus to gay men and their lived experiences in South African organisations, it may be valuable for future research to focus on other or all the people falling under the LGBTI+ umbrella. It is expected that different groups of LGBTI+ people may have subtle but significant differences and intersectionalities of experience in the South African workplace which would provide a deeper understanding of these communities.

Although limited work has been done in South Africa regarding the intersection of geographical location and sexual orientation (Baird, 2010; Nadal et al., 2016; Nyeck et al., 2019), further research is needed. The geographical location of people and the organisations they work in may be necessary for understanding the impact of open expression of sexual orientation in the workplace. More research is needed to explore how different geographical

areas show different levels of tolerance and inclusiveness than others. Should the environment where one grew up differ from the environment where one currently works and lives, may also be an interesting area of future research in LGBTI+ communities. So little is known and understood about geographical location and impact on the open expression of sexual orientation.

Finally, the inclusiveness of organisations is at times industry-dependent. Studying various South African industries perceived to be exclusionary, may be valuable in understanding sexual orientation and the impact exclusionary industries have on LGBTI+ people. This could also indicate which industries require assistance in creating inclusionary and supportive working environments.

Conclusion

Gay men and members of other LGBTI+ communities, who are open about their sexual orientation, continue to struggle to achieve leadership roles in mainstream South African organisations. The data from this study makes this clear. They encounter barriers and challenges that may prevent, delay, or hamper their development in these organisations, which may result in a ceiling or cap to their professional growth and leadership aspirations. However, this is not true for all gay men. Some gay men rise above these challenges by utilising certain inherent or learned skills and characteristics, and these men find it possible to achieve senior leadership roles. Some organisations may also provide affirmative support and practices that again allow certain gay men to progress in their careers and reach senior leadership roles. The problem remains that despite success and achieving leadership roles, all the participants in this study agree that prejudice and discrimination remain in most mainstream South African organisations. The onus cannot solely lie in the hands of the LGBTI+ employee to overcome the existing challenges that create workplaces that are unsafe and unwelcoming. It requires the shared responsibility from every community, organisation, leader, and employee to work against

prejudice and to bring our renowned Constitution into every sphere of work and personal life.

When there is genuinely no unfair discrimination against any person, in any environment, on the grounds of their race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth, then South African organisations will become safe places for LGBTI+ communities (RSA, 1996, p. 4).

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Annexures

Annexure A: UNISA Ethical Clearance Certificate

(See page 183-184)

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

23 February 2021

Dear Mr Shane Wolson

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 23 February
2021 to 23 February 2026

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
31424406_CREC_CHS_2021

Principal Researcher(s): Mr Shane Wolson (31424406@mylife.unisa.ac.za)

Supervisor: Prof J.A. Nel (0832820791)

Title: *Lived experiences of gay men in their achievement of leadership in South African organisations*

Degree Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The **Low risk application** was **reviewed** by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, on **23 February 2021** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can impact the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (**23 February 2026**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **31424406_CREC_CHS_2021** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature :



Prof. Ilse Ferns
CHS Ethics Chairperson
Email: fernsi@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature : PP



Prof K. Masemola
Exécutive Dean : CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 2298



Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet and consent form

Background

My name is Shane Wolson. I am a registered psychologist with 15 years of professional experience. I am currently conducting research for a doctoral degree in Consulting Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). My supervisor is Professor Juan A Nel from the Department of Psychology at UNISA. The main topic of the research is the role that sexual orientation plays in the achievement of executive leadership roles for gay men in mainstream South African organisations.

Purpose of this letter

This letter serves various purposes: (1) To provide you with information to make an informed decision to participate in the study; (2) To ascertain whether you qualify to participate in the study (see Demographic Information Questionnaire); and (3) To obtain your informed consent.

By completing this consent form, it means that you understand the purpose of the study and the conditions for participating in the study. Informed consent is an important ethical consideration since researchers must be transparent, upfront, and candid when conducting any study.

Purpose of the study

Little information is available about the impact of sexual orientation on gay men in achieving leadership roles in mainstream South African organisations. This topic has not previously been studied in much depth in South Africa. Your contribution represents the beginning of generating information on the topic. The main intention of the study will be to provide gay men with an understanding of the potential obstacles and/or benefits they can expect to encounter in mainstream South African organisations if they are open about their sexual orientation. However, this study also hopes to provide gay men with tools, based on the

experiences of other gay men who have successfully achieved executive leadership roles, to overcome obstacles they may encounter in the workplace. A summary report, outlining the key findings, can be shared with participants at the conclusion of the study. Your participation will allow you to broaden the knowledge of gay men in the workplace and academic literature and possibly to help others achieve what you have achieved in your career.

Participant criteria

If you identify as all of the below, I would appreciate and value your participation:

1. **Cisgender male:** Cisgender denotes or relates to a person whose sense of their gender and gender identity corresponds with their assigned sex at birth. *Cisgender male* would indicate that a person would understand their sense of self and their gender identity as male.
2. **Same-sex sexual orientation**
3. **South African citizen**
4. **Working for /having worked in the recent past (that is, max 5 years ago) for a mainstream South African organisation:** A *mainstream organisation* is a public or private South African organisation; has/had a stable hierarchical structure; has/had company policies and procedures guided by and compliant with constitutional law in terms of equality and human rights; employs/ed more than 10 people; and is/was NOT an organisation specifically and/or exclusively working with or within LGBTI+ communities. A *South African organisation* is understood to be an organisation registered and originating in South Africa and governed by the South African Constitution and its labour and human rights laws and regulations.
5. An **executive leader** in the organisation (or held such a position within the past 5 years). An executive leader is someone who is: a member of the organisation's executive leadership; a director; a CEO; a managing director; or the owner.
6. You **openly express/ed your same-sex sexual orientation** to the members of your

organisation

In this study, your experience of achieving executive leadership in your organisation is very important. I am interested in understanding what aided your career development and advancement to executive leadership. The kinds of challenges or barriers you may have encountered and overcome as well as the role that your sexual orientation plays or has played, if at all, in creating barriers to your career development and advancement, is also of great importance.

How you will participate

Your participation in the study will consist of one, in-person, interview via an online platform that will last no longer than 90 minutes. During this interview you will be asked questions regarding your personal experiences, as a gay man, working in your organisation. This interview will be recorded so that transcripts of the interview can be made and incorporated into the research as data and analysed. Your name and details will not be used to ensure confidentiality. Should you prefer not to continue to participate in the study you may withdraw from the study without any consequences. You may decide to provide any information you think is relevant to the topic, even if it is not elicited by questions.

After the study is completed, you may request a copy of the study and the findings. If you would like to be provided with the findings of this study, please contact Shane Wolson on the email address provided below.

Potential harm

Participation in this study is not expected to cause any discomfort or harm, and there are no anticipated risks (psychologically or physically) involved in participation.

Informed consent & ethics

If you agree to participate in this study, please could you complete the demographic information questionnaire and the consent form at the bottom of this document. The purpose of your signature is to ensure that ethical practice is adhered to and to obtain your informed

consent. Please note the following:

1. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
2. You may withdraw from this study at any time during the research process. However, the withdrawal will no longer be permitted once the analysis process has commenced.
3. You will be interviewed via an online platform so that you can choose an environment which is comfortable for you to speak openly. You are requested to arrange with the researcher for the interview to take place at a time when you are in an environment where you can speak openly and comfortably and without disturbances.
4. In order to assure an ethical stance of 'no harm', this document assumes that your participation in this study is an individual choice and is a self-directed and self-motivated endeavour.
5. Every effort will be made to protect your identity. Consequently, none of your personal details or identifying characteristics, including the name of your organisation will be displayed in any part of the study or the research document. If you prefer, you may be identified by a pseudonym. You are welcome to select your own pseudonym, or I, as the researcher, can provide one for you.
6. The ethical approval reference number from The UNISA College of Human Sciences Research is 31424406_CREC_CHS_2021. Approval was received on the 23rd of February 2021.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me using the following confidential e-mail address that is used specifically in my professional practice as a psychologist:

info@shanewolson.co.za. Alternatively, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Professor JA Nel on **nelja@unisa.ac.za**.

Below is a consent form you will need to sign should you agree with the points above and if you are willing to participate in this study.

Your participation and input are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Shane Wolson,

Counselling Psychologist,

UNISA Doctoral Research Student.

Consent to participate

I, _____ (participant name), hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, process, potential benefits and anticipated risks involved with participation in this study.

- I have read and understood the study as explained by the information sheet.
- I was provided with the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time prior to the analysis of the data.
- I am aware that the findings will be presented in a PhD thesis, articles in a scientific journal and/or conference proceedings.
- I consent to the video and audio recording of the interview.
- I have received a signed copy of the information sheet.

Participant signature _____ **Researcher signature** _____

Date _____

Date _____

Appendix 2: Demographic Information Questionnaire

Completing this demographic information questionnaire will assist me in identifying if you are suitable to be a prospective participant in this study. I hope to obtain as diverse a representation of participants as possible. Any self-identified gay male individual who currently or previously (within the past 5 years) has worked in an executive leadership position, within a South African mainstream organisation will potentially be a suitable participant. Please complete this questionnaire below, and where applicable, mark with an "X" in the appropriate box.

1. Province:

Eastern Cape Free State Gauteng KZN Limpopo
Mpumalanga Northern Cape North-West Western Cape

2. Age:

20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69

3. Race:

Black African Coloured Indian or Asian White

4. Gender identity:

Cisgender male Cisgender female Transgender male
Transgender female Not listed here

5. Sexual Orientation:

Same-sex Bisexual Heterosexual Asexual

6. South African Citizenship:

Yes No

7. Leadership level in (current or previous) organisation:

Employee Supervisor Manager Senior Manager

Executive Management CEO Owner

Other (Please specify _____)

8. Do/did you openly express your sexual orientation to the members of your (current/previous) organisation?

Yes No

9. Mainstream organisation (*A public or private organisation; has a stable hierarchical structure; has company policies and procedures guided by and compliant with constitutional law in terms of equality and human rights; more than 10 people; and is NOT an organisation working specifically and/or exclusively with or within LGBTI+ communities.*)

Yes No

10. South African organisation (*An organisation registered and originating in South Africa and governed by South African labour and human rights laws and regulations.*)

Yes No

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

1. Briefly tell me about your professional life, in general, in terms of qualifications, previous work experience and previous employers/ places of occupation
2. What position do you currently/ did you previously occupy in your organisation?
3. Could you elaborate on your experiences of occupying this role?
4. What was your career path within your current/previous organisation, elaborating on what served to advance (or aided) your career development and attainment of an executive leadership position?
5. Were you comfortable revealing your sexual orientation to members of your current or previous organisation, and could you describe this experience?
6. What would you say are the negative consequences of revealing one's sexual orientation in the workplace? Please elaborate?
7. What do you think are the obstacles in the workplace that may prevent gay men or other LGBTI+ employees from achieving leadership roles?
8. Have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted your journey to the achievement of your position of executive leadership and if so, please can you tell me in what ways this happened?
9. What characteristics or qualities do you think you possess that may have helped you to overcome obstacles in your current or previous organisation?
10. What personal characteristics or traits do you think gay men require to achieve executive leadership in organisations?
11. What organisational assistance did you receive, as a gay man, on your journey to leadership?
12. What organisational strategies or assistance do you feel are necessary to encourage equal opportunities and the development and promotion of LGBTI+ employees?
13. How effective do you think the (current or previous) organisational strategies and

policies are/were at non-discrimination and protecting the rights of LGBTI+ employees?

Appendix 4: Transcripts

1. Interview One: Ajay
2. Interview Two: Akito
3. Interview Three: Athol
4. Interview Four: Daniel
5. Interview Five: David
6. Interview Six: Jabulani
7. Interview Seven: Jan
8. Interview Eight: John
9. Interview Nine: Thato
10. Interview Ten: Krish
11. Interview Eleven: Johan

Interview One: Ajay

Researcher

Good morning **Ajay**

Ajay

Hey **Researcher**, how's it going?

Researcher

Good thank you and you?

Ajay

Very well thanks.

Researcher

Thanks so much for being willing to participate.

Ajay

No worries, I love being a Guinea pig in this sort of thing, so have fun with it.

Researcher

Alright, so I don't know if there's anything you would like to ask me just before we start, in terms of the study or anything like that. I'm hoping I made it all clear in in the in the emails but.

Ajay

Yes, definitely, definitely. It's pretty clear to me.

Researcher

OK? Yeah, so you know I've worked in corporate, and I've worked in government and one thing I noticed in my experience was that I never knew, heard about any gay men in leadership which got me to sort of thinking, you know, why is that the case? Surely there must be gay men in leadership. All the literature that I've seen states that there's still discrimination and things like that may cause many people in the LGBTI+ communities to not reach higher levels in organisations so that was just something that that made me, that interested me. If a gay man has accomplished leadership, then how did he do it? So, that's kind of what sparked the research.

Ajay

Yes. Yeah, absolutely. I do suspect some may have a been able to have done that by not being open. So, you could have had a director of a listed company, or something be gay but completely in the closet.

Researcher

Yes, yeah and this is what we are suspecting. UM , I would have asked you at the end but I can, I can discuss it now, one of the challenges I've had with this study is that I can't find a single African gay man that will participate.

Ajay

Really.

Researcher

So, if you do know somebody that would be a great help. If you could let me know, but I haven't been able to find somebody. All the avenues that I've used have been unsuccessful. I don't know whether African gay men aren't open about their sexual orientation or what the reasoning is. But yeah, it's been very hard.

Ajay

I have worked with three very confident, very out and proud gay men at Standard Bank. Uh, and I'm just gonna check. I think I will forward to them before asking them if they wanted to participate. I'm going to send it to them again. I'll just copy you in.

Researcher

Yes please, that would be great because I have really struggled. I haven't been able to find a single one, not one single one, so even if they're not open about their sexual orientation. At least then I can, I can get some feedback in terms of why that might be the case. A lot of a lot of the people on our chats through said they would pass it on, but none of them offered to do it and I wasn't sure why that was.

Ajay

Uh, I'm gonna copy in three of my colleagues from [financial company] and just ask them if they want to participate.

Researcher

You know that could be great. Thank you so much.

Ajay

Uhm? Because they do work in our LGBT program here at [financial company]

Researcher

Which hopefully would mean that they're out.

Ajay

Yeah, no, they're, they're very out and, and they're, and they're pretty senior, so it's a good

combination of just not like, you know, like young men in black out and proud millennials or just, you know, live on a different wavelength to where corporates or Africa is at the moment.

Researcher

That'll, that'll be very helpful.

Ajay

Cool.

Researcher

Well, could you just let me know and then we can carry on.

Ajay

OK, go for it.

Researcher

OK so, just briefly, if you can tell me about your professional life in terms of qualifications and your previous work experience or employers.

Ajay

Cool, so I'm a chartered accountant by profession, that is my qualification, but I've never practiced as a an accountant, if I can call it that. I finished my articles at [international accounting firm], and then came back and pretty much got into banking. I started off when I was 26/27, I did most of my career in banking. At [accounting form] was completely not out back then. I mean this was early 2000's. No way in hell I could have had a career and been out. And I knew that, I kept it to myself, UM, when I got into the banking world, uh also just kind of kept it to myself, didn't mention a word and you know at that age where young, qualified CA, everybody wants to set you up on dates. And I had to duck and dive and duck and dive and dodge and um, you know, kept very quiet about my, my sexuality, and one or two colleagues would ask, they kind of figured it out and I just would like, laugh it off and walk away. Uh, and uh, really just kept it under cover up until I was about 32, I think was about 32 or 33, and I was about that age and then I'd left banking and decided to go work in corporate. So, I went to go get [industrial company].

Researcher

OK.

Ajay

And a few months, I think I was there for like 2 months and then, I was the founding chairman of the first gay and inclusive competitive [sports] team in South Africa. When we launched a recruitment campaign for that, that went viral, that went ballistic and I was like, I'm talking like

[network news companies]. Like all the radio stations. I was like everywhere in the space of like 3 months, hosting interviews with like pretty much everybody, it got insane.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

And after that I was so out, that I couldn't, I couldn't kind of keep who I was.

Researcher

You couldn't be out again. OK.

Ajay

And you know, to really cool things came out of that, number one, where I was working at {industrial company}, the CEO found out about this and he walked into my office and he said, hey, I want you to start an LGBT program here at [industrial company]. And I mean [industrial company], being, you know, one of the oldest companies in South Africa. 100-year-old JCS listed business, you know, proudly South African, widely held shareholding. Uhm, and here's the CEO saying, you know, go, and do this thing for us. I want you to drive a different diversity angle in the organization. So, I thought that was really profound leadership. And it's not employee driven. It's kind of CEO instruction, so it's, it's a very different level of support. Uh, from that perspective, so I thought that was amazing. Uh, and then, uh. While I was trying to set that up and figuring out how to do that, I came across a bunch of people that were doing very similar things at their companies at that point in time. So, [RM] was doing this at [international law firm], the law firm. Uh, [D] was doing this at [multinational consumer goods company]. Uh, my other colleague [L] was doing this at [accounting firm]. So a bunch of us got together and they decided, actually we what we needed to do was start an NGO to help companies do this. So we started these South African LGBT Plus Management forum.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

And the purpose behind that is to help companies set up LGBT programs internally. Because, um, we find like this number one HR people had never been trained on how to deal with the LGBTI+ people. They don't have the vocabulary, they don't have the tool kits, they don't know where to start.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

So we we kind of created 'how to' guides. We created literature; we created research and then put together like a wide mix to make sense for corporates to do it. So that was the carrot. We put together a legal framework; why it should be done. So, that was the stick.

Researcher

Yeah.

Ajay

Depending on which company you're dealing with, you either got a carrot or the stick. UM we've also created like a what, what does good look like, a kind of framework?

Researcher

Yeah, yes.

Ajay

So and, and this I've done out of, I suppose, one, it was, you know, to do charity work. The other part of it was also a bit of self-interest. Because some people like me in corporate, don't have anyone to look up to. There's like, whereas I see, I'm the most senior out person that I know. This goes for a lot of my other colleagues doing similar work at their organisations.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

So at the moment, we either at the glass ceiling or trying to get through the glass ceiling for our careers and the good thing is when, when I took this role at [financial company], I worked at kind of [industrial company], worked at [manufacturing company], the American company and it was very hot and cold around their LGBT support. Uhm, they allowed me to setting stuff up, to, you know, for people to go like, over in Africa we're doing things for the LGBTI+ community in that I had officers sending me like, you know, rainbow wash stuff.

Researcher

Yes, OK.

Ajay

And as soon as I had like a Polish MD, give me shit, UM and I went to them, and I said, listen, there is workplace bullying happening, they just ducked and dived.

Researcher

Yep. OK so yeah.

Ajay

So it wasn't a lived culture. It was very typical corporate washing.

Researcher

Yeah, so on paper but not practically happening.

Ajay

Yeah. But with all companies, they like it when they can get the PR out of it without having to put miles in to make it actually like believable for employees.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah yeah. OK so, the position that you're currently in in in, in in your organization is what?

Ajay

So I work at [financial company], I'm the head of credit for the commercial asset Finance division.

Researcher

OK.

Ajay

It's about roughly a 40 billion Rand portfolio. And then I look after the credit function for that portfolio.

Researcher

OK, OK so, so in in terms of your career path in this current organization, so that's [financial company]. Uhm, elaborating on what shift to advance your career development and getting to sort of the leadership role that you're in.

Ajay

Well, I was, I'm very open about who I am on my CV. I, I openly state that I'm part of the LGBT plus community that I'm a director of an LGBT plus NGO and, and the [sports] team I volunteer at, so I don't hideaway anymore who I am.

Researcher

OK.

Ajay

And what I found is I'm at that stage in my career where my skills are in high demand so I can be, I can be who I am.

Researcher

Right? OK.

Ajay

That doesn't always go for everybody else who is a CA. You know you've got like, all these youngsters graduating and half of them are out and proud and others are like petrified and in the closet so, uhm at my life stage, I can do it. I'm, I'm turning 40 next week, so at my life stage I can, I can get away with it, if I can call it that.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

But also some people who hired me were very progressive. Uh, in the interview, the executive who hired me said, "You're exactly the kind of diversity we're looking for, not just based on ethnicity or whatever, your CV is strong, and we love you. Your skill set is strong, and you bring a diversity that that we don't have". And that kind of implied that, that was a bonus, as opposed to something that they had to deal with from a culture perspective.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

That for me was very interesting.

Researcher

well yeah, so it's, it's nice to hear that there are some senior people in, in our organizations that are actually aware and trying to, to do the right thing.

Ajay

Yeah, definitely, and I found that like, a very interesting thing that somebody said that in an interview because interviews are really like very formal and it's as if both sides are trying to give their, their best, you know PR campaign at each other and here's somebody who kind of dropped that façade and said like, I'm gonna be real with you, this is why we love you and I was like wow, this is pretty interesting. This is a very interesting value proposition. Where like, one of the reasons I left banking was exactly because I was concerned that my LGBT plus community status would hamper my career and I left at that point, at the peak of my career.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

I'd hit my career goal and stayed there for about a year and then I was like, I'm done, I've ticked the box, I'm not gonna have to deal with anyone's shit anymore and I'm just going to go ahead and make money and have fun.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. OK and then in the end, that exact fear was what got you hopefully, well, part of what got you where you are now.

Ajay

Absolutely. I mean it. I'd left banking for four and a half years and when I came back it, there seemed to be this kind of maturity that had come out of it. Well, mostly at [financial company]. Uh and that was surprising because it had changed pretty quickly, in four and a half years for multiple spectrum, from a culture perspective.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, which is, which is good to know. It's, it's nice to hear that there are some mainstream organisations in South Africa that are changing the culture quickly.

Ajay

And I think as I'm working in the [finance] division, you don't get more conservative people in a bank than the the guys are providing credit.

Researcher

Yes, yeah, I guess. Well, I mean you, you know one of the things that I see, while I've been reading the literature, and searching through literature, is that in South Africa, what a lot of the authors are saying is, you know, because there was such a big focus on the racial problems in South Africa, that other minority groups, like their LGBTI communities, got kind of, they got, I don't want to say ignored, but it was as if they just sort of vanished in amongst the seriousness of the racial problems. So yeah, it's, it's good to hear that they, it's starting to become something that organisations are focusing on again.

Ajay

I think what did, what did happen was like with anything in organisations, you get measured for what gets put in front of your KPI's. So with HR people, it was never really a thing because as long as they hit their BEE points scorecard, um, and one of those aspects was physical disability, they don't really have to do more because there wasn't any issue.

Researcher

Yep.

Ajay

Uh, so maybe somebody kind of out of the goodness of their heart. Thought, you know, let's do this thing. Uhm, companies weren't incentivized to be pushed that way. What we found, let's call it about eight years ago, when we started doing the push for corporates to start LGBT programs Africa. The companies that ended up doing it, uh, had offices overseas. Multinationals but the foreign multinationals. So, you had either UK or US based office, it was part of all of the rage back then. In, in those local offices where a lot of those countries were pushing the same sex marriage or constitutional changes, and that's part of that time-frame where Australia, US, Ireland. All these countries started getting same sex marriage, uhm, looked at and challenged in courts and legislation being put in place so that caused uh, because it was getting pushed through those offices, it became it became this kind of wave of activity in those offices. They went out and offered instruction around the globe saying, do similar in your jurisdiction. And when people like me found out about that, we put our hands up and said count us in, I'll even do it for you. Uhm, and what we found is that's how a lot of it came into being.

Researcher

Yeah.

Ajay

And then, once we kind of started finding out about each other and started networking with each other because we formed this kind of like network of people, and then by setting up that organization that we did, one of the key things that we do in that organization is every two years we do a survey and in that survey we, we rank each organisations gold, silver or bronze as being LGBT plus friendly employers to work for.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

Now, if you want to create peer pressure, that's what you do.

Researcher

yeah yeah. If you don't get the gold then you're getting a bit nervous.

Ajay

Yeah, now you must go explain to your boss why you didn't get gold?

Researcher

Yeah.

Ajay

But the good thing is, companies have to opt in to participate. So, number one they've got to be very open. They have to understand they could score very well or very poorly. And they can do it anonymously, so there's also this kind of peer pressure that was created and what we started doing amongst us, for those of us who kind of knew who would be getting through to our friends. Or you know someone at this place is doing this and someone at that place is doing that. You know, doing that, in a place like Joburg, which is only so big. Uhm, we started putting peer pressure on each other, so we'd say to our buddies at like [financial company], oh, we've got an LGBT program and then said like, how come you guys don't have one at [financial company] and then suddenly they go speak to HR and suddenly, you know, there's peer pressure created and, and stuff is starting. So, the programs are one thing, but you know that's a very modern happening, but to your point where there's nobody out as a, as a businessperson, as a large corporate businessperson, is a, is a huge problem. I think in the [political party] the most senior person that's out [female member].

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

And she's not exactly a role model. I mean.

Researcher

No, no, unfortunately not. Yeah, you know. I mean, in searching. You know, I've, I've even looked at the various political parties and who is out and proud. And I know the [political party] has uhm, one person, but uh, making contact with him was just really hard as well.

Ajay

So, that's that mayoral candidate is it?

Ajay

And they do have an LGBT disk at the [political party]. Let me, uh, I follow them on [social media]. Uhm? They've got a very hard but like yeah, they've got a about 4700 followers on their LGBT page.

Researcher

OK, I'll have a look and see if I can find it. It's nice to, to be part of that.

Ajay

Yeah. And they've got quite a few like counsellors that are there are out and proud. And then [male member], who's the gay mayor UM, uh, trying to think there's somebody else in the [political party]. We wanted them to speak at an event of ours.

Researcher

Yeah. A member of Parliament as well. I'm not exactly sure of his name right now.

Ajay

That's, that's what I'm looking for. I'll tell you in a second, let me just find my emails. I'm hooked, I'm very hooked up in the background.

Researcher

It sounds like it is.

Ajay

Uhm? It's just very difficult trying to filter through emails UM. I have to check my other email in my other emails. I'll try to find it. There is definitely, um, somebody there. And then there's the Gauteng legislature has started a LGBT desk as well and they are very active in sponsoring events and community projects. Uh, so you can reach out to them as well.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, OK great then, I'll definitely do that. Thanks, thanks **Ajay**, I appreciate it. So maybe, maybe we can carry on with the questions. Were you comfortable revealing your sexual orientation because it sounds like kind of, they knew from the start, in your interview, but were you comfortable revealing it and what was the experience like?

Ajay

Uhm? Yeah, I think as you know, my earlier years, I never would have come out until I was at the organization for a while and people got to know me. Here, it was pretty, just pretty open and easy. I'm introduced myself. When I started introduced myself to all my colleagues and while I'm talking through my CV and one of the things I touched on my CV was my involvement with the [sports] team and the NGO. So, like people know very soon who I was, including my, my team that I manage now. And on an ongoing basis. I speak about my personal life; so, I'll speak about my husband because we legally married. Uhm, I'll speak about weekends. You know all of the water-cooler type talk that heterosexual people use.

Researcher

Yes, that heterosexual people do at work, yeah?

Ajay

I, I openly engage in that conversation in the workplace.

Researcher

OK.

Ajay

So yeah, I I very much and really, openly, proudly out.

Researcher

OK, So what would you say are the negative consequences of revealing ones sexual orientation in the workplace?

Ajay

So there's, I think there's two parts to it. I think there's one part of people that are hungry for information because I think they just want to know more and it's either out of curiosity or you know they might have an LGBT affected household where you know they've got a kid or a sibling that's part of the community or even a best friend or somebody in their church group. So, we've got one, that people just wanting information, which is cool, so people will like you know, they have it off the record chats with me like, want to ask some questions and I'm like cool, go for it. Like you know like. So, they, if I can call it that, are the early adopters.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

Then we've got the people that take a little longer, UM, and generally when presented with information, and then they'll decide if they choose to buy into it or not.

Researcher

OK.

Ajay

And those people you know, they'll attend events or, or, you know, join a dial in. But they're more kind of in the background. They more just observing and gathering information. They haven't decided what they want to do with it, yeah? And those people, I think professionally will work with you, but personally will keep like a bit of a space between them in you. They're not going to like, hey buddy, let's go get lunch. Uhm, they're more like, if we're going to get lunch, we are going to talk business and I'm like cool, you know, that's cool. And then you get the kind of kicking and screaming brigade. Yeah, the people that will only do it if it's like enforced training, UM, like you know, the people that had to do diversity and inclusiveness training in like the 90's and the 2000's. where it was uncomfortable workplace conversations, and I think that goes through with it because somebody says, you know, you must go under this manager training and that training is LGBT plus diversity, inclusiveness training.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

And they'll do it 'cause they have to, but they're not. And some of their minds may change, and some of them are going to walk out going, I can't believe I have to do that kak, what a waste of my time. I can't believe the banks imposing its ideas blah blah blah blah.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

So those kinds of people will still, I think, work with you professionally, but there's no way they could have any interest or inclination to hear about my personal life, my journey, the work we're doing internally. Uh, you know, when I present people with statistics and say to them, you know, if you look at it in terms of LGBT plus kind of impact in the workforce, uhm, at, at a moderate estimated it's one in seven employees. And then they kind of go, wow, I'm like yeah, it's I mean, it's one in seven employees and if you look at what we've done for physical disability in buildings, we've got ramps and labelled bathrooms, disability toilets and uh, you know access and all these things, and even access cards that are, that are labelled with people with physical disabilities can get to. We did nothing of the same for the LGBT plus community so trans people have, there's no gender-neutral bathrooms, there's no, no gender pronouns on our signatures. Nobody introduces themselves in terms of their preferred gender pronouns. So, you know, there's a lot of lived experience that people don't realize that we have to do.

Researcher

yeah yeah, that sense. Umm, what do you think of the obstacles in your organization, that may prevent other gay men or other LGBTI plus employees from achieving leadership. What would the, the there's obstacles be?

Ajay

I think the most important thing that I've realized about people being allies in the workplace is attached to be driven from multiple layers. So, at the moment our program in [financial company] is employee driven. It means myself and a few other people or employees have put our hands up to join a steering committee and the steering committee, we set our plan of work for the year and then we do what we say we're going to do and then we give feedback to the level of diversity and inclusiveness. And then he kind of takes responsibility, as one of the pillars, for these diversity and inclusiveness of which one is LGBT.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

Uhm? So because it's employee driven, as opposed to executive driven, uhm, we've got a lot of executive support, but if I think of [industrial company] where the CEO said just do it and if you get any resistance, come speak to me.

Researcher

yeah.

Ajay

That's a big different adoption criterion versus it being employer driven because I feel like we have to convince every group that we interact with around why we're needed.

Researcher

So, so, in other words, one of the challenges would be for, for gay men or LGBTI+ people coming up in the organization, is that there might still be fear. You know, they know employees are driving this process, but not necessarily management and senior management or executive.

Ajay

It, its definitely fear definitely. Uncertainty definitely concerns. Think around brand image, because if you're going to have a, you know a queer CEO, go onto [network company] and talk about the company strategy for multibillion Rand organization and you know they present very effeminate. People may be concerned around, you know, how was our brand perceived. What does it say about the strength of our leadership? You know it may say a lot about the strength of leadership that you entrust somebody as competent, but it's also as confident as that organization is for people that are 'woke', people that are very old school, which is a lot of senior leaders in corporate Africa. It's they, they're kind of, they're not of the same generation and thinking.

Researcher

Very old school.

Ajay

Very old school, you know, they're worried about the holiday houses in Plett and their wine farms and, you know, their prized bulls on the farm. And even, you know, their apartments in in London, or Paris. They're not really. I think they talk a very liberal game, but they're very conservative at heart.

Researcher

Well. I mean, you know this is, this is what we're finding. I mean, South Africa has the Constitution. We have the, the various acts and legislation that are supposed to protect the rights of individuals, even those from the LGBTI plus community. But the reality or the lived

experience of those people in organisations, is not necessarily the same as what legislation expects.

Ajay

Yeah. One of, one of the kind of gatherings at somebody you know asked if BEE action be amended to include LGBT plus elements. Because you know, corporate South Africa only tends to do certain things once it's legislated.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

And I thought that was actually a very pertinent observation because the activists in me is no we can do it. We can speak to people's better nature. But the pragmatist in me says, if you want it done quickly, legislate it.

Researcher

Yeah yeah yeah no, I agree with you. Have you have experienced your sexual orientations to have impacted your journey to achieving the position that you're in now.

Ajay

Yeah, I mean I think to a point, yes. I mean I did leave banking 'cause like wanted to leave it on my terms. Uh, and I think that was very defensive. That was kind of one part, is controlling my destiny. The other part of it was, you know I didn't want somebody to come and tell me I'm not good enough in years from now. I always say, somethings you want to learn now and not when you're 55.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

Uh, so I think it would probably be part of it was me controlling my destiny, saying I'm leaving on my terms. And whatever I go do after this is going to be for fun? Because, I have hit my career straps.

Researcher

But it speaks of some kind of fear that you might find your career limited in some way or have to be forced out of the company in some way. So, there seems to be that kind of fear that was underlying that kind of decision that you made.

Ajay

I think that one part was it was that I don't like to live our life in fear, I've travelled 84 countries

backpacking, play [sports], uhm, scuba dive, jumped out of airplanes. So, I've tried to not to live a life of fear intentionally.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

So I think that was part of how I choose to live and part of our what I tried to do there was control it.

Researcher

OK.

Ajay

Was there, I did not get to a point where I was fearful, but my point was to say, it's like I'm doing it on my terms?

Researcher

OK, OK.

Ajay

Uh, because everyone's got a glass ceiling based on your ability or, or you know, just organisations inability to make everybody's CEO. So, everybody has a point where they reach their glass ceiling. Uhm, I wanted mine to be self-imposed.

Researcher

All right, so tell me, what do you think are the characteristics or qualities that you possess that may have helped you overcome obstacles in organization?

Ajay

Uhm? shew, that's a good question that I think by nature I'm stubborn, UM. I've got high confidence, uh, and I've got a, I think a very high righteousness factor. And it's the kind of the thing that makes a good activist, but also the kind of thing that if used incorrectly can sabotage you so, uh, I think what I had to do was understand myself first. Figure out what I was gonna do with information of what I knew about myself. And here I thought I was going to do with that as related to my income.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

So, you know, I had to ask myself questions like, am I going to work in a smaller company? Because then I can be more open and people don't care or do I work in a big company, and you know, kind of get blanketed by the sheer number of people, uh, do I take a role that's kind of like a financial role in the background and nobody even notices you there other than your other finance colleagues? Or do I take a, work the jobs that I want to work? Uhm, do I take Africa roles because I have to travel within the continent? And what does that mean for me? Because you can [search engine] me and find out that I'm gay.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

If I go to Uganda, that's punishable by imprisonment. Uh, and what happens and how do I explain to my colleagues if I say no, sorry, I'm I don't want to do that business trip. Uh, because most the last 10 years of my career has been spent working in West Africa. Uh, so there's not just career issues as physical safety issues.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

And it could be my colleagues in country that turn me in because their moral factor or their religious values could be uh, higher on the totem of values versus, UM, their working life or being a good peer.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

So, so these are important questions.

Researcher

So it, so it sounds like it was getting to know yourself. But then also having a lot of insight in terms of what, what knowing yourself can mean in terms of your future and your career.

Ajay

Yeah, and I think a lot of heterosexual people don't have to have that discussion with themselves, right? They can just kind of go along and put a lot of the energy emotionally into their work into reading trade publications and you know, going to, uh, you know, listening to TED Talks or something and I'm sitting there trying to Google. Is it safe for me to go to Kenya?

Researcher

Yeah yeah, so it's a completely different experience for, for LGBTI plus person in an organization, because these are considerations that they need to make that perhaps heterosexual people just don't even think about.

Ajay

Absolutely, and the thing is, you know, large corporate South Africa is now multinational South Africa. There's not a lot of large corporates that are just South African only. So these are factors that nobody tells you when you're getting your next promotion. Uh, and then you're kind of, kind of dealing with all that figured in South Africa and this other stuff comes with it and you could be like when I was at [manufacturing company] dealing with Americans who were we at the surface very liberal or my colleagues in Europe, or you know, some super liberal and some conservative liberal, like my Switzerland colleagues were conservative liberal then you that could be liberal but it seems a very conservative country.

Researcher

Yeah. Uh, my colleagues in Spain are just like, yeah, you know, come to gay pride. Like we're straight, but we go to Pride every year, come with us and I'm like it could also be done. So, yeah there's different things to figure out, there's different things that you have to learn in. There's no playbook and there's no, there's no mentorship within organisations, so things that companies need is, mentorship, its executive sponsorship, it's a very clearly articulated HR policies, it's, uh, a lived culture and very clear stance on what happens to people that transgress. Because you know a lot of career assassination doesn't happen publicly happens in corridors.

Researcher

Yeah, it's it's so subtle and quiet, quietly done.

Ajay

Yeah. All somebody has to say is look at me and go like do you really want that car and credit committee to be rolling their eyes?

Researcher

Yes yeah yeah.

Ajay

And it's only, you know that, that's that quite messages passed down that leads to downfall.

Researcher

Yeah which, which I assume is a lot of the experiences of the LGBTI plus community, so.

Ajay

That's the one that can even get into employment? I mean, I've, I've got some friends that are so queer that they struggle to even crack an interview sometimes.

Researcher

Yeah. You know, so they don't even get their foot in the door.

Ajay

Yeah, and they can't help it. They like slapping queens like they're not even cracking interviews, you know?

Researcher

Yeah, which would speak a lot to discrimination? I mean, if that's not discrimination, then what is?

Ajay

Yes, and you know if your CV isn't shortlisted, no one's going to tell you why. But I mean you see these very cold to read, you rock up at an interview and they say we've gone with another candidate, and you'll never know why.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, it's very hard. So, what, what personal characteristics or traits do you think gay men require in order to achieve sort of executive leadership in organisations? What do they need?

Ajay

My advice is very practical. It's do whatever you need to do uh, and I know that's not the, the headline quote, but everyone's journey is different and everyone's circumstances are different. And when it comes to your career, you've gotta do what you gotta do.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

Because the world will change but it's a pity if you've had to give up your dreams to wait for it to change. So sometimes you can, you can go and do what you need to do, and you can, you know, suffer the consequences afterwards sometimes anyway.

Researcher

Yeah. Yep, yes, it's sad that it's necessary, but it sounds like what you're saying is it is still necessary to do whatever needs to be done.

Ajay

It is totally true. Uh, you know, somebody was a CEO of one of the large divisions of a listed group and I met with her the other day and she had gotten fired because she was an open and out lesbian in her organization and it was fine under previous management but then the management changed and the new management didn't like what she was and within two months she went from being celebrated to getting a candid letter saying resign or we are going to fire you.

Researcher

Yeah, sure.

Ajay

So, uhm. You know, there's the, the moral stand, but there's also income security, there's job security, there's reputation. The practical things around generating an income.

Researcher

So it seems like you're saying one of the the strongest traits or characteristics that they're gay people or LGBTI+ people need is flexibility in a way to be able to adjust to whatever the situation is is.

Ajay

I would love to tell everybody to be openly queer and openly proud and to change your organisations. But the fact that we have to stop LGBT programs at all these organisations tells me that you know, we've had legalized gay marriage since the late 90's? Uh, we've had gay prides, we've had everything that people need to get constitutional protection. So, if we have to do all these things are doing now to have people catch up. it just shows how the people haven't put in the time, effort, energy. They haven't done the self-learning. And the pragmatist in me says, the activist part of me says be out and proud and live your life. The pragmatist in me says, do what's right for you. Uh, because when you start, when you start having to deal with income security, loss of confidence, loss in business networks, that's a problem. And the other thing that we don't tell LGBT+ people is that you come out all the time, every time we change jobs, change departments or get a promotion, you have to come out again.

Researcher

Yeah, it can happen multiple times.

Ajay

Yeah. So you know, and that's anxiety driven. That's anxiety prone and, and that's why I say to people do what's right for you. You could be openly queer, never have to explain yourself. Uh, and if people ask, you just got to say it's none of their business. I can be like myself, who's an educator? So, I want to over explain stuff. You get some people that Butch it up and never tell a soul. And if you find out good for you, but they will just carry on doing what they're doing. So, I'm very practical about it and I've got other colleagues that are just, you know, queer and proudly

so and live on a dime and they live their full life. Like you know, a beautiful existence. But what that means in terms of their careers, who knows, like in terms of their career progression. Who knows, they could be blessed with great leadership. There could be basic, very poor leadership. Uhm, but I'm a, I'm a super pragmatist. I mean the older I get, the more pragmatic I get around what I see above me versus what I see below me. We can protect the people under us. I can go and speak with HR business leaders and I can help draft policy and I can help protect people that are getting bullied. But above me there's, there's no protection because there's nobody up top who's, who's got the back of the people there. They just do lip-service but there is no true advocacy.

Researcher

Yeah So, so maybe that that leads well into the next question. What organisational assistance did you receive as a gay man on your journey to leadership?

Ajay

Uhm? I think support of my line manager was important, because I mean he, he hired me supporting his line-manager was important because his line manager also interviewed me. Two layers of management above me that were supportive. Uhm, organizational culture, so there was a LGBT plus program that I joined. So, I think those, those things were fantastic. Uhm? I think that I think there's something about the professionalism of environment that can sometimes facilitate, I suppose a psychological environment that people have to be in a certain way. So if I came out in a in a mining company, I'd quickly get laid into by my colleagues because that environment is rough and tumble; somebody says I don't like you and picks up a spade and whacks you. It's not gonna happen in the boardroom.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so it's a certain kind of protection in corporates, yes?

Ajay

Yes, and that's why I say to all of my colleagues. You know, we have to measure, not that protection I've got at the head office but what is the protection I have in a branch in Toyando. Uh, so, so the breadth of protection is important and that doesn't always cover the most vulnerable people in your organization. Uh, so that for me was quite important. Then there's no way to really measure that. We kind of asked past companies to self-identify if everyone is protected and they're like, yeah it works, but that B*****t.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. I mean, so your experience is one thing. But what strategies or systems do you feel that, for organisations, are necessary to encourage the equal opportunities and development and promotion of LGBTI people?

Ajay

So, I think one thing I didn't give them credit for was the fact that they had, were open to the

idea of looking at a candidate who was LGBT, so that's just something around the culture that was already present before I walked in.

Researcher

So maybe something to do with recruitment strategies then is, is one of the things that they could look at.

Ajay

Recruitment, yes. Recruitment strategies they're about how organizations think of diversity and what is it, what does diversity mean, beyond the scorecard. And then, you know that I think that factors into their hiring principles, you know, if people think about more broadly about [diversity and inclusiveness] including LGBTI+ people, that then translates into hiring practices. And then that then translates into things like mentorship programs, E-learning content so companies can put together to help people like, to figure out who the LGBTI+ community is. But, and I think the company was pretty open minded and open to begin with, which made it very easy for me to be me. Uh, whereas I think, I mean I applied for some jobs in the Caribbean about three years ago. I didn't even get a reply and then I went and googled why and it's one of the most homophobic places on the planet.

Researcher

OK, so that wasn't going to work.

Ajay

Not saying you're out and proud. And that really speaks a lot and that kind of, you know compared to talking about people being open minded like that. So, I didn't really understand. You always see from your perspective around like yes, I cracked it and we don't realize what people on the other side, what they had to deal with. They had to have the headspace to employ someone Like You.

Researcher

Yeah, but it also sounds like one of the things that organisations need is a leadership, uh, executive leadership, that is, that supports LGBTI+ community. I don't know, stance or affirmative stance.

Ajay

Yeah. I like to call it executive sponsorship. Somebody that says, you know I want this to happen, go and do it. Uh, because then you don't argue with this, you don't argue with the boss. If the boss says do this PowerPoint presentation on the following, you don't go like. Oh no. I think there are better things to do to help people.

Researcher

yes, so executive sponsorship.

Ajay

Executive sponsorship I think is huge. Now that I've experienced both the employee driven and the executive sponsor driven. The employee driven is the slow grind while the executive sponsorship makes things happen very quickly.

Researcher

OK yeah, so if you're looking at speed of change, executive sponsorship is obviously the way to go.

Ajay

Absolutely.

Researcher

OK.

Researcher

Well, I think it's just one more question. How effective do you think organizational strategies and policies or at non-discrimination and protecting the rights of LGBT+ people?

Ajay

I think the policies are not fantastic because that sort of discrimination, I don't think it's in its own separate column in keeping track of statistics. I ran into a lawyer who was trying to do research at the CCMA. So, she went through CCMA area trying to see how many CCMA cases there were because of LGBTI+ discrimination and you couldn't find a lot.

Researcher

So, so it's not formalized if it's happening?

Ajay

Yeah, so, so, it wouldn't, that wouldn't be the reason why the vendor comes after you. Some other reason like to go after the quality of your work, your engagement in the workplace, how you dress or your professionalism, they, they would use some other angle that would be used against you and that's the one that you would have to defend then that's the one that then lands up on the paperwork and CCMA. So, we found that pretty interesting because we thought we'd find a lot. And when she told us about her research, I was like I'm gonna hook you up with everybody because like everybody needs to watch out and she came back two years later, saying you guys are going to find this pretty disturbing, but I'm not finding anything.

Researcher

Which is very sad, so it's very it's below the surface. It's not observable or quantifiable?

Ajay

Absolutely so, so that, that for me made me change my head space around policy and enforcement because it tells me that there's not very strong policy because you can't tell me the companies are solving this internally. HR people that don't have the knowledge of the LGBT plus community to figure out, you know what this discrimination looks like. So, you go to your HR saying I've been discriminated against because I'm gay and they go to your boss who says, no, it's not because they're gay, it's because their work is useless. They find all these issues. And then, that changes the conversation. HR says you're claiming discrimination and there's actually a workplace performance issue. Uh, and I think, I think there we've got a real policy hole and we have a lack of precedence. I think in both case law and CCMA law. Uh, and uh, I think there's just not a very strong. Uhm? Not sure, I think if you could get a very good Labour Lawyer, you'd be OK, but I'm not sure how good the labour lawyers are either at understanding LGBTI+ workplace discrimination. I think they'll say tell me what's going on and I'll write up a case for you. I don't think there's anyone that kind of, I don't know how many people specialize in that field that can give advice that's beyond the basic conditions of employment or the Labour Relations Act.

Researcher

Yeah, but also the thing is, is that it sounds like what you're saying is that a lot of the these kinds of discriminations happen below the surface, and they're not really spoken about or observable because you don't know what your managers mind is like in terms of why they are disciplining you or dismissing you and what they, what they're doing is producing documents, saying its performance issues so it's hard to defend against the LGBTI+ discrimination.

Ajay

Yeah. I think there's another part to it, is I think employees don't understand their rights. So, they kind of look at the at the company's policies and those company policies always speak about discrimination in a broad sense. They don't really understand that they've got protection under the basic conditions of Employment Act, the Labour Relations Act. You know, there's other, there's legislation that protects them beyond the company's policies. And that, the employees have completely no idea about. I think that because they don't know that they get advised to follow their company's policies and the company's policies are vague and then therefore they kind of feel like they have no foot to stand on. Especially if you're an executive, right? Because this is as soon as you're an executive. The first thing you do is give me a policy, give me black and white, and then elect to use that policy and then you look at it and go like it's because it is wishy washy?

Researcher

Yes, OK, so I mean it sounds to me like what you're saying is that organizational strategies and policies can exist that almost allow a certain amount of discrimination as opposed to protecting the rights?

Ajay

Yeah, I. I think the policies have to be written in a way that people understand they've got explicit protection. And there's a very easy route to follow documented process for people to go

and, and use that policy protection for workplace protection, because this is character assassination quite often. It's kind of muttering, so it's not you didn't do XYZ. It's hard to identify, so how do you turn that into a workplace dispute uh, and log that as, as a grievance. It's hearsay, it's perception.

Researcher

Yeah. So it's lived experience, the lived experience of, of discrimination, but not necessarily overt that that you can identify it or others can identify it.

Ajay

So I think that's where you've got a firm policy. Uh, explicit guidance, explicit guidelines, and then people that understand beyond company policy, where else have you got protection, in terms of other legislation, case law, basic conditions of employment Act, Labour Relations Act, the Constitution, those kinds of things.

Researcher

Which means that having a sort of LGBTI+ forum in each organization is so important in South Africa.

Ajay

Uh, because UM, diversity, inclusiveness at the moment, that organisations look at is very much based on very old definitions of [diversity and inclusiveness]. Uhm, human resources completely donate toolkits. Uh, even though there's a lot of queer people in human resource environments uh, they themselves are also donating toolkits.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Ajay

Uh, so yeah, there's there's a lot to be done. I

Researcher

Lot of work to be done, but at least **Ajay** people like you are trying or creating these forums to, to assist organisations. You're doing something.

Ajay

We are now. We're hoping that you know one day soon somebody is going to be out and proud in a large organization. At a director and board level and put their hand up and we'll have somebody that that's living truth and we can go like, first one, yes.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, I mean I and this is precisely why I began the study because you just don't see that person.

You just don't. You don't hear about them, they're there, they're definitely there, but you just not hearing about it.

Ajay

Yeah. I know about more ex gay Springboks rugby players than I do about ex-gay listed company board members.

Researcher

Really, that's interesting here.

Ajay

And you think, oh rugby is super conservative. Actually, corporate South Africa at the top is even more conservative.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, which tells me a lot. So, there is a ceiling. There is a ceiling, and my study was trying to interview people that are high up in organisations or in the executive. Uh, and then how they got there and how they overcame the kinds of challenges that we're talking about now. That for me is very interesting. How do they do that?

Ajay

Here.

Ajay

I think some people have seen is their sheer grunt work and determination, they've been at the company so long and they actually get to a position where they are senior enough, but it's never gonna be, it's not going to be [financial company] Bank board level. So, I can now be a head of department, I may even become a bit of a supercluster great, will I ever make it to be, an executive on the [financial company], on the board. Not from a lack of ability or capability but because I'm LGBTI+. A flag waving self, I don't know.

Researcher

Which is very sad, but it what I've seen in my interviews is that the people that work for multinationals where their headquarters are outside of South Africa. So, in other words they comply with our labour laws and our laws in SA but the origin of the LGBTI policies and

strategies and things like that come from outside the country. Those LGBTI people seem to just have better opportunities and less of a glass ceiling.

Ajay

Definitely, and that's really quite interesting because we've got greater constitutional protection and workplace protection in South Africa but we're having people overseas tell us how to apply LGBT plus workplace fair practices.

Researcher

Yes, yes this is what I'm noticing from just the interviews that I've done. So yeah, let's say it, and as you say, there's a lot of work still to be done in South Africa in our organisations to even look like these other international multinational organisations.

Ajay

Yeah, it's, it's interesting like a company like [food manufacturing company] we thought, would be not scared of anything. If you look at like, you know, the marketing that they put out, I couldn't get them to budge, to, to join our survey. Uh, somebody like, that put themselves out there that are progressive, so we kind of challenge in this survey and whatever and interestingly, some of them jumped on it. You know, like hell yes. And I mean the large majority were overseas. Now that we've got the banks involved, all 4 banks, you know, we got all 4 banks involved and every time you get a bank involved, it's 30000 employees that are part of that survey.

So, but, uh, yeah, it's super interesting like the fact that myself and my friends across all these organizations couldn't find a single person that we know of, not a company secretary or at board level, nothing, nothing, nothing. And this is even like, we know people that audit firms and law firms, but they're small organizations. And then it's like you know people organisations.

Researcher

Yeah, and, and this is why I tried to research the South African mainstream organisations because there are LGBTI plus organisations and NGOs where you will find a CEO or somebody in executive that is part of the Community. But in mainstream South African organisations, it's something that we have not seen?

Ajay

No. Especially, I would love it for like [retail companies], uh, something like that. That's just everyday life South Africa. Banking itself, can also be a little bit too professional to say on the executive levels where there's kind of like this genteel environment, you know. We could just be kind of washed over like, like we've done in corporate South Africa, where you know the, the placements for people on a board is never people with decision making, authority is like the HR director or the marketing director. You know, it's like not people that determine the company strategy and its pace. It's just like cool like HR director.

Researcher

And then this is, this is again what I what I'm seeing is that in certain industries or certain kinds of roles in organisations, maybe you'll find an LGBTI plus person who is senior. But, as you say, when it comes to the actual people driving the business or steering their business that is where the absence seems to be.

Ajay

So to that would be very interesting to see if you know what everybody your interview is kind of seeing what I'm seeing. And if their ideas are similar to our logic, then how do we change things because I've got my idea of how I think it should be done and that's what I'm doing. Uh, you know, helping corporate workplaces and doing surveys and that and that kind of stuff other people may have, you know, ideas around you, legislation or, I don't know, uh, you know the LGBT programs to be run as an executive project out of CEOs officers as opposed to now we're doing it out of diversity and inclusiveness. So, you need through the, you know, women in business project and physical disability and mental health and we're all a pillar now in this room and everybody wants a time and everybody feels their cause is the most important.

Researcher

Yes, yes. But again, as I said, you know, a lot of the literature speaks about the LGBTI plus communities, minority status and discrimination, just kind of got lost in South Africa, lost amongst the racial problems. And you know it seems as if we haven't got yet back to their place where it's become important again.

Ajay

Yeah, I think that's a very fair observation because I think they're raising the gender problem is ongoing and that takes up a lot of organisations time, rightfully so. Uhm, because you know, kind of this whole lot of that inequity. But people are completely forgetting about the LGBTI+ in that conversation, and, uh when you start looking at the numbers, actually look at some interesting...I was sharing with our human resource teams and interesting studies where young people are in these spectrums where about 50% of them are falling into some sort of queer spectrum. So it's not a one in seven problem. We know it's a one in two-person problem and that's right up there with gender. That's up there, now I've got a big problem. There's no longer a small problem.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, so, so. In other words, the young people entering into the labour force are going to create significant difficulties for organisations in the future.

Ajay

Absolutely, because, UM millennials, they operate on a on a different spectrum and their accountability to corporates is completely different. We let a lot of things slide but they not afraid to go onto social media and post then they'll video on their YouTube, or they tick tock or whatever.

Researcher

So, so, umm, maybe, maybe that's why it's, it's good that you say that if it comes from executive down in organisations, things can happen quickly, because maybe that's what's going to be needed in the future for quick changes.

Ajay

Absolutely. Like I was showing a chart the other day to HR people message you know it tracked this as group of people from when they were 18 to 23 and then five years later, tracked that same group. What the group did is as the group progresses it changes all of the demographic graphs as it progresses. So it's not an 18-year-old group problem anymore. It's now five years later. It's now, those most people are now hitting 30. So that's your next line of middle management.

Researcher

Yeah, so things will hopefully change as they, as they progress up the corporate ladders.

Ajay

So there's people like me trying to do it the good old-fashioned way, and then there's a very young group that doesn't play that way. They'll ask you to change things tomorrow. So, I think there's a societal pressure that's going to come very hard and very fast.

Researcher

Which is why again, why forums like yours important, because at least you're paving the way for when it doesn't become something that's negotiable anymore. It's something that has to happen.

Ajay

Also, you don't want to impact people's careers where they kind of seen as militant youngsters, so demanding their rights. They are so entitled, you know, how dare they be entitled to workplace rights? Uhm, and then they kind of labelled with like this, you know, like aggressive millennials. And then their careers are screwed for like a whole different set of reasons.

Researcher

Yes, which sounds like something that that we would want to avoid, but might be the only way things will change.

Ajay

It will, but you know that's going to come with, it creates a social pressure, but they'll be casualties of that people whose careers are undestroyed, and that's all that's going to be. Highly intelligent, very driven, highly confident, uh, visible leaders, who then you take out and you kind of go like no, no we can't work with these people, like put them in the corner, you know find me a moderate version of that.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so it it'll sabotage people careers for sure.

Ajay

And there's a duality so that, that's kind of why I'm in that, I know what the I know what the Napoleon campaign has to be, what the end goal looks like, I just don't want to be the casualty of that.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so it gives people the idea that you know they have to take themselves in their lives, their careers, they organisations into consideration before they make whatever move they make and make whatever decision they make.

Ajay

Yeah, it's a difficult thing to say to somebody, you know, watch your career and they kind of go like now managing my career, that's why I want to live my truth and I go great but adult decisions have adult consequences. Not all of them are going to be good for you. But you living your truth may be better for you from a mental health perspective, and you may be spending so much mental health effort trying to hide who you are that you're not fully engaging in your day to day work, and you can bring your fullness of you to your organization, which includes like your creativity or leadership, uh, and everything else because you're too busy. Like trying to live in the bomb shelter. So, if you want if you want to go for it, go for it but the fine print is adult decisions, adult consequences.

Researcher

Yeah, understand the consequences of what can happen?

Ajay

it could be the best decision you ever made, you could be that first person that cracks it and then I'm going to high five you and go, Well done! Or five years from now you're gonna run into that guy or that lady who going to make your life hell, just because of who you are and that's no different from any other workplace bullying except the reason you're being bullied, it's because of who you are. Uh, and then address that as part of workplace bullying so you know, it's all in the game plan.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's tough, it's a tough position that you're in, trying to advise people, but also perhaps seeing the, you know I as a psychologist. I often say you see this disaster coming and there's nothing that you can do because you can see where that person has to go for themselves.

Ajay

Yeah. Yeah, and I'm somebody that same bus, right? Because I'm riding a good wave now but all that needs to happen is my line manager needs to change and this happens at banks all the time when department gets reshuffled, and I will end up with a complete dipshit and then I'm back to uncertainly going forward. I just got back into banking and put myself on the line now there's collateral damage again, woe is me.

Researcher

Yep. Yeah, so it's sad, it feels like these, there's always that, that underlying possibility that things could go wrong.

Ajay

Yeah, that corporate South Africa like, uh, you know the difficulty is corporates demand absolute loyalty and give nothing in return, uh, in return for a paycheck.

Researcher

Yes.

Ajay

My parents' generation of working for a company for 30 years back then when you got you know housing allowances and car allowances and you know companies actually like don't pretend to look after you, they are actually. That's gone. So, you're on an organogram, you're a block, and all that needs to happen is, like, I'm just like put some lines through stuff and they go like OK. Did you just go action this now and like?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, it's sad state of affairs but maybe that's what it is. I don't know. I, I know a lot of the European companies and the US companies are making sort of Wellness and things like that, such a big priority and maybe that's also perhaps, something that's lacking in South Africa now. Mainstream organisations, it's again, it's sort of policy, but not necessarily their lived experience of the people that work there.

Ajay

I think overseas is still a culture of, if I look at a lot of my friends overseas that are my age, they'll spend 5-8 years at a company. I think there's a lot more loyalty. Two-way loyalty that way. In South Africa, I mean, I've got, whoever I work for, whoever pays my salary, has got my full attention. But ah, you know I'm not bright eyed and bushy tailed anymore. I know the reality of being in the rooms where people are just like, keep to your department, truth from your department and just go and do it.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Ajay

Uh, and entire divisions just get a line through it and go like, sell that or close it. We were not making any of that anymore go uhm, and ah, you know, I quantify myself as a mercenary, I do my best and I'm at war every day for the people that pay my salary and as soon as somebody else pays my salary, then I'm on their team and I'm making war as a mercenary.

Researcher

For them, yes.

Ajay

And it's a terrible way to sound like you're working for a paycheck, but I'm loyal to the person I work for when the people that pay my salary and if they're great, then we're good.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. All right. Thank you very much. I really do appreciate all your help and all the things we've spoken about. It's great, it's great having somebody with your experience to speak to me. So yeah, if you do think of any African males that you think might participate other than the ones that you've suggested, please let me know.

Ajay

I'm gonna mail a few people now and just ask them if they would like to participate. I'm gonna copy you in that so that you've just got the email trail and then just don't be shy, just follow up with him and say, hey, you know, I can set up a time to chat, so take it as like a yes until they say no.

Researcher

Thank you. OK, that's a good policy to have.

Researcher

Yeah, these are like type A personalities you know. So just kind of like imply that it's a yes, thank you for for volunteering or like thanks for being interested. Let's set up time to talk, They're very senior. They're good guys. They're on the right side of the advocacy curve and they'll share their perspectives because they perspectives are very, very important.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah it would be great to hear them. Yeah, OK great. Well thanks very much **Ajay**, I appreciate all your time.

Ajay

Well, take it easy. Have a great day.

Researcher

You too.

Ajay

Bye.

Researcher

Bye.

End on interview

Interview Two: Akito

Researcher

Hello **Akito**, can you hear me?

Akito

Hi Shane, I can hear you, how are you?

Researcher

Good thank-you and yourself.

Akito

Great, great.

Researcher

OK, so **Akito**, I'm I just thank you a lot for helping me with this interview. Uhm, I just wanted to know if there was anything that you wanted to understand or wanted to know about the study that I'm doing.

Akito

I'm not, I I don't think I have any questions. I understand the overall study that you want to do. And so, I, I don't really have any questions for now, but as the interviews goes on, maybe if I do have questions, I'll raise it then.

Researcher

OK, OK so I'm I. I'm not sure if it was clear but let me just tell you that the title of my study is: Lived experiences of gay men in the achievement of leadership in South African organisations. So how it came about was Uhm, as a gay man myself, I, I looked at the organisations that I've worked in, and I suddenly realized you don't hear about gay men in leadership. You never hear about a CEO or a, an executive or a director that I it. It just seemed like something you don't hear much about. You might hear in the gay community, but not in an organization. The standard organization, it was just something that doesn't seem to be around, or I didn't seem to hear anything about it. And then I started wondering if, there are gay men, achieving leadership. How are they then going about it? Because if these barriers or obstacles and a lot of the literature says they are particularly in South Africa, then how, how are they doing it? So, this is what's leads to where we are today. Trying to answer some of those questions.

Akito

OK, makes sense, yeah?

Researcher

Alright. OK so I'm I. I don't know if there's nothing that you want to know. Then we can start with the questions and then you can see if there's anything you want to ask. Just please let me know.

Akito

OK, no problem.

Researcher

Alright. OK, so uh, briefly just tell me a little bit about your professional life, in terms of your qualifications, your previous work experience or employers.

Akito

OK, so I started my professional life at, at the [South African university], I taught there for a year as an academic article clerk, and they selected me because I was quite academically inclined. I had quite a lot of academic achievements at that time and there only selector. I think the top ten students from the university class to become associated lecturers, so I did that for a year and then after afterwards I went to [accounting firm]. Where I added two years of academic articles, so as a chartered accountant I had to do those academic articles. They were important and I did them in the financial sector. So, you get, you get, to pick and choose right? So, you can either do your articles in banking or non-banking. So, I did them in banking and then I went on secondment through [accounting firm]. And I went to live in [European country] for three months. I worked in [European city]. Uh, for [accounting firm] and then I did a little European side trip. After my secondment ended for about 3 weeks and came back to South Africa and I spent about maybe a year more at [accounting firm] in a management position. So, it was a assistant manager position, but I had to, you know, manage a team of people who were doing audits in the IT field or in the financial field. Then I think after year in the end I started to go into the banking sector. So, I left [accounting firm] and I went into [financial institution]. [Financial institution] capital to be more specific. So, I spent about four years in [financial institution], and I was like as a finance person. I worked in in the finance department. When I, when I entered [financial Institution] and then for the last year, I decided to branch out to get more diverse experience, so, I went into data and analytics. And I did that for about a year and then an opportunity came about to join [International financial institution]. The electronic payments company, which as you know is an American firm. They dominate electronic payments worldwide and I've, I've, I'm joined them as a senior accounting analyst, and I stayed there for about 3 and a half years and then recently I got a new job at [my company]. So, in February. And I, I'm now the accounting and tax leader at [my company] for Sub Saharan Africa so briefly, that's my, you know, history. My career history.

Researcher

OK, OK, so the, the, the position that you're currently holding in the organization that you're in or what, what? What is it called again?

Akito

It's accounting and tax leader for Sub Saharan Africa. That it's a very small company. UM, well from a South African perspective, it's small. It's about 24 people in the office, but in the factories its about 40 something people. So, in total we have about 60 to 70 people.

Researcher

OK, OK, OK Great. UM can you, you tell me a little bit about your experience of occupying the role that you you're in now? What's it like?

Akito

Well, uh, so, so do you want the focus to be more on me as a gay man and how it is like for me occupying this role?

Researcher

Yeah, I, I think yes and if there are any other kinds of experiences that you are having in terms of being in this role now.

Akito

OK, so uh, maybe let me start with why I decided to join [my company], so at [financial institution], I was out like I actually came out at [financial institution] because if you work for American multinational companies, you will know that they do focus a lot on employee resource groups and so there is one for almost anyone in a company. So, if you're black there is a black employee resource group or PRIDE employee will have a resource group.

Researcher

Yep.

Akito

Hi, I joined and UM, you're joining the Pride organization or the priority. I gained a lot of confidence in myself, and I was able to come out to the office and a lot of my friends and when I was at [financial institution]. I never came out of my immediate family then because there was still, I was still scared of doing that, but Um [financial institution] was very supportive, and they sent me to like the out and equal conference which happens annually. It's very big. It's in US. I was sent to Washington, where I got to hear a lot of inspirational stories from others and community. And I came back with that confidence. Uhm and uhm, I started to look for very similar companies to [financial institution] and at the conference I actually interacted with a number of [my company] staff, and I could tell from, from that being gay was acceptable in their organization and their CEO is a gay man as well. Openly gay man. So, I, I wanted to Join Now because of that reason because if a CEO can be gay and be open about it then, I certainly wouldn't be prejudged if I joined the company.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Akito

Sorry, I'm here also in the interviews, I was comfortable enough. I went through five interviews out of the five, four of the interviewers was comfortable to tell them in the interview that I am gay and the reason why I'm, I'm interested in joining your organization is because the CEO, [Jeremy] is an openly gay man. And so, I told four of them. The fifth person I did not tell and the reason why I didn't tell, and he is the person I report to currently, I did not tell him because he stays in Dubai.

Researcher

Yes.

Akito

He is a man from the Netherlands, so he's [European]. So, just thought because of the climate that he operates. And as you know, Dubai is not, it's not legal to be gay. I thought maybe he would also have absorbed that type of mentality and I do not feel comfortable about after telling him at that time, but subsequently actually like a week or two weeks ago, I did tell him that I'm gay and you know, he was OK with it so.

Researcher

Umm? Yeah.

Akito

So that's how you know I, I came to telling my colleagues at [my company].

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But it does sound like, **Akito**, as if it's something that's in your mind even when applying for the job you were thinking. You know, I'm, I'm looking for an environment that would feel safe and comfortable for me. Being a gay person trying to, to, to, to develop a career, but you want to feel like the environment is right for that.

Akito

Correct, yeah? And that's why I think I'm more attracted now to going to multinational organisations rather than South African based organisations. Because as I mentioned previously, I worked for [financial institution] and I know that even though [financial institution] had a Pride Info resource group, there wasn't a lot of support behind it, like there would be events, but events would be, you know, attended by a minimum amount of people.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Akito

So, so yeah, that that does drive where I want to go, and where I see myself.

Researcher

OK, OK, So, what was your career path within, within this organization? And perhaps serving, what what's served advance your career development or achieving your role that you're in now.

Akito

Well, I think when I was at [financial institution], I spent three years. 3 and a half years. Actually, in a similar role in Sub Saharan Africa. And I looked off to a lot of countries in Sub Saharan Africa. I think there were seven countries and almost 11 companies that I did accounting and tax for. So, it really gave me good experience. And you know that that that did shine through on my CV. So, they were looking for someone very similar here at [my company]. And I guess I was fortunate enough to, to apply at the right time, so that's how I got my position.

Researcher

OK, OK, great. Were you comfortable, um, revealing your sexual orientation to the members of the organization and maybe you could just tell us, tell me a little bit about what that was like? What was your experience of it?

Akito

Well, I, I've I felt comfortable about revealing to, like I said to four of the interviewers and the one I did not. Uhm, and you know, I've done so much and in at [my company] already he said I joined because I lead the pride ERT here as well so you know I've done full leadership talks, I've printed out [my company] pride t-shirts for the offers I have gone and [my company] sponsored pride this year and you know everyone at the office knows my sexuality and knows that I'm gay and I just felt comfortable to reveal that because we just have that culture that allows me to be my true self.

Researcher

But also that, that's kind of what led you to this organization in the 1st place is because you knew that the culture seemed to be obviously more accepting.

Akito

Yes, correct, yeah.

Researcher

What would you say are the negative consequences of revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace?

Akito

I don't think there are any, I don't think there are negative consequences. Well, for me my experience has been quite positive. I think, like a lot of people are excepting in the workplace, there's no homophobia. If I can call it that. So, I mean, I, I have experienced one instance had [financial institution] and I can tell you a bit about that if you like. We, you know I sat next to the HR lady for breakfast in the morning one day and you know I told her I'm gay and, and everything and, and she, she, she supported me in the beginning, right? You get the Pride to lead pride in the region for [financial institution].

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Akito

And UM, y'all like it was great at the beginning. But then, when she got involved in some of the decision making around pride events, there was subtle things that she said to me that I did not like. For example, she came up to on one day and said, **Akito** you should have told the office not to bring in kids to the Pride parade because she thought that you know it's going to influence kids negatively to be around gay people at the pride parade. So, I was like, why can't people bring their kids to Pride parade? It means they kids so indecision. And she said something about, no, you know because people will be naked there or whatever so it's just ignorance on her part. And there was also another instance where we sat down for lunch at the pride parade and then she says so, **Akito**, when did you decide to be gay? And, I said, you know it's not really a choice to be gay. Once again it's just like ignorance that came out.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, well, you know, you know. And, and this is something that, that, that I I, I've realized is that sometimes it's not these overt homophobias like you were saying. There's a lot of perhaps more microaggressions, things that people say that you kind of feel offended about, but, uh, it's not blatant if I can put it that way.

Akito

Yes, exactly.

Researcher

All right, So, what do you think or the obstacles in your current organization that may prevent other gay people or LGBTI people from achieving leadership? Do you think there's anything?

Akito

I don't. I don't think there are any limitations at [my company], or even at [financial institution], that make gay people incapable of achieving leadership. I think it's actually encouraged for gay

people to achieve leadership. Well, you know, if you are gay at [my company] or [finance company] or any in USA multinational, there's a lot more support for you, than a person who is straight, because there's you know, like there's no like straight organization if you know what I mean, it's not straight. We put this moral support structure for, for gay people.

Researcher

OK, OK, and do you think that that is very different in South African organisations?

Akito

I, I think so. I just it's OK. So, the only South African organization I've worked for was [financial institution]. And you know, when I look back on that experience, I just thought that they had a lot of older people in the organization and because of the age gap, I did not feel comfortable about coming out to anyone at the office.

Researcher

OK. Alright, OK so it was more like an, an age thing or a generational thing perhaps?

Akito

It was more of a generational thing because I, I know how, like my parents, even my parents had these old age views about homosexuality. And I know from interacting with my partners parents or with my friends' parents. You know it's always a tone of homosexuality is bad, and you know they, they also like perhaps slightly racist as well. That racial complaints comes from as well. So, I sort of mirrored that when I looked at populations and I ended up thinking that they might also be the same whether it is correct or not. I, I, I don't know if that's just an unconscious bias that I have, but I that just to make me feel comfortable.

Researcher

OK. So, tell me **Akito**, have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted in your journey to achieving your leadership, and if so, what happened?

Akito

No it hasn't impacted at all. I think it's like supported me with leadership positions and I think it will continue to do, to be like. I think I will continue to be supported because of my sexuality. Um look being a gay person at working at [my company]. There's no, there's no stigma as they used to be in olden days where people are forced to be in the closets until they retire or whatever. But when you are out at these organisations, there's actually a lot of benefits for you. You know, you get to be, you get to go to Out and Equal which is in the US. You know they fly you over to Out and Equal and, and they don't pick anybody to go. They have to pick someone who understands like issue, that understands what we're going through. So, there is more benefits to coming out than not.

Researcher

Yes, yes. OK, OK so I mean really it, it, it's almost certain environment that really encourages being out and being open about your sexual orientation.

Akito

Ja, definitely.

Researcher

So what characteristics **Akito** do you think that you possess that may have helped to overcome obstacles or difficulties in the organisations that you've worked in?

Akito

Well, I think UM look a lot of these characteristics come about because of my experience and my job in finance. They don't come about because I'm gay right. So, I think when I was, you know, with my previous experience with [financial institution], and I talked a lot about [financial institution] are because I felt like it was a place where I grew a lot as a professional. I had the right manager who could teach me how they behave and how to plan work so that things get done on time. And how to set expectations because that's quite important. So, I, I had a lot of those learnings, but these are all learnings that anyone can get irrespective of their sexuality. They just need to be in the right environment and corporate and someone needs to take your hand and be like no, you need to plan to meet this deadline and you have to draft an action plan to meet that deadline.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. So, you don't feel that they were, you had any kind of innate qualities or characteristics within yourself that that made it easier for you?

Akito

No, but I don't. I don't think so like yeah, I was recently at an Out and Equal conference and I attended a session about how gay people have a superpower because they can read the room better because we had to do that to survive.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Akito

I don't know if I, if that actually helped me in my career. Like I don't know it like sometimes I feel like I don't have enough of that, like the ability to read the room well, because in my previous job like my manager would, which would say that I need to increase my empathy level because I can't read someone well. So, for me I feel like I have less of that thing. Maybe than someone else.

Researcher

Yeah.

Akito

You might, you know, have more ET.

Researcher

But you know a perhaps **Akito**. It's also linked to the kinds of experiences that you've had in your life since coming out. Uhm, It, it sounds like it's, it's been a relatively OK journey which means perhaps that that that sort of empathy for, for difficulties hasn't been necessary for you to develop, because your, your journey hasn't been quite that's frustrating or challenging.

Akito

Yeah.

Researcher

OK, do you think that there are personal characteristics or traits that gay men require to achieve executive leadership in organisations?

Akito

Just be open and just live your full self. Don't hide. Be someone that is a role model. I also spoke at Out and Equal this year and and the session is recorded as well so if you, if you like I can send you a copy of the session, so you can see what I talk about that in my session. I talk a lot about how anyone can be a role model in a company.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Akito

Uh, so in in role models help because people who might not be out can see that, OK, it's safe to be out. There's no negative repercussions for that other person who is outside the office. So just be brave and be a role model out there so others can see you and you don't have to be a leader to do that. Anyone can do that.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah so. But so maybe we, we, we were talking earlier about those innate qualities being having the ability to be brave to having the self-confidence to be brave perhaps those are some of the personal qualities that, that gay men might need in in terms of developing a leadership career.

Akito

Yes, yes no. I agree with you. I agree with you, being brave and being able to come out to the office, that is, those are qualities, yeah.

Researcher

OK. So, in terms of the organization. Uhm, you. You've mentioned that the environment has been very, very inclusive. Are there any other characteristics or assistance that you feel the organization is provided that's made the journey easier for you to leadership?

Akito

Uhm, I don't think sorry so important. We like my leadership journey is slightly different to someone else who might be promoted into only right. For me, I was, I came from [financial institution] with a lot of experience and then I was promoted when I joined [my company], you see. So, I sort of got the leadership position through giving the experience and the fact that [my company] is accepting of people who are of different sexualities. So, it's it's difficult, like it's a different journey that I've taken.

Researcher

Yes so your personal experience hasn't been that they've done something specifically to help you grow into leadership.

Akito

No no, I just grew into leadership because of my previous experience.

Researcher

All right, so. So then, perhaps you can tell me in terms of a normal or another, another organization, what do you think, assistance they can provide that that would be necessary to encourage equal opportunities or the development of LGBT people.

Akito

So, I know that at [my company], we have mentorship programs. Uh, so I know that at Pride they also try and link senior leaders, gay leaders with junior staff members so they can sort of see what the journey has been like for senior leaders, and then sort of get inspiration and knowledge required by doing that. So, I think we in social programs are important.

Researcher

OK, alright, so providing a program of mentorship. Uhm, kind of taking somebody in a in a lower position under your wing kind of thing.

Akito

Yeah, Yeah.

Researcher

So in in terms of organizational strategies how do you effective do you think they are? So in in, with the strategies and policies in terms of non-discrimination and protecting their LGBTI community.

Akito

Well, like what policies when you join [my company] there's actually on your employment contract that says that you can't discriminates against all other races as well so that it's an agreement that you signed with [my company] and then, I think that every year they also do training to ensure that you understand the importance of diversity and being there's a chief diversity officer as well, so she would you know, make announcements and stuff too for us to understand why it's important to have diversity, so there's a lot of support here.

Researcher

Yep. So it it kind of starts from the beginning. Uh, with the contract and, and there's, there's various avenues and, and support structures in the organization.

Akito

Yes. Yes.

Researcher

K. All right, well, Akito those are all the questions. Nothing specifically difficult, I hope for you. Is there anything else that you feel is important? So, in other words, it's important in terms of a gay person achieving leadership in South Africa specifically Uhm, that you think an organization can organization themselves can do, or the person himself characteristics that that they might be able to develop to get them to that leadership post.

Akito

Umm yeah, I think it, it's more power being out there and being a role model for me personally. That's the only characteristic that I can think of because as soon as you're out there, people do take notice of you and that increases your chance of getting that leadership position and people start to know you. You know, so you know, that's the only characteristic. That's my point.

Researcher

So, being being a role model and, and as you said maybe being a mentor to those people that are below you in organization.

Akito

Ja, Ja, those are the only things I can think of.

Researcher

OK. Alright, thank you, thank you very much **Akito**. I, I wonder if, if, if you can assist me, because one of the challenges that I've noticed in, in this study is finding openly gay men in South African organisations, in leadership in senior leadership and, and, and so it almost seems like it's proving my, my, the reason for the study that I am finding so few people in South African organisations. So, I don't know if you perhaps know of anybody else that you feel fits into that role. So, it's somebody that's open a gay man that's achieved executive leadership and working in the South African organization, I would be very interested to, to speak to them too.

Akito

Yeah, I don't really know anyone else with, you know the call to action for this interview we took onto our WhatsApp group. And that's where I picked it up and that group has, like most of the gay people, like mostly men, that work in corporates across South Africa, so I don't know how many people responded to that message. But some yeah, like maybe try and get the message, get the word out there again through. That was so good.

Researcher

Yes.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, thanks. Thanks **Akito** and you know, as I say it has been challenging. Although I've, I've approached many people in organisations and through various LGBT organisations. Uhm, there's been very few actually responses. UM, which is a concern. I'm not sure if it's proving the point that the, that gay men don't come out in the organisations, so if they become leaders they're not open about this sexuality? Or is there some other thing going on that's making people hesitant.

Akito

Yeah, yeah. No, well, if I think of someone else, I will give him your contact details and you can contact correctly.

Researcher

Yes, yes. Thanks, thanks very much **Akito**. Now I really do appreciate your help. It's been great speaking to you.

Akito

OK, hopefully I gave him some help.

Researcher

Yes, well, it's an interesting thing. You know. One thing I, I discovered in the literature was that multinational companies that tend to comply more with the country of origins and Labour Relations and inclusivity policies, tend to be more inclusive than organisations, for instance, in South Africa that originate here and use our Uh, constitution and laws. Although we do have a

very good constitution and we do have the Labour Relations laws and various acts that protects employees. Uh, uh the, the literature says that South Africa and, and various other places just are not, as good as the multinational companies. So, it does seem like that's kind of what you're saying, or your experiences been. It's been much more positive perhaps because you've worked in those kinds of companies.

Akito

Yep. No, no, I can definitely agree it's, it's, it's a thing you know multinationals do look after the people better. I do have. I think I do have two friends who are in leadership position. They are gay. And then I will just have to ask them if they're willing to participate in studies like this.

Researcher

Yeah, you you will you welcome to I'm you know that the idea is to provide information to get the information published so people know what is going on and perhaps can make steps to, to perhaps adopt some of their multinational companies' policies in terms of managing staff and, and inclusive, inclusivity.

Akito

Yep.

Researcher

So that's the hope. Well, thank you **Akito**. So, yes please if you do think of anybody, you're welcome, you're welcome to give them my details. They can contact me or call me, and I can explain what's going on and what I'm doing. So, they're welcome to do that.

Akito

OK.

Researcher

Thanks very much **Akito**. Uh. Keep well and, and if you do want any other information or anything please you are also welcome to call me.

Akito

OK great thanks, thanks Shane.

Researcher

Look after yourself.

Akito

Bye bye.

End on interview

Interview Three: Athol

Researcher

Hello hello (**Athol**), how are you?

Athol

Good and you, sorry, I'm just gonna put my camera on now. Just a second.

Researcher

Alright, great, thank you very much for being prepared to participate in my study.

Athol

My pleasure, hope I can add some value to you in your PhD.

Researcher

Yeah, I hope so. Now you might not know if, if it was clear. I just wanted to tell you the title of the study so that you know exactly what I'm doing. Uhm, so it's called the, it's the lived experiences of gay men in the achievement of leadership in South African organisations. Uhm, So, what, what lead to this study was that I observed, just working in, in government and working in corporates in my in the past, I, I notice that you never heard about gay men in leadership, particularly executive leadership or senior leadership. There was just no, you just don't hear about people in those positions, and I wondered is it because they're not there or could it be that they're not open about their sexual orientation? But yeah, it was just an observation. I made dinner and that kind of leads to where I'm at now with this study trying to understand gay men that do it chief UM senior leadership or executive leadership. How? How do they do it? What is that that gets them? All the literature says is that there's still a lot of discrimination in South Africa. There's still a lot of prejudice. There's a lot of talk of glass ceilings and things like that in the literature. So, it's just, I find it interesting. If somebody has achieved it, what have they done? What qualities do they have? Or what organisations are they working in that they're getting it right?

Athol

Yeah, it's very true. I know the case of a CEO who couldn't come out and then she eventually left.

Researcher

Yeah and that's that's more the common theme in in the literature and what, what we hear about from people's experiences. All right. So yeah, so I wanted to know those that have achieved it. What have they done? How have they have they? Have they got there? So yeah, that's basically where I'm coming from.

Athol

Ok cool, I think it's still a struggle.

Researcher

Yeah all right. Well, if you're happy and we can, we can carry on with the questions. Or if you've got anything you'd like to know more you can. You can ask me now.

Athol

No, that's good

Researcher

OK, perfect all right so, so, so briefly can you tell me about your professional life just in general in terms of your qualifications, your previous work experience and.

Athol

OK.

Researcher

Things like that.

Athol

Anything else?

Researcher

No, no yeah that's it.

Athol

OK, so to start off with qualifications, I've got my master's in psychology. I'm doing my PhD as well. I have a honour's degree in business management so that's something that's like an NQF8 like a MINI MBA. Then I've got all the banking regulations exams right. I've worked for various banks and started my career at [financial institution] at the age of like 20 and became a manager branch manager at 21 for [a financial institution]. I worked at [financial institution] for a few years and then I moved onto but [another financial institution]. I worked for [financial institution] for 8 or 9 years in total, and then I moved on to [a financial institution] as a regional sales manager. And then I moved [to another financial institution] is the regional manager. That's what I currently I'm doing. So, in total I've got about 16 years banking experience in retail, business banking, professional banking and foreign exchange.

Researcher

OK, alright and the position that you currently occupy.

Athol

So I'm a regional manager.

Researcher

So you, the regional manager? And what does, what did this entail?

Athol

I looked after the whole of [one province].

Researcher

Who was?

Researcher

OK, OK, so the entire region and, and, I assume you've got people that you're managing.

Athol

Yeah.

Researcher

OK.

Researcher

OK is it sounds like it's a significant number.

Athol

I'm not significant, it's manageable.

Researcher

Alright, so can you, can you tell me a little bit more about your experience is just managing in, in the role that you're in now as the regional manager?

Athol

So my experience, just qualify that question a bit more.

Researcher

You know, just in terms of being in the role. I'm working in the organization perhaps, in terms of your experiences as a gay man in the organization.

Athol

Yes.

Athol

Yeah, OK so, so, look when I started out, you know, uh, nobody knew about my sexuality, I was very much in the closet about being gay. And I did that for very, very long time. I think throughout my [financial institution] career up until towards the end of my [financial institution] area and I ended my career in [a financial institution] as a, as a business manager so, that basically is somebody who looks after a portfolio of high-net-worth customers. Like you know your [food manufacturers], your [retail company] that kind of customers, your hospitals. So, that was my customer base. R100 million turnover clients. So, I was very much a manager itself, at the time, which is quite senior in a business. And then I used to look after team of other business managers. Uh, and I was still quite young, and I can't remember but I was in my late 20s. And at that time my boss was a Muslim, so I'm Muslim as well. And I think a lot of the stigma of not wanting to come out because I was so afraid of what he would think of me. You know, he would think I'm antisemitic, I'm against the religion. How can I. So, I used to go to mosque, and I still practice, I still practice my religion, but was always afraid that you know what will people think? What would the, the other Indian, Indian kind of people think though? That was a big thing for me.

Researcher

Yes, yeah.

Athol

I come from an Indian environment, an Indian culture, Indian family and in Cape Town there is a lot of Muslim Indian and you know Malay people and they're still very religious, or they are to a point. And there is the sort of environment that I was part of for very long time and I'm not sure if you know Cape Town but the southern suburbs, southern, and lot of people in the southern suburbs, and there's a lot of big Muslim community.

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

So that was always my thing. You know my thing was, was, and a lot of my colleagues were Muslims as well and a lot of my clients and I was always afraid. What would these people think of me? Who is worried about what they think? And I was really afraid that they would reject me or, or not treat me with the same kind of dignity and respect that they treated other people. Although I was out to my family like my family knows about my sexual orientation and, and they're in Johannesburg and I'm in Cape Town and that distance, does make things a bit better. And, you know, we're not in each other's space. I think at work I was still very cautious. So my private life was very private. Nobody would ask if; that's the thing, the beauty of being in a leadership role. Nobody asks you anything. You know, nobody will come to you and say are you married? Ask you if you married and ask about your kids or anything about your personal life. And I always kept that distance. Always maintained that professionalism. I would, of course, engage staff about their lives because you know, you care. But nobody did ask me, but I think people assumed and make their own assumptions. And you know how it is. You always talk about somebody above you, it's always the case.

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

And so, I kept quiet about it for very long time up until 2017, I think , 2017/2018. And, UM. I was working at [a financial institution]. I was just about finishing off at [a financial institution]. It was towards the end of my career in [a financial institution] and then 2017, I think, October 2017. I then met my ex, my now ex. And yeah, I think the prestige of his like, his title like, he was a medical doctor. We fell in love. We got together. Things progressed quite quickly and then we ended up living together and then I became brave at that point in time. I then started disclosing that, I didn't say I was gay, but I would mention what my partner's name is and we lived together and it was surprising that the people below you or on the same level as you sort of accepted

you, you know, without any negative connotations, or if there was anything negative, nobody said anything.

Researcher

Yes yes OK.

Athol

Uhm? So, my coming out was sort of, was relatively fine in terms of career limiting at that point in time. No, no serious issues or anything like that. But still there were these people who silently didn't sort of accept you, you know. And I, and I remember one of the reasons why I was a bit disgruntled at [a financial institution] was because the, the executive was a staunch family Muslim guy. And I won't give his name away. If I do say his name, you can just change it or whatever the case may be.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Athol

I remember feeling, so I won't give his name away because he's still there. And I remember I, I know he came across the fact that I was with a man and, and then at that point, I applied for an area manager position, sort of a level up. And I has been doing the role for a while, but I remember talking to him and he's, he's view or his, his attitude towards me was completely different. I mean, this is the guy that loved me. You know, that really respected me and valued me and I mean he promoted me once before, you know?

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

He's his feeling in his attitude toward me, and I can pick, I pick up the nuances of the

conversation was completely different. And that was, that was, that was it, that was the point of no return. I couldn't. It was very difficult to, to progress further. Uhm?

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

And eventually I just left. And then so, so, I think the feeling there was because, I think it's the, the like my boss at the time, he was Muslim. They married; they have children. They, this normative society, cultural society and then you come in there and it's one of two things. I think the first thing is, they have the prejudice towards you. I mean they weren't always sort of overt, like overtly prejudice, but they've got this prejudice towards you and then the second thing is that we don't fit into their world. I can't talk to them about children. I can't talk to them about my wife.

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

They don't see you as part of the Boy's Club, but they see you as this outsider that exists, you know. And that has always been the most prevalent thing for me in my career, up to now is that, uh, with other heads and executives, whether or not they're happy in their marriage or whatever the case may be, they seem to have this club where they belong to, and you just can't fit into that normativity because I am different and I will always be different.

Researcher

Yes.

Researcher

Yes, OK, yeah, so I mean it, it sounds like there is, it's almost, it's a sort of a underwritten prejudice and underwritten exclusion, UM?

Athol

Yeah.

Researcher

Perhaps because of, that's the club they are part of and that's how the club is.

Athol

Yeah. But that, that is, I would say, fundamentally, one of the biggest reasons is that, you come in there as a gay man and you don't have any sort of normative morality, normativity like, like heteronormativity, you know, you don't have the wife and the kids that you talk about because I hear their conversations, you know. And they they, they have that common bond. And, and we I don't, so they would look onto you and think that you'll always be the outsider, who always, always be the outsider.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Athol

And embedded prejudice does influence, unfortunately, the decision making when they want to bring somebody into that executive level. They want to bring somebody, like a gay person from a lower level up to a more executive level, it, it does, it does influence the decision making absolutely.

Researcher

So then they're looking for somebody that just fits the mould, right? It's just yeah.

Athol

Yeah, yeah, yeah cultural. Remember its culture, so it's their cultural model. They don't want to talk to somebody who's a man having sex with other men. They don't want to bring that person into their fold. They don't want to hear, and also religion. It's the, I won't say it's, say that

Christianity or Islam, it's a religion aspect like, like I know, in the, in the bank that I'm working at. All those guys are quiet, it's not religious, but you know, for them God is always there, an element in their lives so anything that kind of contradicts that, they don't want to be a part of it. You know they won't want to have a conversation about, UM, men having sex with other men and or men in a relationship with other men, they want to. It doesn't fit into their norms. And, and like you said, it's the mould and that's the big, big thing, and I again, I think it's about breaking down that stereotyping, that stigma and, and until we do that, I think it'll be really slow, very long journey before you find LGBTQ plus whatever people.

Researcher

Yeah.

Athol

In, in very, very senior roles.

Researcher

Yeah, OK, So what, what was your career path within this current organization? And maybe, trying to elaborate on what advanced or aided your career and getting to leadership?

Athol

Yeah. I, I never told anybody. That's how I got you. I never told anybody about my sexuality. So, when I, when I move whenever did [a financial institution], I was a regional sales manager for the Cape. I looked after the Western Cape and Southern Cape and when I went to the interview, I remember, they asked about that and I just said, I'm single. Never, ever once in my entire life did I ever say that I was gay.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Athol

And. And even there, when I got to [a financial institution], and it lasted for about two years, and

we dealt with executives like the CEO in and out with the other board members. But the CEO or the CFO, CIO you always deal with these people, and you find that, and you get along. I remember, I remember I got along with the CEO at [a financial institution] pretty well like he was a lot more open to diversity. And I remember that about him and, and that made a big difference, but there were still others were not very open to it and you can feel that. And then you, you always feel excluded. But how I advanced, that. I always put my CV first and never my sexuality and at the time we did this, I was, I was open, so everybody knew about it, but I always still felt like a bit of an outsider. I left as well. Uh, I didn't fit. I didn't like the culture, so I left because of that and, and then I moved to [a financial institution]. It was the same role with the regional manager which is a bigger region. Biggest scope, a lot more. Also, a lot of interaction with the CEO and with a lot of group executives. So very much interactive that level, but it was all professional. I never disclosed anything about my sexuality and then I came out, because I had to come out all the time in a different organization and this organization, I came out again and was still with my partner at the time. Things seemed fine, but again then you feel like you get excluded in some group, like the other business heads. I, I wasn't welcome very much in their space. Uhm again, so I think the answer to that question was I didn't say anything until afterwards.

Researcher

Yeah, I see.

Athol

And then when I did say anything I I could, I did feel excluded. A lot of the times and.

Researcher

So, you, you got the position before being open about your sexual orientation.

Athol

I've never come out first, then apply for a job. No, always the other way around?

Researcher

No, I, my next question is basically you know, where you're comfortable to reveal your sexual

orientation to the people in the organization and obviously you got to the point where you felt comfortable, but still then experienced some exclusion because of that.

Athol

Yes. I never, I never came out, so whenever the conversation was, I would introduce my partner. So, I took him once to a work function that so that's how I came out. You know when I introduced him to the CEO and I was like this is my partner, so that's how I came out and it's all fair and well. But then, when we broke up and then, I didn't tell anybody specifically, when people ask them, I would tell them, but now I feel like I went back in, back in the closet again in terms of a corporate environment.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Athol

In the game, it's about a career growth and I'm trying to grow my advance, my career and so now I feel like I have to put that side of me back in the closet and then just showcase my credentials. My experience, my qualifications, first and then come out later again.

Researcher

But it's interesting **Athol** because do your straight counterparts come out to the people in the organization. Is it something that's expected that you come, and you say I'm a heterosexual man? You know, in other words, it still seems like there's some kind of expectation that if you're a gay man, you have to come out, to, you have to talk about your sexuality.

Athol

Look, it's not, you don't have to. Absolutely not. But if you, if you think about this, you know in a boardroom when you're sitting around with other EXCO members and the conversation about family comes out, what did you do this weekend with your, with your husband and your wife? You have to be a part of that conversation. You understand it. You cannot exclude yourself because by virtue of doing that, then you're not forming relationships. So, you're in a boardroom

and you guys talk about oh we went golfing or went fishing or we went camping or we did this, so we did that, and they do all different things. You can't say I did nothing, I've gotta say I did this with my partner, you know, and you gotta give you a partner a name because, and that's how you come out. You never say I am, but it's always in conversation. And then when you do say that because it's corporate law and governance and all these diversity employment equity in all this nonsense that tries to govern us, people won't say anything. They'll keep quiet about it and then they won't engage you further, so you try and open up a conversation about what you and your boyfriend or your partner did, and you can easily tell that they stop engaging with. They didn't ask you anything further and like, if you tell me that you went somewhere with your wife, I'll ask you a further leading question, but they don't.

Researcher

Yeah.

Athol

But they have to respect you, because if they don't, it's discrimination, but they don't have to engage with you. And that's how that's how you feel excluded in organization I, I remember once I said to my boss, I said something. And I said to him, hey, you've gotta get use of this and he says, and he said to me, hey bru, I'm not sure if I can. Just, just like that you know, and I couldn't do anything. I didn't want to say everything, I just let it, I just let it be, but it was something gay related. If it comes to me, I'll tell you what I said to him.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Athol

And, and, and two a point where I can't share with other people then. We do catch into some non-normative things. You know, on the weekends or whatever the case may be, I can't share that. As an example, I'm going to a drag party on Saturday night. I can't share that with my colleagues, never in a day. I can't say to him, Saturday night I went to Camps Bay, and we had a beautiful, fabulous time wearing women's clothes. My staff or colleagues, people look at me

and will frown upon me because it's not their norm, no. And they can't say anything, they can't overtly discriminate against me, but I will feel that. It makes sense, it makes sense to feel that.

Researcher

Yes, yeah. So it's, it's a subtle kind of prejudices, subtle kind of discrimination. Uhm, not overt that you could, you can say this is what's happened, yeah?

Athol

No. People are very careful because we, we in South Africa we have pretty well governed in an organization. You know, you can't overtly say to somebody I don't want to talk to you, be off or whatever, but you can't make somebody feel excluded. And when career opportunities come, then they have this prejudice that oh, this guy is not going to fit into the cohort of EXCO members you see because, but they won't say it's because he's gay.

Researcher

Yep, Yep.

Athol

That's where, that's where it becomes very career limiting um.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, So, what would you say are the negative consequences then of revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace?

Athol

Number one I think career advancements you, you are hampering your career, limiting your career, your career. I think, I also think like relationships. You sort of limit your relationships with certain people because they stop engaging with you or only engage with you in a professional level, so you can feel excluded and yeah, I think those are the two big things for me. It's, it's just yeah.

Researcher

OK, OK, OK. Do you think that the, the obstacles in your organization might prevent gay men or other LGBTI+ employees from achieving the leadership roles then?

Athol

Oh absolutely. Yeah, I mean, I mean there's a, absolutely at a very very senior level, yes?

Researcher

Yeah, OK, so the highest echelons of the organization, it's, it's kind of, there is a glass ceiling for you in this organization.

Athol

Yeah. And there is no, there is no organization. If we could just edit the company name out when you're doing the thing and, there is no gender diversity that exists in our organization. There's a policy, yes.

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

But no awareness that's being created. There's no, because you have to, as Exco members, you have to, you have to talk about it in order for it to become real. And we talk about a lot of other things like disability. We talk about Africanism and we talk about BEE. We talk about a lot of things, but we never talk about LGBTQ+, we never talk about HIV and AIDS. We never talk about stuff like that.

Researcher

Yeah, so it's. It's almost like a no-go zone, a no, a no talking subject.

Athol

It's just not spoken about. And they look at the gay man as flamboyant, as the gay man that is not taken seriously. You can't take him seriously. He can't think strategically because his mind is probably in the gutters all the time. That's the view.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted your journey to leadership?

Athol

Yeah, I think it does. I think it is today as you and I speak, I definitely think it does.

Researcher

And what, what ways, what ways did it happen for you? That it, it prevented the growth.

Athol

I think for me, growing or advancing further than I am would probably be very limited because of thinking that, one of the reasons is because of, I don't fit into that because there's only men in the level higher than me that I engage with. And I do sit with that team from time to time, or a lot of the times, actually, as part of projects. So, the executive, I sit with them as part of projects where a lot of them are men and they're all married, and they're all like that. Yeah.

Researcher

So that they all fit into the sort of normative heterosexual patriarchal roles.

Athol

All five of them. They're all married men in their 40s, probably miserable, and they probably go to church because they must, and they probably try to do the best, but they will never get along with somebody like you know. I mean, on a professional level, no problems at all. But then the personal level. So, I think that would be better. It does limit me; it definitely limits me.

Researcher

OK.

Athol

I'll have to leave and go to another company to get to the next level, and not thinking about.

Researcher

So, I was also wondering what, what, what characteristics or qualities do you think that you possess that might have helped you get to the level of leadership that you're in.

Athol

OK, I, I had to sacrifice a lot of my stuff that I wanted to do. Like, I had to sacrifice coming out as an example and I do try and conform to that kind of normative, normative society. So, so, so I just sacrificed a lot of that, you know. And, let me see if I can explain it to you.

Researcher

But it sounds like, so you almost had to withhold a lot of who you are, in order to be able to achieve leadership.

Athol

I couldn't be my authentic self. I could never speak about what I did on the weekend. Like, oh, you know, in your 20's in your working hours as a manager at the time and I used to go out to a nightclub on a Saturday like we all do. I could never say, I went to a gay club. You know I could never say that. I could never speak about stuff like that. I could never say that I went out with my gay friends, and we went to a gay, gay camping site. I could never speak about stuff like that because I had to fit into their world. I'd always fit into this normative world where I'm a good Muslim boy that goes to Mosque on a Friday and follows his religion. And you know the typical, Uh culture typical yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, did you, did you find that you had to kind of change your stories because you know the words, I went to a club but not mentioning that it was a gay club or you are talking about that, that you had to just adapt your story? Or did you just not share it at all?

Athol

I would from time to time I would adapt it, so it is always you would go out to a straight place. Never ever mention gay, so I had to adapt it, but not too so much so I don't get caught out in my own lies and, or I would not say anything to a point where it depends on who the audience is. So, it's like somebody in a MANCO session, then I wouldn't say anything. You know, I'll just like, keep quiet about my personal life, just try to limit as much information as I possibly give out. Anybody asks, I'm just single. What am I doing? I'm just studying, so for a big part of my life, but I think I focus on studies. I, I just placed a lot of what I really wanted to do, and I think, the time to achieve this career was so important because it made me feel seen and heard and respected. I felt like the being gay would not have, I would not have achieved the same kind of respectability, I had to, yeah, like, yeah, I think there's probably pictures of that as well.

Researcher

So, so in other words, **Athol**, it sounds like almost each organization that you've worked in, if you look at the past, is that each time you had to go through the trauma of coming out again.

Athol

Yes.

Researcher

Yeah, if you were prepared to be open about it, but even then, it you felt, excluded if you did, yeah, OK.

Athol

Yes.

Researcher

So then what, what, what, what personal characteristics do you think that game in require to achieve executive leadership?

Athol

Ah.

Athol

I don't know, I think. I think there should be a level of authenticity. They should number one, be real about who they are. If you are single gay man then embrace it, if you have a partner and you really want to be in a relationship with a picket fence and kind of conform to the heteronormative normativity's then that's fine. Don't try and fit that. Like at this point in time in my life, I don't want to be in a, in a relationship with anybody, you know, but I don't feel like I need to go and find a man just so like, I'm fit in with other people and with other colleagues of mine who are in relationships and miserable and unhappy. And, well, I don't feel happy whatever the case may be, I think that's important. I think I did that for a long time. I thought that if I was with this with this, this, this doctor is an example and people would respect me more or they would accept me into their folds. And that's how I thought. Unfortunately, I thought if I if I'm also in a white picket fence relationship, then great, I'll be accepted and to a degree I was actually, you know.

Researcher

So it gave you a sense of maybe I've got something maybe in common with, with their, the stereotypes.

Athol

Yes. Because now they can ask you about your partner, you see. But now, now they can't ask me but they're not really interested in just asking about me specifically. You know, because we always ask about your husband, your wife, your children, you know. So now I don't have any, uh, so now it's my cat that they ask about it and then. But I, I think important is, I myself. I'm not going to be something that I am not, and I will advance because I have the credentials and I'm

smart enough. And, I have to believe in myself, and I think a lot of gay men, women, they deal with that insecurity. The insecurity of not having security of who they are, their identity and when you're feeling insecure it really messes up with your psyche. You know it makes you feel not confident, you don't go after what it is you want. You don't look, you don't go for the opportunity that may be there in the organization. You limit yourself.

Researcher

Yeah.

Athol

And I think I that's one thing I never did. I never limited myself, you know, I, I would go for it no matter what, because I never let my sexuality sort of define who I am. But a lot of people, unfortunately they do. They allow their sexuality to define who we are, and then they don't feel confident in their own skin.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Athol

And you know that if you have to be, to operate at that level, from MANCO upwards, you have to have a certain level of confidence, you can't second guess yourself, you know.

Researcher

So, so it's, it's confidence in yourself, but also being genuine or authentic as the person that you are.

Athol

Absolutely you can't. You can't be confident in yourself if you're not authentic. You can't. It's not possible. Umm, and that's something I, I learned, you know I, I don't feel like at this point in time, a single gay man, my colleagues respect me, my subordinates respect me, my seniors respect me and, and if you don't respect me, I'll take you on.

Researcher

OK, so it also means being, being prepared to challenge people that are prejudiced or stereotyping you in in some way.

Athol

Absolutely, absolutely if you get a nuance or a hint of that, you have to, you have to actually be able to actually, actually say something you know because policy dictates.

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

Then you're challenging because just can't just challenge them because you feel that they are, uh, otherwise you'll be like fighting a fight to hold.

Researcher

So you have to you have to be able to back yourself up with policy or the legalities or acts and things like that, regulations?

Athol

What I'm saying, something that contravenes any policy in order for you to sort of challenge them. Otherwise, if you're gonna say, oh, you guys all hate me because I'm a faggot then you sound crazy, you know so I can't do that but, but yes you have to be able to and you can only do that if you're confident and you you know yourself.

Researcher

Yes, yes. So, tell me now, in terms of organizational assistance. Do you think you received any as a gay man on, on your journey to leadership?

Athol

Oh no, never not. Not, not ever, ever, ever, ever never.

Researcher

So no, nothing, nothing that the organization did to make the journey easier or better for you.

Athol

Not once, not a single day or an hour, never, not existing.

Researcher

OK. So now do you think the organizational strategies or assistance that are necessary to encourage or equal opportunities or the development of LGBTI people?

Athol

Yes. I think so.

Researcher

What do you think they would be?

Athol

I don't know. Do you think there would be so just to say that again?

Researcher

Yeah, and what what? What organizational strategies or assistance do you think they could offer? For instance, LGBTI people to help them grow into leadership.

Athol

I think you can do like a diversity and inclusion workshops. You know, stuff where you talk. You talk about 'cause you always have stuff we talk about, race, you know. We always have

diversity. Inclusion talks about race and religion and culture, and they're trying to create awareness of better. Because if you have more knowledge then you break down your own prejudice in your mind. I think they should include LGBTQ plus all that stuff into those diversity and inclusion talks because organizations do have, they do have programs that cater for diversity and inclusion, but it excludes LGBTQ+, you know, and I think once we do that, you need to be able to explain to a, if you are managing an entire call centre or if you manage in a branch, or such, I should be able to have a session where everybody in my, in my region understand what it is to be, what is the LGBTQ plus? What is trans, what is Bi. They need to be able to understand it? They don't have to accept it, but they should be able to understand it because if you can understand it and you can respect it and it starts there. We don't have such a thing and I think there's there's stuff that we need to get. Yeah, have conversations.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah, and you know or something else that I just noticed when you were talking it it does sound like, a lot of the, the lack of inclusivity starts at the top of the organization, of the people at the top, you know, almost the culture that they represent, the culture, that they, they have between themselves does filter then down through the organization.

Athol

Yes. Yes, yes yeah. Culture is top down here. They can say what they want. Culture comes from the top down. You have a bunch of, uh, boardroom people. Uh, and I was like, I can't tell you why, but I'm telling you this, as a matter of fact, culture is, it's, it's top, top down. Like I, I have a scenario story like a true story of how it impacted somebody quite senior, but culture is top down. If, if, if you don't hear about it, or if, if EXCO isn't brave enough to talk about LGBTQ plus, who in the organization is? Your mother and father doesn't talk about being gay? Who in the household is going to?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Athol

Who's going to? No one. So, what do you do? Is you year from other people, but then you hear

the wrong things? So, what happens is people kind of Sprint. This this image at the more lower level, you know, but there's, there's nobody championing what it means to be gay. You don't see, I sit on employment equity, and we cheer for getting people of colour promoted and making sure that they are representatives. But we don't talk about the other kind of diversities such as, uh, you know, being homosexual, or you know other, other minorities. And I think better.

Researcher

For instance, transgendered.

Athol

Yeah, the transgender, they should also form part of it.

Researcher

Yeah, but you know, I know. I think something that I picked up in, in, in, in studying the literature is that in South Africa due to our racial history, Uhm, other diverse groups kind of got lost amongst the, the, the, the seriousness of the racial issue. If you know what I mean. So, there was so much focus on the race and racial, racial inequalities that the other diversity groups were lost, lost in under that shadow.

Athol

Yeah. I think that may be true to an extent, but we are like 25 years plus out of that Apartheid, you know. I'm in a few organizations. A lot of them have lot of structures in place. You know the policies and processes and, and forums in place to ensure that equality is met. I think we've overcome that hurdle by now, you know.

Researcher

Yeah, so it's more about including the LGBTI.

Athol

And I think it's I think. Yes, I think it's time to include other minorities as well. I think we've, we've overcome, overcome the hurdle of color now, honestly, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah. So how effective do you think organisations, strategies and policies or at non-discrimination and protecting the rights of LGBTI plus.

Athol

Take overt discrimination, will always be protected. If you, if you, if you feel that you are discriminated, we have an employment equity policy, we have a Labour Relations policy, we have ethics policies, so we have policies that protect the rights. We have The Constitution. If you are overtly discriminated at, somebody calls your moffie to your face, then you have the right and grounds to take the person on. But there's always the covert discrimination that you can't do anything about the feeling of being isolated. That feeling of not being included, the feeling of not being promoted. You know you not being promoted because you don't fit in with the Boy's Club. You can't do anything about that. You can't go to an employment equity core forum or to your boss or two and say I've not been promoted because I'm a gay guy. You can't and...

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

That is why. That is why I say that to your previous question. We moved past the race thing now. We need to include other forms of minority groups into, into corporate like transgenderism and transsexualism or the other ones, so that we show, organisations need to show tangible that they've promoted a gay person who is seemingly out or to a trans person to a senior role, doesn't have to be EXCO, can be to a supervisor role or to a manager role. And if you show, the organisations shows that because everybody will know this person is trans, you know? Or this person transgendered from man to woman, a woman to man. Then you're showing that you are being progressive. But I, in my 16 years, I've never seen a transgender or transsexual person promoted. Never in my life seen gay people, gay men as senior roles, but it's very few and far I can name them. I can count my fingers on my hand. I can name them, out of gay people that I know that are in senior roles so far.

Researcher

Which is, which is obviously **Athol** it as I'm doing this study, Uhm, I'm realizing it's, it's hard to find gay men that are open in a South African organization willing to participate, so perhaps that is an indication that there are very few.

Athol

Yes. Yes, so there is this whole male masculinity. You know, you have to be there. You have to be part of the Boy's Club. If you're not, you will be marginalised guarantee.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Athol

So it's very rarely you find the CEO's gonna come out to you and say I'm willing to participate in the study. Because I don't think there are many. And those who are they probably been dismissed by the board.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Athol

And then at that point, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, that which, which is very sad to hear, considering the Constitution that we have and considering the labour acts that we have in the organization, in, in South Africa.

Athol

Yeah. A law only goes so far you understand because it is the mindset. You have a, a 60-year-old man who's all his life been like part of this, uh, heteronormative man. You know, he's not

going to just change his view and allow some gay men to come and run his business. That is how deep this thing is. You know that's it's heteronormative, heteronormy. It's like they dominate the corporate culture. And that is not going, you have to change that person. You can put a law there or a rule, but that just means that I won't speak about it openly. You have to fundamentally change the psyche of those people and, and yeah, that is a challenge.

Researcher

So, it sounds like you, you almost saying the only way to, to change it is to not have those people there anymore, not have them in the, you know, senior positions.

Athol

I think longer. Yeah, I think that'll take at least another 20 to 30 years. You know you need to get him to die first, so the next level, but, uh, I think government should take this a little bit more seriously where they can. Because, I mean, you have the BEE, the BEEE act, and I think it should allow for that. If you really want to be serious about including minorities, LGBTQ, they didn't, unfortunately or fortunately, comment at a government level. You know, where, where they enforce this. Yeah, because we are minority. You know we are pretty much as shamed as a black man was 25 years ago. And that's true. So, we should be part of those numbers, I believe. Definitely, we should be part of those numbers we struggled. Or maybe not me, but the guys, the gay guy who came before me struggled. You know, for various things. And I think I, I think we should be part of those numbers where they have their 10 black men and black female. There should be like 20 gay as well.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, I hear you. Yeah, to be inclusive in terms of all, all minority groups.

Athol

Yes, and you know it sounds extreme, but I'm saying to you now if you, if you look at and if you look at a uh employment equity dashboard for any organization, what do they call this? I can't remember. I will have to search feature in my computer. Uh, we do the stats every year, so every year I, I'll, I'll look at the, the Department of Labour and their recommendation of how many Blacks and Whites and Indians and Coloured must be an organization. But give me, the

name escapes me, but if you can Google the report or I'll send it to you afterwards and on that report, we focused on male, female, we focus on Black, White and all other races and then we put a percentage, right? And then we presented the Department of Labour, they say yay or nay and we look at it at different levels. So, we look at EXCO level, MANCO level, senior manager level. Then we look at skilled and unskilled. And, and that's a government thing, right? And I think at that level we should include other forms of minority. We look at disability. disabled people also feature as well. Uh, by doing I do feel that. If we wanna see a change then we need to include it in the report like that somehow.

Researcher

Yeah, at that level. So, you're talking about almost the labour, the Labour Department, and how they do everything and, and what they're expecting from organisations should also be more inclusive.

Athol

More inclusive, yeah, absolutely. Because people are a lot more liberal about their sexuality and they're gonna, there's gonna be a clash someday. You know where there's a lot more gay people being born today and there's going to be an organizational clash someday. And universities are transforming a lot faster, much quicker than organizations, so there will be clash someday, you know. Uhm? Yeah, so I don't think so. I'm just trying to get the name of the report, but I can't find it.

Researcher

OK, no, no, no. Don't stress. So, the only things I wanted to ask you. I noticed on your demographic form that when it came to the gender identity you, you said 'other' or it's not one of the, the ones listed.

Athol

No, no. It's a man. A man.

Researcher

OK, so, so, uh, cisgender male is how would you describe yourself?

Athol

Yeah, I'm a man. Yeah, a gay man.

Researcher

Alright, no, I just wanted to clarify that. So yeah, the, the other thing then is just if you do know of any, any gay men, openly gay men that are working in South African organisations and have reached sort of executive levels. Uhm, I would appreciate any kind of referrals from you or suggesting that they contact me if they want to be part of the study. Because as I say, I, I have discovered that there is a limit to, and I mean, we've sent out a call to various gay organizations and, and, and organizations which are supportive of the LGBTI community. And despite that, there's still a very limited number of people prepared to participate, so I don't know, is this an indication that there are few executives' gay men in in on that executive kind of level in organisations? Or are they just not openly out about this sexual orientation?

Athol

Yeah, I think in most cases they're not openly out and there are very few. I think it's a combination of both. I know 2 at that level, for now. I'll definitely pass it on to him. He is the national sales manager for [a financial institution] and, [N], he is the provincial head of Business Banking at [a financial institution]. I think he's out, I'm not quite sure if, he's, he's very manly man. He looks very manly, like a normal man.

Researcher

Yes.

Athol

Not sure he is out in his organization, but I know he's, he's, I know he's gay for that, yeah. Uhm? But you're looking for people in cooperative, alright?

Researcher

You, you know what I'm trying to find out. Mainstream South African organisations so you know, like you were saying, in the banks, those kinds of industries. I wanted to see, you know, is it the

same? You know, that, yes, there are organizations that are very inclusive in terms of LGBTI people and, and those, those organisations, we, we, we kind of understand and are aware that they're all inclusive. But I'm looking at mainstream organisations. The normal run of the mill organizations and companies in South Africa. What are they like and what are the people that work for them? What are the experiences like and if they do a get to executive leadership, how, how do they do it considering the challenges that we've been talking about?

Athol

Yeah, I, I got two people. I'll send them your details. Three, there is [K] of course. I remember, he once, he took a female to a year end function 'cause he wanted to appear as being straight.

Researcher

You didn't yell, didn't want to face that kind of frustration or challenges, yeah.

Athol

Yeah, I'll, I'll send your details. I still have it in my, my [university email]. I'll send it through to them and if they contact you, great.

Researcher

OK, perfect, that's, that's great. Thank you. Thank you **Athol**. Yeah, it's, it's been great speaking to you and I, I think a lot of what you've said in in in this interview is, is similar to what the literature has stated in terms of what we expect. The kind of glass ceiling that you've spoken about, the kind of frustrations. There's almost microaggressions that, that people experience? UM yeah, so it it's been very nice talking to you. It, it kind of helps me understand what the literature is saying.

Athol

Yes. But like I, I hope you make a difference.

Researcher

Recommend to you too. I hear you also studying. So yeah, I hope it goes well for you too.

Athol

Thank you very much.

Researcher

Thanks **Athol**, have a good afternoon.

Athol

OK you too.

Researcher

Alright cheers bye.

End on interview

Interview Four: Daniel

Researcher

Hello **Daniel**, how are you, hello.

Researcher

OK, I, I assume you've seen the the title of the study that I'm doing and I'll tell you what, what started it is that my observation of seeing organisations sort of government and, and private organizations is that there was just no gay men, any LGBTI people whose voices you could hear; you don't hear about senior directors or leaders in organisations from the LGBT community. And I just started to wonder what is the reason for that? And, then obviously going through the, the literature and and studying, studying what, what, what others have said these. There's a lot of prejudice and discrimination still happening to the LGBT community. So, my interest was then, if, if they're all gay men in executive leadership, have they done it? How, they overcome whatever obstacles or expected for our community? So, that's, that's kind of how it started and that's why I'm trying to do the study now.

Daniel

OK.

Daniel

Uhm, I yeah. I've been thinking I thought about it after our conversation, the last time we spoke and I might not be the perfect candidate for one of your, your interviews, but yeah, I mean there's let's hear your line up of questions through the interview.

Researcher

Yes.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

But a lot of it is, uh, inane is not the word. For me I didn't. I didn't really come out.

Researcher

OK.

Daniel

In the workplace but that's because it didn't allow it. They put, they, if I can say the words, you know, there would promote it in ways like like, like [accounting firm] for example. I must say very advanced in there LGBQ keep you know, but there was, you know two members quite senior in

the partnership. Uhm, however. When you start getting down to the old Boy's Club, it's not easy. It's not easy to actually just come out and say you are gay. You would rather just keep your personal life personal.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, and I mean that is kind of, **Daniel** really, what, what one expects, particularly in South Africa, in the organisations and the kind of history of our country in terms of discrimination against minority groups, so it's, it's. It's not unexpected.

Daniel

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

Alright, so, so well, let's see if I ask the questions and see, you know I I don't really mind that you are experiencing that or have experienced that in the past. Uhm, but well, we'll see how it goes. Yeah, let me know what you think.

Daniel

Yeah.

Researcher

OK, so let's just start with you telling me about your professional life. Just in general, in terms of your qualifications, your experience and employers.

Daniel

OK. Uhm, on, on the educational side. I got a bachelors in which I majored in marketing and informatics and thereafter I travelled to the UK. I worked for the [media network company]. I did sort of project work, data analysis uh, and that's pretty much where I started my, my career in technology.

Researcher

Yeah.

Daniel

When I returned to SA, I worked for a company called [credit company] which, uh, which quite actually was one of the companies that was a little bit more, new. I was both ways inclined, all messing around but that was in my 20's and it and it was a company that had a very wild social life.

Daniel

Uh, [credit company] dealt with claims processing between the medical schemes and or the medical scheme administrators and pharmacies, doctors, and hospitals.

Researcher

OK.

Daniel

Uh, and there, I moved up basically went into the business here is and became a business relationship manager and, and I was with it for a while, 7 years. And then I moved into the big corporates. Uhm, I worked for [a technology company] as a consultant, uh, and I went back to because during my studies, I worked for [retail company] during my bachelors. I did part time work. I worked for them for quite a while. Uh, yeah, went back into retail and got onto the [clothing store] projects, uh, when [an investment company] invested into them? And then I worked on several projects there, and then I finally headed up their business intelligence department. Uh, so dealing once again with data, but more in a reporting manner.

Researcher

Yep.

Daniel

It was at that point, I was with them for about five years I decided I, at 35/36, I'm gonna go and do my MBA full time [university]. Uhm, so I packed up and I went down to Cape Town and did my MBA full-time for a year, or year and a half, including the thesis and dissertation. Uh, and then I came back and joined [a technology company] again, just for a while, and then I moved through another consulting firm...for 2 years. I then took a sabbatical for a year, and I travelled South America. From Argentina, right through up to, to Panama. Uh, and then on the return of that I joined [an accounting firm].

Researcher

OK.

Daniel

Uh, which was I must say, actually, I enjoyed working there, but then I got a good offer from a company called [educational company]. So, this is basically a company that helps universities take education, online, formal education. So, bachelors, masters, honours and uh, that was, I don't know, in hindsight, now when I look at it, uh, I suppose during it, that I was a horrible decision because working for, I can't generalize and I won't, I won't do that, but working for Texans just seems you're a, you're just a mule. Uh, that's all they wanted out of you and I just I couldn't, couldn't stand it. And also, they almost, uh, they were almost authoritarian in their management approach, and I think you know, South Africa being a very much a community driven, decision-making culture or, you know, we're not scared to voice our opinion. They didn't like it, but I was quite willing to, to tell them their fortune, and then I left them, uh, end of last

year. Uh, and then I took another few months. So, I have investments in a [food processing] company and at the time, I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do, if I wanted to take the lead, to work for myself or go back in corporate, so it took me 3 months of partying and then I decided to take the leap. So right now, I am, uh, the majority shareholder in a [food processing] company, which is sort of prepared meals, groceries, everything and at the moment, I'm managing that whole project to bring this all together to launch next year. So, so that's where I am at the moment.

Researcher

OK. Alright, so I mean that was my next question, is what you're doing right now? So, there I've got it. What, what is it like in in your current role? What, what's your experience of it?

Daniel

Well it took me, you know, being used to working in a very corporate environment and you know the now my partners and they are friends. One is very close one, I mean, I've known since I was 18. You know, they are men's men. You know, swearing, screaming, shouting. Very much unlike my kind of management style, which is very diplomatic and professional. You know they, they, basically you know they are a [supplier] to, to restaurants. Uh, and I've worked with that company since you know it was, one of my strategy projects, not doesn't necessarily my thesis, but the one of the strategy projects I did on the on, was on their company. Hence, was actually, I saw opportunities and wanted to move into it so they, they all, I feel far more comfortable they now. Uh, they all know you know that I am gay and there's no, I have no issues about it. I feel very comfortable.

Researcher

OK.

Daniel

Uh. I think because of the smaller environment and my freedom, you know I'm dealing more with external, external sort of service providers and technology providers and marketing people, I suppose it's if I have to do a comparison to you my corporate world, it's probably the most freedom free I've felt to be myself, no.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, OK to be yourself. So, in in terms of your career path within this organization and it, it sounds like you, you started out almost using them as kind of part of a project, but it's, it's developed from the can you, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Daniel

Yeah, so it's a different project and then we actually started launching, we called it [cooking company].

Yeah, we sort of portioned fresh produce and, and the raw material, raw ingredients, and then you would cook it yourself according to a recipe.

Researcher

Yes.

Daniel

Uh, and that I invested in as a silent partner, which but I've been, I couldn't really be a silent partner. I was involved you know when I could. And I think with lockdown, you, I mean, you can imagine 90 % of their, of their business income was coming from the wholesale. Now they provide up to 200 restaurants and it was probably a turnover of about 100 million a year.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah.

Daniel

Went down to practically zero in one month and when all restaurants shut so they had to immediately swing their attention around to online or to retail, and that was the one way of doing it was to going online and it was a good move up then and now I think through the year, you know, realizing that there was, I was not going to be going anywhere. I think that's also one of the problems is, you know, black economic empowerment, when you get to [your forties] you realize you know, you not really going to go any further, uh, it's just one of those things and I've always wanted to, to own my own business. Or you know, being at least a partnership with this and I took that leap and decided to make, make it work, and I think that's and then I think, especially, you know that they've, with my corporate experience and my technology experience and my, my thesis in my MBA that was based on E-commerce, uh, and I haven't got a, I've got a strong e-commerce background. I mean, even you know, education online was all a form of E-commerce.

Researcher

Yes.

Daniel

Uhm, and you know, that's basically how I sort of evolved into the position to head up and drive the retail business.

Researcher

Great, so in in terms of your sexual orientation, do you think you were comfortable revealing your orientation in the, in the current role that you are in, it seems like they're friends. So, they kind of knew you before but did it. Was it something that you had to reveal to them?

Daniel

No, it wasn't something that I had sort of say, I think they knew, and I mean ja, it's you know, there's the odd joke now and again but it's not something we commonly talk about.

Researcher

OK.

Daniel

Uhm, but no, it's definitely there and I, I have no concern about any repercussions. That's the word about you know, discussing the, you know, sort of the gay interactions, gay uhm, activity that I might have.

Researcher

Yep, OK.

Researcher

Do you think that there are negative consequences too revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace, just in general?

Daniel

So I, I would say I don't know if it's just, not, not in my current role, no. But however, you know with the uh and I don't, I don't, I don't want it to be racial about it, but you know, with, as opposed to the black men, certain team members in the more, you know, the blue-collar range of company, I won't really act on it [sexual orientation] or show it or discuss it.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

They can probably figure it out. And then so be it. But I'm not gonna encourage or entice that kind of confrontation around it or discussion. It's not actually there to me, is it's my personal and I, I have no reason to discuss it with them.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

Uh, however, I mean my my executive chef, you know, I know that also, she's gay, UM, but also something we don't actually talk about in the workplace.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

Uh, it's. I wouldn't say it's because we don't want to. I think it's just personal life is personal life, work is work. Uh, But there's no fear around it. But I think the corporate environment, especially now with the team that I was in within the consulting environment with, it was a very much, there was only one woman, there was only one woman in the team, very much a Boy's Club.

Researcher

Yes yes yes.

Daniel

Uh, and there, you know, revealing, not that I had to was, ever asked. But you know, I wouldn't openly just divulge it to them because of, I suppose, the fear would be of prejudice thereafter.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah,

Daniel

I might have just been my own perception of it, it's not necessarily the truth.

Researcher

Yeah, you know, it's not a blatant thing where they discourage you from speaking about it, but there's a kind of a feeling of, this isn't a safe space to be talking about it or to be sharing my experiences.

Daniel

Correct, yeah?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. Now, obviously I you you've spoken about your current, organization, but what do you think the obstacles in your current or previous organisations or that may prevent gay men or any LGBT employees from achieving leadership?

Daniel

So I think I don't think I, so that's the crux of the question. I'm going to carefully think about what I'm saying. Answered it., there is a place for, you know, for LGBT, I don't know how many how many plus there are today or no, but in that environment, within leadership, so you know there was a lady in in the partnership realm within the accounting side who took an active role in, so that was why I liked [accounting firm] because they actively uh brought awareness to it, you

know, and, and sure that any prejudice would not be tolerated in the company? Uh, allowing, I think maybe more, and I think this is where it comes in, the youngsters to actually come out for easier than our, I have to work by generations here. With our age group, you know, with my age group, with growing up and matriculating in '93, it still was very subdued, it wasn't an easy thing to even discuss. Where I think now with bringing it into leadership forum, for the youngsters, I feel they have an opportunity.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

However, sorry, I've just got a call. I just wanna I don't know who this is. I just wanna check quickly.

Daniel

So yeah, I feel I feel that you know, if you have to go by generations and I'm not, I'm always, you know, the generation gap definitions are so vague. But you know, if we have to look at generation, you know prior or you know the new, I think it would be easier for them to lead into a leadership role. However, saying that, I think you know, uh, if I think about [technology company], there was a, you know, there was a gay man, in leadership, quite senior in management realms within [the technology company], but he didn't lead any forums or anything here in terms of allowing non-prejudice, but he definitely made it into leadership, and I don't think there was any there any sort of road blocks or anything. I think the consulting environment was very open to allowing you to progress through those barriers.

Researcher

Yeah yeah yeah OK.

Daniel

But this might be the exception.

Researcher

Yeah yeah alright.

Researcher

Uh, so I mean, obviously, have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted your achievement of executive leadership positions.

Daniel

Not directly, no.

Researcher

Alright.

Daniel

Not that I'm aware of.

Researcher

But it does sound like part of these, some of these organisations did make it a little bit uncomfortable to be there and perhaps that's part of the reason why you, you moved out and away.

Daniel

Yeah. It's, it's, it might not be what you know, one thing about that leadership saying, saying something. But trying to instil a change in the culture is difficult. And it's the culture of the company that makes it hard to actually allow yourself to be freely open about your sexual orientation and to move up. Yeah, and I think that can inhibit an individual's ability to progress in their career because they, they almost become, I wouldn't say recluse, but that rather they would probably become a little bit more, uhm, you know, rather not be so outspoken about it. But it makes it difficult environment when you have a culture of you know like Christmas parties, bringing your partners or whatever. And or family orientation and really is geared towards that.

Researcher

Yes.

Daniel

Where it is difficult to bring your partner with or you know if you have a partner.

Researcher

Yep, yep. Well, so, what qualities do you think you possess, characteristics that may have helped you overcome obstacles in in your organisations?

Daniel

Uhm? Well, let, let me look, do we take the positive first?

Researcher

OK.

Daniel

Uh, you know I've, I've got a very energetic uh, personality, you know I'm very, I wouldn't say flamboyant. You know, I'm very good at networking and I have ability to speak to anyone. And

you know, I'm not scared to speak or, you know, I've got the ability to engage and build relationships with the with every culture and every persona?

Researcher

Yeah.

Daniel

And then I think coming with that, I'm also a very good actor. You know, I can mould and fit myself into it, whatever the environment needs me to be. That's helped me progress but also in a way sometimes it makes me feel like I'm not always at my true self.

Researcher

Yeah, you can't really be authentic, authentically you.

Daniel

Yeah, that's it.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. So, I mean it sounds like you're saying two things. It, it's about being able to adapt or be flexible enough to fit yourself into certain situations or certain groups, but also, there's, there's a sense of confidence in yourself in your ability to engage, to network, to do that well.

Daniel

Yep.

Researcher

OK. Do you think there are specific personal characteristics or traits that gay men require to achieve executive leadership?

Daniel

I think, uh, definitely the ability to be able to network with all sorts at any time.

Researcher

Yeah.

Daniel

Uh, I think that's, you know UM, and to be able to hold a sense or level of professionalism while you do that, uh brings you into leadership. Uh, of course your capabilities in your, you know, the usual consistency, work ethic, that all comes into it.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, OK.

Daniel

Uh, yeah. I think it takes time, uh, I will, you know, put your, your thesis question on the on its head now, but I don't think that it would inhibit that being a gay man would inhibit your progress. Uhm, by you know, letting people know. Uh, who you are but when it comes to like I said, the culture or the team environment, uhm, if you know it's more, more openly now that you've known that you are gay, it might inhibit you through your peers?

Researcher

Yep, yep. So, kind of socially, socially it there would be a definite impact.

Daniel

yeah.

Researcher

OK, yeah.

Researcher

Did you think that there was ever any organizational assistance that you received as a gay man in terms of achieving leadership.

Daniel

Do you mean it was like I ever coached or....

Researcher

Yes, assistance or coached, whatever it is, with its policies, assistance, or coaching, I don't know.

Daniel

No. And I think that was probably I'm going back to his being a good actor. I don't think I ever I, ever openly mentioned at all.

Researcher

Yeah. But again, there's that element of was it safe to mention it?

Daniel

Yeah, that's where I'm going. And once again I think maybe you know that leadership side would be willing to like, like I said, like [accounting firm] being quite open and publicly, you

know, holding LGB sort of events. You know, to encourage it. However, you put in 99 % culture, that's still inhibits it, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, and I think that that's my next question is you know what organizational strategies or assistance do you think is necessary to encourage equal opportunities or the development and promotion of LGBT employees?

Daniel

So I think like I mentioned to you now, it's time and it's an active, uh environment. You know, you know bringing in Pride or, or promoting you know there's been material, you know, commonly about the gay environment. And using the best example that I haven't mentioned, ready, which was [accounting firm], they've you know, they've elected a specific champion in their leadership to drive it.

Researcher

Yes.

Daniel

And it's you know, it's I think, and then just you know, for the youngsters or you know the that are joining into the companies now, at least there's a sense that they're not alone and that they get, they can. And I think that's encouraging, with time, a career path or career route or consultation or coaching that's available for them. But in the past, that never been openly mentioned. You wouldn't know who to talk to about it or, or discuss you know what the repercussions for me in this environment would be.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

Uhm, I mean. Yeah, so I think that's one of the key things. From your question, I think is in the in, in the leadership or the current leadership structure, if they don't have someone currently and at the next level, they need to find a champion and they need to, need to invest finances, first of all into it.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

To encourage open discussion and, and to show that there's availability of coaching in the systems.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, you know my next question actually leads a bit from that. How do you, how effective do you think organizational strategies and policies or at non-discrimination and protecting rights of LGBT people?

Daniel

Sure. So, I think the leading corporations that have been to like [accounting firm] and [technology company]. And I mean, you know, consulting groups are normally more, you know far more ahead, but I would, I mean, I wouldn't say that, like you know, especially in the retail environment, you're clearly gonna have a, you know, gay people quite open.

Researcher

Yep.

Daniel

Uh, which is you know, like you can clearly see. But I think it's your, it's your old school, Boy's Club and that kind of thing that you know, this is still something to breakthrough that's in these organizations, that can make it sometimes difficult. But I think I think over the last two decades, I wouldn't maybe even push it that far. I think over the last decade, we've seen enormous progress with, within your leading large corporations uh, when it comes to depending on the smaller medium sized companies, it depends on the individuals within there and how comfortable you are. They might, you know, there might still be prejudice. I even wondered to myself, you know, maybe even you know, would you be openly discussing your sexuality openly with someone in an interview, in a small medium sized company or even that and that to me is, is not always, there's still a sense of concern that it might affect your employment. Not so much of progress into you into executive leadership. But yeah, but I think now if I had to look at really know if, like you know we, we openly, open about my sexuality in, in and going applying for a corporate position, probably would be in my benefit, if I look at company corporates and large. Not talking about the medium and your sort of more though, if you like, it's like, do you understand what I'm saying?

Researcher

Ja, I, I agree with you so. So, in other words, you know even though they might be legislation in South Africa or Constitution in South Africa, and even policies in place, it's still got to do with like you're saying the old boys club, that the culture in an organization will still have an impact into LGBT people.

Daniel

Yeah.

Researcher

Well, I don't know. Well, that's it's **Daniel**. That's the last question. Is there anything else that you'd like to comment on or say in terms of, of being a gay man in in corporate and in leadership?

Daniel

I think just more and more specifically about maybe my interview. Is that I am the more conservative. Well, I can't say that I mean. I mean, I openly told your partner and everyone at that party knew, it's not like I wish I wasn't gonna. Maybe I'm a bit harsh with myself. You know it's not something I sort of walking in and announce, you know I'm not gonna bother.

Researcher

Yeah. You're very cautious about announcing it.

Daniel

Ja, you know, if they figure it out well, good for them but I do you feel overall in a summary, that South Africa is probably, you know with its constitution, with its rights to allow gay marriage and now I think, and this is more, the more educated in the more sort of employed environment world has allowed the space for, for development. Uhm, and openness about, about your sexuality.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

I think we are moving in the right direction, and I think it's that prejudice and that fear of coming out or being open with your sexuality is diminishing. I don't if I had to do comparisons with other nations in the world. Uhm, Latin America, for example, I must say was quite progressive. Uh Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador however then you got the more conservatives, Bolivia, you know, that weren't.

Researcher

Yeah.

Daniel

Uh, and if we do comparisons ourselves, even us compared to the Americans like the Texans for example, it's just not at that all easy to show your sexuality openly there. In a first world country, you would think that would not be the. With the UK. I mean, they wouldn't care. Their provision is good. So is Germany, so is France.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Daniel

So, I think you know if I'm putting South Africana on a scale in comparison to the world, you know, I think we've especially in Africa we, we've come a long way. But yes, I do think that it comes down to me, to the culture. Uh, and it's, it's sort of the semi- cultures, those little, you know, those micro cultures within organizations that sometimes doesn't allow you to be yourself.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah. OK, well I mean, I think that's the, the end point. I being yourself, does that limit your achievement of leadership in South Africa? And it sounds like there's a possibility that there is still hesitation in being able to be authentic. Um or a worry that that may somehow impact or impede your progression.

Daniel

Correct, yeah? Yeah, so that's why I said, you know, I'm not always just sitting there because I mean, I've taken quite a swing now in terms of moving away from the corporate environment, even though I found that my last employer, which was America and I did not feel safe or comfortable, however in you know [accounting firm] there was, you know. there was a Boy's Club, but generally there was a far more progressive environment. And like I said, a champion that led individuals.

Researcher

Yeah.

Daniel

So, I also agree with you there's still an overhanging fear that you will impede your progression by revealing your sexuality.

Researcher

Yeah OK yeah great thanks. Thanks very much. **Daniel**, it's been really great speaking to you. I think I think that's it's great. Your experience has been wonderful because you've worked in a variety of different environments. Where you felt safe and where you haven't felt safe, it's quite clear. And interestingly enough, what I've heard is, you know, multinational companies, particularly those originating in America in the USA, tend to be more accommodating and inclusive, in terms of the LGBTI community. But you're saying, your experience with the Texans that you worked for wasn't actually like great.

Daniel

Yeah, I mean they were a bit of a smaller company in a bit more conservative so. However, the big international is like [accounting firm] and [technology company]. You know [accounting firm]

is British, UM, probably with a larger office. But I mean [technology company] coming out of [USA], ja, far more progressive, uh, and I think that you know, they realized they needed to also, know needed to do that, and I think also because you know the there's an enormous leadership, you know, where the prejudice and the pressure that comes up on a person you know when they realized that their sexual orientation is not within the normal society, uhm, you know builds a strong character. Uh, and sometimes you get the best leadership out of it. I mean, [the CEO of a technology company], you know, I don't even know if he's, if he has a partner or not, but he's, he's been open about it, you know, and he's leading one of the, leading the richest company in the world.

Researcher

Yes, yeah.

Daniel

So, yes, large corporates are far more progressive in their way. However, like I said to you, there's still that undertone. It was equal parts within micro-cultures. Within those organizations that sometimes will inhibit someone to come out. But I think you know we are moving in the right direction.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. All right, so you don't have any, if there's anything else, yeah, you're welcome to contact me, but otherwise, yeah, that's the end of my, my questions and the interview for now. So yeah, I don't know if you interested in, in the study, if you'd like to see it afterwards, but I can, I can always send it.

Daniel

Cool. I would like to see, I am very curious, yeah.

Researcher

Perfect, perfect, I'll do that.

Daniel

So well, I wish you best.

Researcher

Thank you, thanks very much. It was great speaking.

Daniel

Bye.

End on interview

Interview Five: David**Researcher**

Good morning, (David).

David

Good morning, (Researcher). How are you?

Researcher

Good thanks and yourself.

David

Not too bad. Had a lie-in.

Researcher

So Um (David), yeah I, I just wanted to tell you a little bit about my study before we start. I don't know if you noticed that it's not actually in the, the information brochure. It's the study is entitled: Lived experiences of game in in the achievement of leadership in South African organisations.

David

mmm.

Researcher

So what I'm trying to research is, I mean obviously a lot of the literature says, and I'm sure you, you will be aware of this, that there are barriers for, for gay men in terms of achieving executive leadership due to harassment or victimization, all those kinds of things, prejudice, whatever it is, and so for me, the my interest was in if, if gay men are achieving executive leadership, how are they doing it? How are they overcoming these, these expected barriers or obstacles, so that's, that's where I'm coming from, in terms of trying to understand.

David

And what if I say I don't think I've ever really in the recent 20 odd years, experienced any barriers or obstacles?

Researcher

Well, I mean that's, that's interesting. That and it's good to know that that's happening. Because that's how it's supposed to be, particularly in South Africa, with our Constitution, the way it is.

David

Yeah, OK.

Researcher

Alright, it's anything you would like to know. (David) anything that you would, you want to ask me before we start with questions?

David

Do I need to make any notes or am I gonna be completing any psychometric tests or?

Researcher

No no. No, nothing like that. No, it's just going to be about 13 questions. Just asking about your lived experience, just your experiences of working in executive leadership.

David

Uh-huh, would you like to know my Meyers and Briggs profile?

Researcher

No, no, no that's not necessary.

David

OK, I think it's on my LinkedIn profile anyway, I think.

Researcher

Alright, so you're OK (David). So you happy for me to carry on.

David

Yep. Yep.

Researcher

OK, so let's start with the first question. It's just, just briefly tell me about your professional life in general, just in terms of qualifications, your previous work experience, employers, places of occupation, that kind of thing.

David

OK, so where do how far do you want me to go back because I'm 60 next year?

Researcher

Don't worry it does matter.

David

OK, I may be faster. I start from 1989 which is when I arrived in South Africa.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, I arrived as a junior manager at [resort company]. At the casino. Supposedly on a 6-month contract, but as you can see I'm still here. Uhm?

Researcher

Yes.

David

Whilst I was there, I did a training. I I have A levels from the UK.

Researcher

OK.

David

I never actually got to go to varsity in the UK. I kept getting drunk and traveling and partying. As one does when ones in Europe.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Uh, I was at [resort company], [name of company]. Then I was part of the team that opened The [name of resort]. I'm moved into HR, started the first proper training department they had for skills training within [resort company], with a few other people from the [entertainment] side of things. Uhm, '97 saw the opportunity to open my own training company to service the newly opening South African [entertainment] industry, much to the chagrin of [resort company], because it was myself and two other people from their only training department. Uhm? Studied NLP but never actually qualified as a practitioner.

Researcher

K.

David

About 2000/2001, my ex who I believe you spoke to, who is now my best friend says to me: "Now you don't look very happy" and I said: "Oh [friend], I'm rather bored." UM, we weren't together that time. Uhm? Employing certain people. I'm not really enjoying myself doing a lot of traveling, thinking of selling my shares in the training company, so I think you would be quite good at market research. We do two days a week and we spend the rest. I'm drunk, I hope.

Which suits me fine. Uh, so by 2003 we had moved across into market research completely, but I didn't go to work for any particular company. Um [friend] did offer me a job and I know never to work for a friend. Ever, uh, because I'd had a rather bad experience going into business with a former Catholic priest in the UK and ended up rather poor at the end of that experience.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uh, and it was basically self-taught in market research. Uh. Worked as a freelancer for about until 2014, early 2014 as a freelance consultant? Uhm, especially in more in financial services not so much FMCG. And then I was approached by a company called [data company] to come in as an account director to cover somebody was on maternity leave. They seemed to like me because a month later they offered me a full-time position. Um, a few months later they pointed me to their EXCO. Uhm, sent me on lots of like high level development training.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uh, then from there I was. I was, uh, affectively a De facto, deputy MD [managing director], if you will come. We had an MD and the rest, the rest of the leadership team, exco with client service directors, but I was my MD De facto, Uh and Deputy MD, possibly because we used to have drinking together every Friday. You'll notice alcohol plays a role. We're still good friends today. We then, we were owned by a global company. We were then merged with our sister company. Uh, and then the EXCO became a Manco for Johannesburg. There were three Manco, one in Johannesburg, one in Durban, one in Cape Town.

And then COVID hit. Uhm, we got sold to, the global company got sold out to private venture Capital Group in the States. Who had stuffed up [retail company] by the way, a company called [venture company].

Researcher

OK.

David

They were slashing and burning like you cannot believe, then COVID hit. Uhm, I was about to quit, so when COVID hit. I wasn't happy. Yeah I'd gone from working what felt like an effective small business of about 150 people to being treated as a number. And I didn't like our new CEO. Uhm, I didn't like the way the company was going. My MD said, my MD who is no longer MD said to me: "Look, don't quit. We're probably going to do retrenchments. You can always put your hand up for that."

David

Then in. Yeah, OK. That was a tough period 'cause I couldn't tell anybody. We were going through retrenchments.

Researcher

Yes, yes, I imagine.

David

Uh. And in fact, we were supposed to go through them in March of last year, but with Covid they delayed it all. Because they didn't know what the business was going to look like. Let's say end of last year. Uh, we got retrenched end of November.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, took five months off. Well, I was gonna take three, but I took five months off till my hubby turned to me one day and said: "Are you ever going to get off that couch? He stopped working Netflix, watching Netflix. Uh, fortunately I was in a financial position where it wasn't that desperate. Yeah, no, desperation. Uh, and I just put the word out to my former network about. "OK, I'm gonna start consulting again. I'm not gonna work as hard as I work before and I'm now, you know, I do one or two projects at the same time. Uh, I'm working for our company locally. A couple of companies locally, UM, the you, know they get pass work over to me and couple of global companies locally and working for a farmer research company based out of [Europe], doing projects in [USA]. So, wonders of remote working. Uhm, and, also yeah, for another European based company, I'm doing some work for them in Europe and [USA]. So yeah, and I now work an average of 3 or 4 hours a day.

Researcher

OK, well then, and that was actually my next question, what position are you currently occupying? So, are you freelancing at the moment?

David

Yeah, I mean, I, I, I've never actually really went out of my way to look for another job. I accepted the reality that Uh, we are going on 59 when I got retrenched UM and I'm a great believer in BEE, don't get me wrong. And you know addressing the imbalances of the past. But then I do that from the luxury of a position where it doesn't really affect me. Other than that, other than that, I'm probably not gonna get a full-time position anyway. Plus, so I don't. I don't really want to work 60-hour weeks anymore.

Researcher

I understand that. Alright, so uh, could you perhaps elaborate on your, your current role, your experience with working in this current role.

David

Don't the people know that I'm gay, for example?

Researcher

Uh, yeah, and, and you know, just working there, what is it like? Do you feel any discrimination? Any kind of prejudice?

David

None whatsoever.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uhm? TO give you an example, one of the companies I work forward to is based out of [Europe]. Their local MD sent me an email, Uh, last week or the week before last, to say you know, I'd like to introduce you to my colleague in [USA] and I have some work for you. I think you'd be suitable and, in my response, so and she knows I'm gay? It's not an issue. And in my response, I'm more than happy to catch up one day next week, I'll be in [a resort] with my hubby, you know. And there was no issues.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

In fact, I think, look I, I've never gotten around sprinkling Stardust and glitter and riding unicorns. But I've never made a point of. no, I don't walk into a room and say hi, my name is (David), I'm gay.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

But if I'm having a conversation with somebody, Uh, I will say, you know, I went to [a resort] last week with my hubby. Yeah, I'm I've never.

Researcher

Right.

David

Sorry?

Researcher

You're quite open about it.

David

I'm open, but I don't, I don't feel like sort of rub people face, I don't rub people's faces in it. I'll give an example, UM. Just after we merged with our sister company, one of the guys who was on the EXCO of the sister company, we were great rivals, and then we had to work together. Uh, they they did a quiz night or something and I took my hurry along and went along and the next day Richard came up to me and said, "So you could have knocked me down with a feather when you introduced me to your hubby. I would never have thought in a million years you were gay," and I said, "Let me tell you why that response is actually quite offensive. Because how would you feel if I said I would never have thought in a million years you are straight." Uh, so whenever I had encountered something like that, I would just throw it back at them and say look you know is it really relevant?

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Yeah, but then also to put it into context, he was pretty much my age, a white male from Durban, so he's probably. But I'm comfortable.

Researcher

So David, um in, in your ,in your previous company. What was your career path like, UM? What do you think served to advance your career development? UM, in terms of reaching that executive role?

David

Uhm firstly my experience.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uhm?

David

Secondly, they think it gives you a sense of empowerment. They approached me; I didn't

approach them. They came to me and said we have a position to cover for maternity leave and then when I started, they said all we'd like to you to join our EXCO. So and then they said we'd like you to become a client service director. Uhm, I didn't have to answer any development on. Yeah, I'd get a phone call on on Monday and it'll be listener spaces opened up on our top leadership program in [the far east]. Can you get on a plane on Saturday and fly to [the far east] for a week?

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

So I think what helped me was my experience, my, my depth of knowledge got on with him sending for egotistical here. Uh, my, my network. I knew most of the consumer insights managers in most of the large companies in the major centres in South Africa

Researcher

Yes

David

I had a good reputation. I'm known for being ethical. Uhm, I was also known for treating people fairly. Uhm, I was also one of the few people in the industry that actually fired clients.

Researcher

OK. Fire clients in in in what way? In other words, people that?

David

I didn't care whether you worked for [consumer goods company] or David and Mrs. Smith's pie shop. Don't treat me like her slave.

Researcher

OK alright, good.

David

Yeah.

Researcher

All right, so were you, were you comfortable in in in that organization revealing your sexual orientation to, to the members? Could you perhaps describe your experience of that?

David

Uhm, I think some of them already knew because I'd already worked with them on a

consultancy basis and then some of the people there, I'd known for 20 odd years, and I'd met at the summer conferences. Or I've been out of dinners when I've been there, right with [my friend], or with [my husband] or whatever. [my friend] is a friend. [my husband] is my hubby, UM, so some of them knew. Uhm, [my husband] had, I mean [my husband] works at [financial institution]. So, he had quiet, sometimes he would just pop down if I was drinking at work, we always used to drink on a Friday afternoon. Told you alcohol plays a role; he would drop me off on a Friday morning. Not going on the train. And then he would then come down to pick me up from the office on a Friday afternoon and he would just join us for drinks. I would introduce him. So, there was. I'm sure there, there were some people who didn't fill specially amongst the younger African males who didn't feel entirely comfortable. Uhm? But I'd never fly. It's not like I flirted with them, and they felt comfortable enough to come to me for advice or asked me for a reference if they were leaving and quite a number of them, even regardless of race or sort of, ended up on my [social media] somehow. Uhm? So, I'm sure there were one or two people who are comfortable. Uh, what I did experience and what I used to challenge with the people that annoyed me, you know, and sometimes it would be women. Uh, who would insist on telling me about their gay best friend to show that they weren't homophobic? And sometimes it would be guys who really had to go out of their way to tell me how 20 years ago when they lived in Durban, they went to [LGBTI+ club] and they had these guys hit on them and they weren't offended and I'm thinking, why you telling me this and I would challenge them on it. I don't you know I'm so. Do you go up to men and tell them? I mean our HR manager. I mean she was a lovely woman. Uh, and we did become great friends and she insisted on telling me especially once she'd had a glass of wine about her gay best friend who used to do this and used to drag. And I would say to her, do you go to straight men and talk about your straight male best friend? And she went no. And I said, well, you're supposed to be not only HR in charge of transformation and diversity, but you're not aware of what you're doing.

Researcher

Yes

David

Uhm, and I think that's the other reason I was respected in the workplace, is that I did it nicely, I wasn't offensive.

Researcher

Yeah, but you did, you did challenge their points of view.

David

Yeah, I did, I did and one of the one of the biggest issues was after we merged with our sister company, and we were moving to new offices in [Johannesburg]. Uhm, I queried the fact that, Uhm? You could only access certain parts of the building on the ground floor if you were in a wheelchair, and there was no wheelchair access to the first floor. Uh, and I sent him what are we gonna have gender neutral toilets. And what surprise me on the Johannesburg Manco is the people who are most against it, were the female members of the Manco, not the male members.

I don't want to share about bathroom with a man. I said that that it is not a man. Take that into account.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uh, and yeah, but you know, I don't understand it. You're talking to cubicles on either end in the building. One, one side of the building. One, I said you can't get up there if you're not in a wheelchair anyway. And we, we have normally had, have a disabled, so why not just have a gender neutral site? And so, I would challenge that to things like that.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uhm, I would get offended in the you know, we had the party committee who would come to me and seems to think I would be an expert in all things gay in Pride month. Yeah, should we, should we do rainbow cupcakes. I don't know. I don't eat cupcakes, I don't care.

Researcher

K.

David

No.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

U'm the only time, it was and it actually became an annual event before we merged the first year. I was there with my team. We were coming up to Women's Day and it was, my team was 100 % female and one of them said to me, "So have you ever done drag?" And I said... I've lost your camera, I think.

Researcher

Sorry.

David

I, I mean I, I said well, I've dressed up as frank converter and I showed them a couple of pics and they said, oh, you gotta do that for Women's Day. And I said well, Frank Converter isn't a

woman and they said, will you drag out for Woman's Day. I said, well, you know what? I'm not a very attractive drag queen. I have done this before. I will issue you a challenge if you can get 10 men and to, in this building, and in the building there are only three gay men in the building, and I said if you can get 10 men in the building to agree to drag up, to get up in drag and to raise R10000.00 for my favourite charity, which was a children's home in Pretoria, I said yeah, I'll get up in drag. Well, bless their hearts. They managed to organize the whole thing in three hours. And it became an annual event for about three years until somebody from our sister company came and complained that it was offensive to women. Really.

David

And we did very well. I mean, the first year we raised seems like R40000.00 and then we raised about R30000 the next year and the straight guys seem- I only did it the first year- Uhm, the straight guys seem to enjoy throwing on a frock far more than I did. Ah. But yeah, I'm so, I didn't, you know. And the guy, a lot of you know, we'd be sitting there, and I became very good friends with the finance director, who's straight. I'm just sitting chatting and he was chatting to a couple of other guys, so we're all going to the cricket on Friday. Blah blah blah I said so where was my invite? It was a subtle things like that and he'd go oh, do you like cricket? I said, actually, I do like cricket. Oh, do you wanna come? I said I'd love to come. Yeah, um so it was breaking down those sort of stereotypes and then they said you want to come to the rugby. I said only if we're in a box and we can get drunk. I can't bear rugby. Uhm? Yeah, it's not all musical theatre in glitter if you're gay.

And. I suppose it took about 8-9 months. Yeah guys would say that, you know, they said oh, we're going, we're going to the club for a drink, and I said well can I come? Oh, do you wanna come to the club. I don't know if you know the [golf club]. Uh, in [Johannesburg]? I mean, it's, it's a bit rough and ready, but the booze is cheap and the food is good. I said, yeah, I'd love to come. And got into a lot of trouble most Fridays 'cause I would only get home at 9 o'clock at night in an Uber, to very angry other half. But so my experience there. I didn't really experience discrimination. It was possibly people had a stereotype in their mind which they tried to fit me in.

Researcher

Yeah, OK.

David

Uhm, I did get in, although I never really focusing on South Africa. I did get invited to join the Global Gay and Lesbian Pride Committee and I said I'm really not interested. I work hard enough as it is. Because my experience in South Africa within the company I worked in, was being gay was not an issue. There was. As I said, there was what 3 gay men? Uh, we had one member of staff who was trans UM, which was interesting, and we had four or five lesbians. Uhm, and everybody was in a management position, so it wasn't. I was thinking, we don't really need rainbow cupcakes.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, I hear what you're saying. So, I mean, if you if you think about it, what would, what

would you say are the negative consequences of revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace?

David

What I've observed with other people. Uhm? I think, well, first thing is you have to depend. If you were in a fairly well, let's not say use the word liberal, but if you were in an open minded company, is breaking down the stereotypes of that. Some people may hold in their minds, you know we're not all Graham Norton.

Researcher

Yep.

David

So that's the first thing. You, you probably, and that was probably my experience with [a resort company]. I had to work a little bit harder to let you know I wasn't, yeah, I wasn't prancing around with fairy dust, but I did. At least it, it took a little bit longer to break down those stereotypes, but that's possibly because it was a larger staff compliment.

Researcher

OK yeah yeah.

David

Uhm? You do um, the men and women. Uh, let's leave trans out of it for the moment and uh, you do tend to be excluded uh, based on perception rather than reality. I have noticed in various companies, gay men and lesbians overcompensating, and perhaps trying to fulfil a stereotype in order to make people around them feel comfortable. Uhm? You know, not all lesbians wear checked shirts and dungarees and kickstart jumbo jets.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uhm? And I did have a woman that reported into me from Cape Town for a while and I just said to her one day I said, you know, I need to be honest with you, you make people feel uncomfortable. I said it feels like you're overcompensating. The minute you walk into a room, you mention your wife.

Researcher

Yeah, I think yes.

David

How many women do you know who walk into a room and measured what, mention their husband, you know?

Researcher

Yes.

David

And without being coming across as being cool, can I speak frankly? And she said yes, I said somebody would have to be blind not to know that you are a lesbian when you walk into a room. You've got the shaved head side. You fit; you tick every box of the stereotype. Uhm, and she was like oh, should I change? I said no, you don't change. I said I just think, just turn down the aggression and sometimes that aggression causes negativity.

Researcher

Yes.

Researcher

Yeah, well, I, I, you know I. I mean the next question is basically what you think the obstacles in the organization where that prevents gay men or LGBT employees to achieving leadership. It sounds like a fitting a stereotype is or not fitting the stereotype is one of the obstacles.

David

Yeah, I think that lesbian and gay men, lesbians, and gay men have to compromise, even today, within an organization.

Researcher

Ok.

David

Uh, even if you look globally, if you look at somebody like [the CEO of a technology company]. I'm not saying that somebody has to look gay, Uhm, but he dresses like a grey executive. You know he, and maybe that he fit. Maybe that's how he feels comfortable. I don't know, I've never met the man, but would it be? Would he have still become CEO of a [technology company] if he wore a pride pin and pink golf shirts and that sort of stuff? You, you don't know, UM.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

So I think that I think the other thing that doesn't help lesbian and gay men is how we're depicted in the media. Uh, so, I don't know if you've been watching the morning show on Apple

TV. Uhm? You know, all the lesbians are very lipstick and pretty. You know, it's so conveys so, they are all highly successful. Yeah, you think about the L Word, they are all highly successful or if you look at the South African context, you look at Sumese, who I want to hit with a brick 'cause I think it's a little ferret but.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

You know you're over the top fur coats. So, I think what's going on in the media doesn't help because people, even if they've got gay people in their own families. Still, I think people, even within their own families, have fairly guarded sometimes. Uhm, I know. I know a couple that have just immigrated or being together for almost 20 years. But if anybody visited, if any of their family visited their home, it's obvious they share a room, but they had their house set up with two separate bedrooms. So, one persons and the other bedroom is a wardrobe basically, but you know, so sometimes we don't help ourselves. That's a barrier.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

Um the other barrier as well. Well, I don't know if it's a barrier or not is. And I experienced this at [a resort company]. And it actually worked to my favour at the end of the day, is there was an expectation because you are gay, you probably wouldn't have children, therefore you would never want to take leave over Easter and Christmas or other school holiday times. Which was fine with me because it was more expensive to take leave at those times anyway.

Researcher

Yes. Yes.

David

Uhm? But it was quite irritating one year I wanted to go back to the UK for Christmas and I put in my leave and was told, you do know that when parents take their leave. And I said hang on a moment, I have family too. I am a son. Uhm, the other barriers. Uhm? I think it's the way. Uhm? It's, it's how, I'm gonna try to verbalize this in a way that it's not offensive. You walk into an environment, and it feels really, really straight.

Researcher

OK.

David

OK, and again, I'm not asking or suggesting you should have rainbows on the wall.

Researcher

Yes

David

Yeah, but the like the minute you walk into an office. Uh, normally what you'll see off the reception area is you'll see the oak reception desk, which is quite masculine. Male toilets there, female toilets there. There's nothing in the building that says we are a safe environment for everyone, not just gay and lesbians, but we are, we are a non-discriminatory environment. We are an inclusive environment.

Researcher

yeah yeah.

David

Uhm, and I've noticed, you know, I used to go to London for a conference every year. And I've noticed in the UK, Uh, and locally, if you're going to the Google offices or Facebook offices, they're very gender neutral. Then very welcoming and they feel inclusive, and I think if you're a straight person walking into uh, [financial institution]. You probably in Joburg and I don't know if you've ever walked into the [financial institution] ...in Johannesburg?

Researcher

I haven't.

David

Uh, or compared to walking into the [financial institution] in Sandton. [financial institution] head office just feels inclusive. I don't know if that's being done intentionally or not, but it feels warm, it feels welcoming to everybody. I mean, there's lots of curves and shapes like that. But if you walk into [financial institution] head office... [telecommunication company] head office in [Johannesburg], for example, not the building where the large [telecommunication company head office] is, but there's a building off to the left. Also feels quite inclusive when you walk in, so I think interior design plays a large part.

David

Uhm? I'm think. I think the way interviews are conducted put people into boxes. Uhm? You know? Uh, yeah, where I was working when I was helping coach some people applying for positions and I was looking at the CV and I'm saying why have you all of this information is not relevant. I don't care if you like to play tennis, so it's not relevant. What are you trying to tell me? Try and tell me you're straight because you play soccer, and you play tennis. Uhm, but there's an expectation there. Uhm? Other barriers. I think I, I think, as I said, I think some people put barriers on themselves. Uhm? I used to work with a guy, who now works for an insurance company in Centurion. Uh, and when I first met him and I thought it, it's, I'm specifying the gender. I actually thought he was trans. And, and it was a few quite a few years ago, and I said, and I asked him at the time I said, how would you like me to address you? And he looked a bit

confused and I and I, I had to apologize 'cause I was convinced he was trans. And again, my, my own prejudice coming through.

Researcher

Yep.

David

And I and then I actually ended up working with him in 2014/2015. And I actually had to say to him, [P] calm down. You know you, you, you. I've been with you out in public at [a shopping mall] Having breakfast. You do not swish the way you swish in the office. It's not, you know?

Researcher

Yeah.

David

So yeah, I think and other barriers. And I think most of the barriers and I think the biggest barrier now comes from people overcompensating, which tends to create prejudice. Uh, and also, I've found, I used to deal with grad interviews at my previous company and I would sit there with another client service director and somebody from HR, and usually I'd be the only White person in the room. And sometimes you would get a grad that walked in, who may or may not have been gay, but was quite feminine. And you could see my African male colleague almost bristle. Uh, so I think there is a cultural barrier. Uh, and I think, although he did not appear to have any issues with me, he had more issues with African men being gay than with European men being gay.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, OK.

David

There was a definite sense of that. Um, in fact, it almost seemed to be more acceptable for an African male to be trans than to be gay.

Researcher

Yes, but it sounds like it has to do with those stereotypes that you were talking about previously. You know if you're gay, then you must be effeminate, so, if you transit, almost feels better for them.

David

Yeah, I remember I, I worked with a young woman who was trans at [entertainment report] who used to get... And we're going back to 1990's, that's how long ago it was, who actually got changed in the female changing room. Wore the female trousers while the female blouse. Uhm,

and was very well accepted but only got hostility from their male colleagues if they try to use the male facilities, even though they were male by birth.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Researcher

So tell me a David, have you, have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to impact your journey to achieving leadership.

David

I have, uh, but it was so long ago. So back in 1984, at the tender age of 22 I had just been promoted to a table's inspector in a [an entertainment company] in London. Actually, it was big beginning of 1985 I was still 22.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, and you had all the tabloid newspapers going on about the gay plague. I don't know. I got called in by my GM because there were about. The [entertainment] industry was quite welcoming to gay men.

Researcher

Yep.

David

In those days, and possibly still, there's, I wouldn't know. I, I and we got called in by our GM and we got told that we had, we could only with people were scared that they were gonna get this thing called AIDS from working with it and we had to use separate mugs and stuff in the staff canteen, and we needed to go and get letters from our doctors to state that we did not have AIDS. They hadn't even identified the virus at that stage. I think. Yeah, I think they are identified it first as HTLV 3.

Researcher

Yes.

David

And I can remember going to my doctor and my doctor was like, what absolute nonsense is this? All I can do is do a blood test and say your white blood cell count is not high. But I was told I would be fired if I didn't do that.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Come on, that was based purely on the hysteria that was going around. Uhm, and, and as I said when I arrived in South Africa, I had to work a little bit harder because up until then, God I'm going to sounds awful now. The gay men that had worked at [entertainment resorts] had spent most of their time getting pissed in the staff pub and trying to pick up the dancers from the show up. And I know they. If they were around today, they're probably at [LGBTI+ club] every week.

David

But it's and I had to try a little bit harder. And I remember saying to my manager at the time, I said, you need to understand. I don't walk in here and say hello, I'm (David), I'm a gay man. I walk in here and I say hi, hi, I'm (David) a manager and if my sexual orientation is really important. I happen to be gay. Uhm, I've never defined myself by my orientation, ever.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

David

Although. I possibly have been attracted to careers that have probably been more welcoming.

Researcher

OK, OK.

David

So, like the [entertainment] industry, training, HR and training, market research. Uhm? Have, you might do, PR. I worked in PR for a while. Have been industries that have felt more welcoming or open and I, I don't, I don't know if I did that consciously.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Uhm, I've never wanted to be a hairdresser, but.

Researcher

Yes.

Researcher

Well, I well you know it's interesting, (David) I, I was I was thinking you know, as I listened to you, obviously I'm forming my own opinion about this, but maybe you can tell me, what characteristics or qualities do you think you possess that may have helped you to overcome the, the obstacles in your organizations.

David

Ah. Respect for myself. Uhm, I'll share a story with you that got me into a **** load of trouble as a kid. Uhm?

Researcher

OK?

David

The education system, slightly different in the UK, and although my father was a non-event, he said to me once when I was about I was about to go to grammar school when I was 11. And he said your name is (David). People must address you as (David). David, Master A, master not in the gay sense, obviously. And that is your name. So anyway, I, I end up at sitting in my first day at my new grammar schools still sitting in alphabetical order. Now the teacher could have quite easily looked up and seeing 30 people in the class and then yes, they're all present. But he would go through the register, calling out the names in alphabetical order by surname, and he got to my name and he went David and I didn't respond right like and he looked at me and said, you stand up so I stood and he said, so what is your name? I said my name is (David) or David, and you will address me as such. Being really cocky, 11-year-old. Uh, thereafter not one teacher in that school for five years addressed me by name.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, so it's respect for myself. I think that's a quality I have. Refusing to take no for an answer. Uhm?

Researcher

OK.

David

Treating others the way I expect to be treated. Uh, I've never put my work before. Uh, my life. So, whenever I've had people reporting into me and they've come to me and they said, I need to do pick up my daughter. I said stop, family always comes first. Do what you need to do. I also like to be the best. So, whatever I do, I want to be the best. Uhm? I don't want to be judged because I'm gay or because I'm white or because I'm a male or because I'm nearly 60. I wanna be judged on my output.

David

Uhm, I'm, I'm happy to share. I'm always happy to share with somebody, wants something, something that where I can give them knowledge, I'll, I'll share that with him with him I don't. I don't see it as a threat. In fact my, my greatest delight now is seeing people come that I've employed as grads in 2104, moving into medium to relatively high level positions in companies like [beverage company], [consumer good company] and places like that, and I think, well, I helped start their career. I get a kick out of it, so it's so it's also my ego as well.

Researcher

Yes.

David

To be honest, you know the. I take pride in what I do. I, I won't do something for don't enjoy it. I've had jobs in the past before I came to South Africa; three days and then I'm off. I said I'm sorry, this just isn't for me. I'm not even gonna try and making an attempt.

Researcher

Yes, yes. it sounds like you really knew your own mind.

David

Yeah, there's a whole host of reasons for that. My sister and I had to be independent children. Uhm? And also, I think, I mean, I told my mom when I was 15 that I was gay. Uhm? Her response was, Are you sure? I said pretty sure, and she said, well, all I've ever wanted for my children is to be happy. Well, that's great and then she went and cried for about an hour. Uh, and then after that she was, I want to say supportive. She then came to instantly, you know, are you meeting people and I said yeah, she said where you going? That's what I'm going to pubs and she's well. You know you're not even 16 yet and then a week or so later she came back, and this was when London was really well run. Should you know there's a group called the London Gay Teenage Group you're gonna have to lie about your age and so you're 16. I'd rather you mix with gay people of your own age. Uhm? My dad was never around, so that wasn't really so much of an issue, so and it was never I'm buying. You know, when [my husband] and I went back to the UK in 2012 when we did our civil union, Uh, I had cousins and their kids who I had never met wanting to come to the ceremony. So I'm I was never given, possibly 'cause I didn't really care what the family thought.

Researcher

Yes.

David

I'm really give a toss what they thought, but I've never experienced that type of discrimination. You know, when I was at school like remember the boy sitting next to me at school when I was about 13/14 who I sat next to for five years, turning to me and saying, you queer and I said, well, you asking me if I'm homosexual. Umm yeah, I said yes, I am gay, and the rest of the class

were cool with it, but it was like yeah alright or there's somebody can give us a hand drawn a Friday afternoon perhaps when I'm feeling a bit horny. Uhm so, in that sense I hadn't experienced discrimination. I did experience discrimination outside of the work environment and it being, I mean my hubby is mixed race. I affectionately called him Colindian- half Coloured, half Indian. Uh, but and the only place and we've experienced discrimination when we've been out in public in Durban, never in Cape Town or Joburg or Pretoria. Uhm, I'm, I've been spat upon on a gay pride March in London. I've, I got queer bashed, leaving a pub in London once in the early 80's. But within the work environment, I've never felt unsafe.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

But I think that's also down to my personality as well.

Researcher

Do you think that they are specific personal characteristics or traits that gay men require to achieve executive leadership in our organisations.

David

Yep. Yes. Uhm? I think they have to be more tolerant than their straight colleagues.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uhm, you will in the course of your career, you will encounter ignorance and those comments like, Oh, I've got a really good friend who's gay, who you know, or my brothers gay or my hairdressers gay and you might like to date him. Yeah, so I think you've got to be more tolerant and I think you have to be prepared to challenge because that is something I indeed did. So when I, for example, when that guy said all you could have not be down with a feather, you should be able to challenge that and you shouldn't feel shy about challenging it.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

I mean, I, I could, I can remember saying to somebody once, I really sometimes feel I should wear a badge saying how dare you assume I'm heterosexual? So, I think you, you need to be a bit even need to be stronger, but, Uhm? I think also try not to play to the stereotype. Don't become a character or caricature of a gay person, you know. I have met a number of, so my, my cousin, works in theatre in the UK and I have met Graham Norton. Uh, and I have met other

celebrity and I've met [celebrity], for example, I know him quite well. And he's nothing like his stage persona. Uh, hum. Be yourself. I mean somebody like [celebrity], he's you know who I'm talking about, yes.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Yeah, I mean I met him when he was doing musical theatre years ago in Pretoria, and he's quietest shyest person you can ever hope to meet.

Researcher

Mm.

David

Yeah, this little bit too much plastic surgery now, which he admits, but uhm, but he never plays up to that stereotype when he's not in character.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

And I think it's about being yourself. I think it's, I think the other thing is well. Is and one thing I did experience both at [resort company] and that company I was in up until last year, was that colleagues who were gay, who were perhaps Junior, who were junior to me, maybe not in terms of age, but in terms of level, sometimes seem to think I should give them more flexibility because they were gay. And I think that's I think that's a dangerous road to tread. Uhm, I actually, so for example, there was a guy who worked in our Cape Town office. And we became quite good friends. And then I said to him, look why, why don't you move to Johannesburg? There's more, there's more scope for development for you there blah blah blah. But you're not going to report him to me, we're friends.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Can't can't do that. Anyway, with all the merge and head slashing, whatever he ended up reporting into me and I had to sit the whole team down and say look, you all know that [S] and I are friends. Please understand where professional, I'm not gonna treat him harder because we're friends, but I'm not going to treat him different because we're friends. Yeah, I'm in private. I called him the hysterical homosexual but in public you know, if he if he ***** up I dealt with it

exactly the same way as if a straight person had ***** up. In fact up so you gotta be, so I suppose what I'm saying there has gotta be consistency.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah, being consistent in in how you treat others, yes.

David

Yeah.

David

Yeah.

Researcher

Do you think the, the organisations that you worked for was he needs assistance that you received as a gay man in your journey to leadership? Did they provide assistance?

David

Erm. So [resort company], no, but then [resort company] in those days was an eat or be eaten organization so they didn't supply the supply assistance to anybody.

Researcher

Yes.

David

You always have to make sure you had your Kevlar vest on front and back because no matter, because it people, I mean, you earned really good money if you climbed the tree. Uh, and that's one of the reasons I left. I didn't know that's one of the reasons I moved into HR and training it, so I didn't want to play that game.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Judge me for I can do not know how well I could throw a knife at somebody.

David

Within, I would say I, [data company], it's not that they provided assistance but that, and I can only talk for the South African operation. I can't speak for other countries.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uhm, but they created an environment that was safe and inclusive for everybody, not just for gay people. Uhm? In fact, when I was freelancing, I often said to [my husband], if ever I went to a company full time, the one company I would consider would be [data company]. Yeah, like from the moment you walk through the door there was treated you well.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

Uhm? I know there are some friend of mine works for, for [accounting firm] and I know they've got a diversity committee and they've got a gay committee and they've got this committee and I think that speaks a lot about an organization negatively that they have to form these committees.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, it, it almost feels like they have to tick certain boxes and that's what they're doing with the committees to make it look good.

David

Well, not just that, but the fact that they need to have a committee to make sure that gay people or disabled people, like people are not discriminated against. Uh, I think it's shocking.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uhm, especially in this day and age but I also understand when accounting audit firm is probably quite conservative. Uh, from where it comes from, but that doesn't excuse it. So, what should as I said, no, they didn't really have to do anything, for example. Uh, if we had people coming from, the global team coming over. I remember we had our global CEO coming over. It was a really nice guy for in Australia. And we were having a dinner with him, and it was you and your partner. Ah, you might just see my partner in the background going out for a smoke. Uhm? And I can remember I was quite shocked by a female colleague who came up to me, who said Uhm, so you are bringing [my husband] to the dinner and I went. Yes, absolutely. Uhm? And the way she phrased it was, do you think Travis is going to be comfortable with that? And I just turn around her and said, look, I've met Travis on a number of occasions in London and here. He knows I'm gay, and he's met me once before. It's not an issue, but I think you have an issue with it. No, no, no, no no, no no. She walked away.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Uhm, and I think she did have an issue with it personally, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, it does sound like it, but it, it, it seems as if you weren't afraid to challenge it. If you came across it.

David

I've never been afraid to challenge it. Uhm, you know, for example in the UK, I would always, Uhm and in South Africa, I mean, I stopped going on the Pride March in South Africa. Last one was Zoo Lake or somewhere like that, but I always used to try and make, I would always make sure I was off. I mean I went on the 1st pride mark in South Africa in 1989 and always make sure I was off.

David

Uh, and I will be opening. I'm saying look, I'm going on the Pride March, I need that weekend off. But OK, fine.

Researcher

OK, OK, so, so in terms of organisations, what organizational strategies or assistance do you feel are necessary to encourage equal opportunities and development of LGBTI people.

David

OK, we've talked the entire interior decor of the office.

Researcher

Yes yes yeah.

David

This is a really interesting question. I've never really thought about that one, I think, I think what company should do, and they do tend to sweep this under a rug with, well they did with the company I work with in terms of race, so I don't see why I shouldn't apply to LGBTI as well. But if there was uh, so the my sister come, our sister company at the time ended up on the frame front page of the star, Uh, accused of racism and various other things come, our black CEO allowed himself to be recorded, saying some really unfortunate things to a black employee. Uhm? And apparently there were accusations made and there was an investigation. And then they came back and said, we've completed the investigation of the 10 people accused eight have been found innocent. Two people have decided to leave the company, finish. And I thought that was appalling. I think. Where's the transparency? Yeah, call a spade a spade. If somebody is racist call them racist.

Researcher

Yep.

David

Uhm? And the same thing if, if somebody is homophobic, they should, they should be called out in the workplace and it should be, "we have dismissed (David), for his homophobic behaviour. And I, I think I think, and I think companies are scared to say that sort of thing. I, I also think, this, and this is going to give away my age, I think there's this, and people of misappropriating the term because white people shouldn't be using this level of wokeness, in the work environment, I think is actually shutting down. Uhm, openness and transparency. Uhm? I started to experience it a little bit before I left, I got retrenched that, that I don't think that helps. I think allow people to say what they say. And if it's not appropriate, then tell them why it's not appropriate. Rather than create a climate of fear. We have people don't speak at all.

Researcher

You know, so everybody is too scared and is walking on eggshells 'cause they don't know what's right and what's wrong.

David

Yeah.

David

Yeah.

David

Yeah, I. I mean, I'm a hugger. For example, UM and I always ask people permission to hug them, but then after we merged I would be seen hugging somebody and somebody I didn't work with went and complained to HR that I was oppressing a young black female member of staff because I was hugging her and I was like, what the f**k, who complained was it the person I hugged. No yeah, but you gotta understand the image it creates, and I said no, I don't need to understand the person who's saw it should be brought into a room with me and sat down and I should explain to them, I've already asked it. I shouldn't have to explain, this person should say to me. I was worried that when you were hanging this person, I said, well, I've known this person for 10 years. We've always hugged.

Researcher

Yes.

David

And I, I think companies are going and I, I think you're starting to see a rebellion against that. Or if you see what's happening [on] Netflix at the moment.

Researcher

mm-hmm

David

And the the people that spoke out against him have been fired from Netflix. Uhm? I'll leave whether his comedy is appropriate to another at time, but what I'm saying is, I think both responses were wrong.

Researcher

yes.

David

I think in what the employee did was wrong and I think what Netflix did was wrong. I think they should have sat down and said we must agree to disagree. And first of all, understand we make shitloads of money that pay your salary out of this. But you know, we will be more sensitive going forward.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

Yeah, so I think that level of wokeness needs to be addressed. Uhm, I think. People need to understand, I think. There's this thing called diversity training going on.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Which is the most shocking training I have ever come across? Uhm, back in the late 90's. With some guys from [a university], from they were industrial and research psych's, they used to run something called the Robben Island diversity experience.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uh, and I went on that three years in a row and ended up being trained up as a facilitator before it all fell apart. But what I learned from that is before you can respect the diversity and others you gotta respect the diversity in yourself. Uh, and I think you know companies are ticking boxes. They're saying let's do diversity training well. I think diversity training is an idiotic term. You can't train diversity. Uhm, you, but you can run programs where people can become aware

of the differences in themselves. You you are, you can be a husband. You can be our father. You can be a colleague. You can be a son. Uhm, you can be a conservative. You can be a liberal. All of those things actually conflict with each, within each other. Yeah, so.

Researcher

Yes.

David

I think diversity training needs to be done away with. I think self-awareness training or self-awareness coaching about your, your impact should be. What is your impact when you walk in to an office or at home work environment that should be impact training rather.

Researcher

Yes

David

I think management training programs, there's a difference between management and leadership. And I think something like impact training should be part of a leadership development program.

Researcher

Yes.

David

And I'm, I don't think it's necessary to put pride up flag up everywhere or give people rainbow flag cupcakes once a year. Uhm? I think, you should, you're starting to see it now. Thanks to COVID probably a positive out of COVID, a relaxing in dress codes in the workplace. You know I, I never wore a tie to work. I mean, I would present to the Board of [a financial institution], and I didn't wear a tie. They're all sitting there wearing ties, but nobody expected me to wear it.

Researcher

Yes.

David

I was just a market researcher. But I, I, I think, you know that. So that that's important, you know, allow people 'cause you can express your identity 101 different ways it can be through your hair colour. I and I know it's quite contentious. I mean, I'd have no I'm, I employed young woman. Uh, coloured young lady who had a spider web tattoo over her neck and my MD went ballistic. So, I said, what's the problem? And she said, well, how can we send her to a client? I said, well, that's the client's problem. That's not my problem. She can do her job, she can do it brilliantly, UM. So, I think there needs, I look at that. It's gonna take a long time to come around. Uhm?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

And I've noticed that. Within the workplace in South Africa it did start to relax in the late 90s, the dress code. Uh, they put in be they gay, straight, whatever? Then introduced this formality back into the workplace. Yeah, or the expensive suits where they insist on leaving the label on the arm and the neck ties. And yeah, and I think I think that needs to be relaxed. I think there should be a policy dress as you're comfortable. Obviously if you're going be client facing, when you go to a client, if the client would then you fit into that client culture. If that client culture is jacket and pants, then wear jacket and pants because they're, they're paying your bills.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Uhm? I would like to see. I and it's more difficult with this working from home, home culture. Bring your partner to work days, you can bring your daughter to work.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Can't bring your son apparently, but, but you can bring your daughter to work. Yeah, I'm, I'm we had that. I mean, we whenever we had company events. So, like we would start our Friday at 1o'clock. Partners were welcome to join after 5pm.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Very few partners did join because we were a drunken mess, but they were welcome to join.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Uhm? I'm just, I don't know how you communicate reassurance. But what you do with your genitalia, and where you put it should be of no interest to anybody you work with. And there needs to be a process of education that, I mean, I've, I've lost count over the years that are members times I've been asked you, the man or the woman.

Researcher

Yes.

David

I like f**k off.

Researcher

I agree.

David

I don't know. I would say well, are you the man or the woman? And again, don't like that look at me, I said, well, are you dominant in the bedroom or any passive in the bedroom, yeah.

Researcher

Yes.

David

What are you doing? I'm not asking you what you do, friend.

Researcher

Yes, exactly.

David

Yeah, if you take it up the bum and it's like. Uhm? And that comes from ignorance, and I think that starts, that starts at the varsity level and I'm like, I know, I know, you know. [B]ut I know by reputation from his writings over the year, I know he's done, done a lot of work, but I think you know, in a lot of these Varsities, the fact he's still getting issues around language and segregated hostels and, it's not just LGBT, I think it's a whole. I mean, I know that's what you're focusing on.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uhm? It comes through. I mean I, I had a young friend who was at Tukkies. I mean, he was very

well known on campus and I used to say to him, geez, yeah, you might as well put on wings and flutter through campus and he was like, yeah I know and I said but you're not like that. And he said but it's the only way I'm gonna make an impact because I'm quite short and I'm gay and I'm very effeminate and people expect me to be a hairdresser and he's actually doing extremely well now in corporate communications.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uhm? So I think it starts at varsity level.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Before it goes into offices, and I think what's critical, is companies tend to forget the support services? So, when I say support services, I don't mean the psychological support services you know, within your organization. You've got cleaners. Now you've got the maintenance people you got, the receptionists, you've got the security guards.

Researcher

Yes.

David

I've never seen any corporate include those people in any sort of awareness, training, or anything like that. And ultimately, they're the face of your company. Now. The first people people encounter.

Researcher

Yes, yes, exactly.

David

I mean when I query there, I was told, Oh yeah, but you need to understand security is outsourced, cleaners are outsourced. I see, yeah, but we invite them to our Christmas party. Yeah, it's uh, I believe they should be included, and I think that's essential, but just because it's and you can't rely on another another company. Just saying yes, we do. Diversity training.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. Well, it's actually interesting you saying these things because of the last question. (David) was just about how, how effective do you think organizational strategies or policies or at

non-discrimination and protecting LGBTI rights? Uhm, so obviously what you're saying is there's not much that makes them particularly effective.

David

I think. They're only effective if you if that transparent about the effectiveness.

Researcher

OK, honest if it's not.

David

Uh. Uh, it why you gotta be honest I'm so. Uhm? The friend I had that weird at [accounting firm]. He was all he was sitting on. The Diversity Committee was sitting on that committee. I don't have to two years he left, and I said, why did you leave? And he said, well, it was a waste of time, nothing happened. And I really was always promises. So, you gotta, you gotta show action. [IT firm] every year will put, 'cause our new offices when we moved to [Johannesburg] next to [IT firm]. Every year in July, which was Pride Month in the Europe, they put up the Pride flag. I think it was pointless. Let's yeah, just because you put up the pride flag does not mean You know, pink washing irritates me intensely. Uhm, I'm working in market research. You know, I I see brands doing all the time, so it's, it's about, put out the lunchroom, prove that you can eat it. That's what, uh?

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

David

I. You know, if somebody verbally abuses a gay person, Uh, and then is disciplined for it. It shouldn't be kept a secret. Well, and depending on the level of abuse.

Researcher

Yep.

David

It depends on whether it's a final written warning or they're fired.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Yeah, and I think. That's the other thing is, you know, people talk about freedom of speech, but educate people. That freedom of speech comes with responsibility.

Researcher

Yes.

David

So yeah, I I don't think any company is particularly effective in dealing with this. Uhm, but then I think what they probably my last employer is effective because up until we merged, whether it was conscious or unconscious and environment was created where people felt safe.

Researcher

OK.

David

Regardless of their sexual orientation. Uhm? You, there was no inappropriate touching. Yeah, a lot of people were sleeping with each other, but it was by consent.

Researcher

Yes, yes, yes.

David

Yeah.

David

But it's yeah.

David

And I think rolls around behaviour you know, are sometimes problematic. I've worked in companies where it said you can't have a relationship with a colleague. Well, who the ***** are you to tell me I can't have a relationship with a colleague.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

But then you have the other extreme in the States where if you have a relationship with a colleague, you have to go and fill in documents at a HR to say that its consensual, I mean.

Researcher

Yes

David

Surely you can just walk in and say, hey, we're happy holding hands, hey, we split up.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Uh, I agree that relationships within the workplace has come with a whole host of problems as well, but you know, I don't think you can legislate behaviour. If someone is going to be homophobic, they're gonna, they're gonna be homophobic. What you need to do is you need to put something in place that tells them why their behaviour is not acceptable.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

Uh, why? If they continue with that behaviour, they won't be working in that workplace.

Researcher

Well, I I think that that that's the whole thing, (David). I mean in South Africa we have very clear constitution. We have very clear human rights and Labour Relations acts that are clear in terms of non-discrimination. And yet these things are still happening. So having guidelines doesn't necessarily change behaviour or improve, improve the discrimination.

David

But I, but I think I think it's individual managers. And, and I, I think you know, let's be honest, human, a human resources department is not there to protect the employees. It's there to make sure the company complies with legislation.

Researcher

Yes, yes

David

It's not, there's you know, if you go to HR and you complain about a manager, the first thing the HR manager is going to do is, does this leave the company open to liability, and if it doesn't, let's say to take out a grievance, do this. Do that.

Researcher

Yeah

David

But you know, they they don't. But you know people are under the false input perception that HR is there to protect employees. They're not, they're there to, they're there to make sure that human capital does not impact adversely on the company's bottom line. And by and if by doing so they inadvertently benefit the employees. Good luck to the employees.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, but that's not the main goal.

David

That's not their goal. Uh, you know they'll put up the basic conditions of Employment, Act on the wall and the Health and Safety Act on the wall, and you know they're run around and with thermometers. You know when COVID first hit, and we were out of the office for a while, and they give everybody face masks, but they didn't care if you died of COVID. I mean, I used to say even, even, you know, even with the company I was very happy in before we merged and even afterwards. Yeah, so I'm just so, I've got it working with him now, you don't have to work. Yeah, but I want to get it done. You know what're you gonna think of me and say, look, I understand this. If you die and you're just gonna get a wreath. You will be replaced within 24 hours.

Researcher

Yes.

David

And they would look at me like this. Yeah, or something would go wrong. I said calm down, it's not your money. Yeah. Uhm? So, I think it's up to individuals to push the agenda. Uhm? And companies will only come to the party when it starts to impact their bottom line. Up until you start seeing CCMA judgement against companies for not protecting LGBTI employees. Until you see people standing outside, I [beverage company] head office in [Johannesburg], saying [beverage company], [beverage company] employees, standing outside [beverage company] head office and saying your head off is based in [USA], which has the most homophobic legislation ever and yet here you are saying you support pride.

Researcher

Yes.

David

We supported the winter Olympic. I refuse to drink [beverage company] products. So you know, since they Winter Olympics were in Russia. Was it in Summer Olympics? Because how dare [beverage company] sponsor a Olympics in a country that's so homophobic? Um, but until their own employees stand outside and start generating negative press, it's not going to change.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Uhm? And. You know, people say, Oh yeah, but you know, employers turn around and say oh, but we have any EAS program. It's an EAS program you pay for. An employee, Especially when they find out you're paying R12 per employee per month and employee. I don't know if you, I think I read on your bio you were part of any EAS program. Most psychologists are but.

Researcher

Yes.

David

I used to say. I mean, I had a number of employees, people reporting into me, gay and straight, who are burning out and I said to them I had, by the way, I have to tell you we've got this EAS program. It's available, but when I actually recommend you do is go to your doctor and go to a good psychologist.

Researcher

Yes.

David

Because you're going to get more value for money.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Uh, and that's not to denigrate what people like yourself do on the EAS programs.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Uhm?

Researcher

But organisations do limit what, what we can do. In other words, they only give you so many sessions and you have to do it in a certain way. So, there is the oil lot of restrictions in those.

David

Yeah. Yeah, and, and, and it's a tick box exercise, so when your employee jumps off the roof because people have been calling him a fairy every time he walks into work, then company can say you know what? We had EAS program. We advise the employee there was an EAS programme. Our hands are clean. But no, they're not clean. The first time he was called a fairy, that other person should have been publicly whipped verbally.

Researcher

Yes.

David

And they don't do it.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Yeah, and.

David

I don't know, you know. Even in Holland, which is supposedly a very liberal, very advanced society, I've got a friend who now lives and works there, and she was telling me that, again, enlightened, she works for large corporate in Holland and Philippines. You know the people and do the and she was saying it's the same here. It's lip service. Uh, and until individuals take charge, I'd I don't see it changing and I demanded respect. But I had the right and this is egotistical. But I had the right to demand that respect. I didn't walk into work and demand respect. I proved that I was worthy of that respect.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

And I think I know I have come across gay men and lesbians who demand respect but actually don't deserve it. You know, or you just saying that because I'm gay? No, I'm saying that because you're ***** useless.

Researcher

Yep.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, well I yeah, you know in South Africa I think that's also an issue. There's, there's

often people that hide behind beds, behaviour, or poor performance. Uh, because of whatever issue they, they bring up something that's very, very politically, UM. Important and as a result get away with murder.

David

No, I'll tell you one last story. Many years ago I used to be a volunteer on landing gate switchboard before it became London Lesbian and gay switchboard back in 1982/1983. And I can remember, and she's quite well-known journalist. Sitting in a meeting, I'm saying to a woman in the meeting for me. I'm not disagreeing with you because you're a woman. I'm not disagreeing with you because you're black and I'm not disagreeing with you because you're a lesbian. I'm disagreeing with you because you're wrong. She still threw an ashtray at me.

Researcher

Yes.

David

That, that was the, that the fact was, I felt I had to preface it with that. Uh, maybe that's something managers need to learn to do as well. Maybe it needs to be, listen here, you're sitting here and I'm talking to you about your performance and I'm talking to you as an employee, not as a gay man. I'm talking to you as an account manager who is not delivered to standard.

Researcher

Yes, and that and that's the problem. Not, not anything else.

David

Yeah.

Researcher

OK, well thank you very much (David) that that's been very helpful. It was nice talking to you getting your your feedback. I think perhaps because you've, you've come from the UK and worked in South Africa for so many years. It's also helpful to see and hear your experience.

David

Yeah. I've also, I think. Also it and I think it goes to an individual's personality. I mean, I know you interviewed [my friend]. Uhm? I hope he learned a lot because we dated back in 92 when he was still a student for about 3 months and then we became good friends and I think he learned from me. I wish to say.

Uhm, and he didn't have, you know, and I think it there are people out there and I I see them today, I mean. We don't go clubbing very often. We don't go out very often come, but you know, every now and then I'll bump into some, you know, might get the cord in Centurion TC or something, or somewhere like that. Or and your I bump into somebody I used to see like the early 90s and they still got the same hairdo and just trying to now fit their 44inch, and I've also

got a 44 inch waist, they're trying to fit their 44 inch waist into a 32 inch waist jeans and they're still living in a bachelor flat on the edge of Sunnyside and I'm I, I said to him, you know, and they're complaining that they can never going to be able to retire. And all this, that and the other. And I say, well, you'd need to take responsibility for that. You know you chose. Uh, I also chose to party. There are partied hard, but I'd never let it interfere with my career or when I wanted. You chose to party, you chose to spend all your money. You chose to continually date inappropriate people. You know, once or twice is a mistake three times or more is a habit, you know.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

David

Uhm, and you made the decision that as a gay man, and I'm saying this in my head, not to them. Then you made a decision as a gay man that you weren't going to get anywhere because you were a gay man.

Researcher

Yes, yeah, yeah that it was going to be an obstacle that would prevent you from doing anything.

David

Yeah, or you know that's all I'm worth. Why should I finish school? Because as a gay man. And I'm all I'm worth is working, although it's closed now, isn't it? Remember that pharmacy in Esselen in street?

Researcher

Yes.

David

That's where all the drag Queens used to work when they weren't in drag. And they all lived in the block of flats behind that pharmacy.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Uh, and they work there because they got their wigs for free and their make-up for free. But you chose to do that and accept responsibility for that. Uhm? And then there's another guy you might want to try and track him down. On LinkedIn, his name is [Jack].

Researcher

Yes.

David

I dated very briefly he's he was a very, very good drag queen. He was a Miss Gay Pretoria in ['90's] or something stupid. But he's actually quite well. He was last time I saw him. He was quite high up in [a financial institution]. In HR, again, a profession that is quite welcoming, but yeah he, I don't think he really experienced discrimination in the workplace because you know he knew how to compartmentalize.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Researcher

Thank you (David) for giving me his name I. I was also wondering if you know of anybody else that you in in sort of executive, or that sort of line of work, that might be interested in participating.

David

Awesome. Ah. I recommend you get hold of her. Should be happy to talk to you, but don't mention my name because I was the reason she got fired.

Researcher

OK.

David

Ah, but you'll find her on LinkedIn.

Researcher

Yeah.

David

Her name is: [Tracy]. I'm just, I'm looking, going to LinkedIn.

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, she's with the research company in [Johannesburg]. Ummm, but it might be. As [Tracy].

Researcher

Right?

David

Ah yeah, she's [Tracy].

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, and she's just being made, small company called [a research company]. Uhm? I don't. I'm trying to think what his name was, so the mess. Uhm, how senior are you looking for?

Researcher

Well, somebody that's in executive, sort of, senior leadership in any organization preferably. Specifically, mainstream organisations like sort of like you were saying. Like the banks, people like that or, or for me very interesting how they've survived the barriers and the, the prejudices and got, got to that position.

David

Uh, OK? Uh, it's it's, it's definitely. It's the guy works for [financial company].

Researcher

OK.

David

Uh, I'm turning this name. I think it was [S]. Uh, not not that one. Ah. And then there's the guy who's the marketing manager at [car company], marketing manager director thing. He's also called as [S]. Uhm? Uh, that both quite high level, uh? Uh, yeah. How have you found anybody of colour?

Researcher

Yes, a few. A few people that are Coloured specifically, but if, if I had an African person, I'd be very happy to speak to them too, because I do think they experiences might be a little bit different.

David

I'm trying to think I know he's like at [corporate company], he's a Coloured guy. I can't, I do know any Indian guy at [food manufacturing company] in Cape Town. Ummm, but he's Muslim and he's not particularly out. I'm so, I'm not even sure he's out at work.

Researcher

OK. Yes, and that is one of the, the, the criteria is that they are open about their, their sexual orientation.

Researcher

Thank you.

David

So [Tracy] will be very ferocious. Uhm? I know I'm. Yeah, that's about it really. I'm trying to think I'm, the only black men and women I know. I'm not actually out at work.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. What would be understandable, UM, concerning but understandable.

David

I'm and then there's an influencer who works for himself. I don't know if that would be of interest to you.

Researcher

Does it work in his house for his own company or is it just as an influencer?

David

Well, he's, he's a Model C rich kid. Uhm, drinks a lot of champagne and has an Instagram channel and now he probably yeah no, probably not. Uhm? Trying to think no, sorry.

Researcher

No, don't, don't, don't stress it, it did just. I just thought if you do know anybody that would be great. But thank you.

David

How many more are you looking for?

Researcher

Well, I've got about six or seven people so far, and I'm looking before between 10 and 15 people. So we're getting there, but it's I know, I think perhaps the reason it's difficult is because so many gay men on not necessarily out in the organizations. So, if there are in executive leadership, they're not openly gay in those organizations.

David

Yeah, and, and then you've got your standard in industries like advertising. Uhm? Where being gay is a bonus.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah no. And that's the thing, I know. Obviously, I can investigate those organisations,

but I know that they are more inclusive, so it's, it's more than mainstream organizations that I want to investigate and understand their inclusivity.

David

Um there's a guy White guy. [Corporate Food Manufacturing company]. Uhm, I couldn't drop him and note. Um, [KC]. He's, he's there, in charge of all the home care and personal. He's the brand manager there.

Researcher

Yes.

David

You might want to contact him on LinkedIn. [KC] and I can contact him for you.

Researcher

If you could give an introduction, that would be great, just so that he doesn't think I'm some random strange person.

David

Yeah, yeah, I don't know if he's out at work, that's the thing.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, it's difficult. It's difficult to know these things unless you kind of worked with him.

David

Uhm? Yeah, well, you know, when I'm with him and I've been at meetings with him, I'm thinking how can people not know?

Researcher

Yes.

David

But then I've never actually asked the question.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

David

Uh, I can ask him. I can ask you if he knows any senior people at [financial institution] who are open and out.

Researcher

That would be great. Yes.

David

Uhm? Yeah. [A] yeah, he's not South African that he's Canadian. He's been here a couple of years, OK? All right, there's been an absolute pleasure.

Researcher

Yep. Thank you, thanks very much. (David) is great speaking to you. I appreciate all your time.

David

Yeah, I'll be interested to see your thesis once it's written.

Researcher

Yes, thank you, I I can definitely forward it to you. So I will. I will send that to you. As soon as we done, yeah, you know. Obviously this, the study is in South Africa, so we'll see how it compares with the rest of the world, but Yeah, hopefully it will give something to the community to assist them.

David

I'm like, I'm a cynic. Yeah, I'm, I think it will give something to individuals to challenge within organisations.

Researcher

Yep.

David

But we can't all be who's we can't all be a Mark Hayward.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, definitely not.

David

OK all righty. OK, thanks (Researcher), take care.

Researcher

Yeah, that's pretty much (David). You look off yourself.

David

OK, bye.

Researcher
Cheers bye.

End on interview

Interview Six: Jabulani

Researcher

Good afternoon **Jabulani**.

Jabulani

Hi.

Researcher

Thanks for meeting me. So, before we start is there anything that you'd like to understand or know about the study and what it is that I'm researching?

Jabulani

I'm, I'm gonna be honest with you, other than your email context, honestly speaking, I didn't go through that.

Researcher

Yeah.

Jabulani

Completely, because I just got back to work last week, no, actually this Monday, so it's been relatively hectic. But I think it's about you are investigating around queer individuals in the workplace and what their experience has been like.

Researcher

Exactly. Yeah, yeah, so specifically for me, I work in government, and I've worked in corporate environments before and something I noticed was that you don't hear of any gay men in any leadership positions. You just don't hear about it. Uhm, and I started thinking about, you know, what is that about? I mean are there just no gay men in leadership in South Africa or what is going on. So yeah, I started researching a little bit and obviously from what I discovered in all the literature is that they're saying that there's still a lot of discrimination. Some of it may be subtle or covert, but there's still discrimination, prejudice, and that impacts in terms of gay men achieving leadership positions. So, I decided, I'm going to do some research to try and find out. you know, if they are gay men that have achieved leadership positions, how have they gone about it? How have they done that, how have they overcome the barriers, or the challenges that we kind of expect that they would have to overcome/ So yeah, that's me, that's where I'm starting from and then one of the things that I found most challenging is finding African gay men to participate. There just, there's nobody that wants to be interviewed. Nobody that's answering any call, so I and I assume that that means, in the African culture, it's even more of a problem in terms of being out about your sexuality or your sexual orientation, in the workplace.

Jabulani

OK, I just want to ask this question when you say excuse me, when you see individuals in leadership positions are we talking about hierarchy? Are you talking about projects that they've led? What sort of leadership are you referring to? Like in a spectrum of, is it in terms of hierarchy or career progression? What exactly are you referring to? Because someone can be like senior in the organization, but not necessarily like, be a leader.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. Well, initially I was. I was looking at just people that are in any kind of senior leadership position. Uh, but as I say, I've had such a struggle to find African men that would be even willing to participate that I'm assuming that it's a really complex and difficult thing, especially for African men. You'll see, when I ask the questions, I speak a lot about sort of executive leadership roles and your path to getting there but really, if you've been in any kind of leadership position where you've sort of lead a project or been a leader in an environment, then that would be relevant in terms of what I'm trying to understand, yeah?

Jabulani

OK.

Researcher

Alright. OK, is there anything else, anything else you want to know?

Jabulani

No, that's that. Thank you.

Researcher

OK. Alright so then, maybe you can just start by just briefly telling me about your professional life in terms of your qualifications and your previous work experience or employers and places of occupation.

Jabulani

OK.

Jabulani

So I completed my undergrad, that's a bachelor's in business administration, with [a tertiary education] campus. I think that was around 2011 and then there are, I think two years ago, no, I'm lying, three years ago, I completed my post grad, which is like the honours with [a] Business School. So, I've always been like in business management and in there I sort of majored in like advanced Human Resource, Project management, organizational strategy, and all of those sorts of things, including marketing and finance. Uh, and then I joined [a financial institution], I think it was around 2012. So, you want everything or the most recent.

Researcher

yeah, well, where you are working now and previously?

Jabulani

OK, so currently what I am doing is like a junior business partner for people in culture, better known as a HR. We call it people in culture. So, I'm the junior business partner there.

Researcher

OK.

Researcher

All right and can you tell me a little bit more about your experiences in this role occupying this, what, what is that about?

Jabulani

So it's basically like, uh, HR practices, really, uhm, when it need comes to like collaborating with other senior stakeholders. Because basically what we are is the custodians of processes within the organization, to ensure that all staff members are treated fairly and equally and then all HR or performance related methods are sort of adhered to. So, we like bridge the gap between the employee which is the staff member, let's call them the staff member and their leader, just to make sure that that relationship is sort of healthy. So basically, it's around that, and showing that there is fairness across expectations. What the employer expects from the junior and also around growth for employees. Ensuring that we sort of, ushered them into being future fit, as in the financial industry, there is constant change, so we also heavily involved in developing and growing our people. And also sort of laying out like, a learning pathway for them, so to say. And another thing that we heavily sort of park on is ensuring that we foster true diversity and inclusion within the organization, and that's one of the other legs that I'm heavily involved in, of course.

Researcher

OK, all right so. So, in terms of your career path within this organization. Uhm, what served to advance or aided your career development and attaining the kind of leadership position that you're in now.

Jabulani

When you say leadership position, its disarming because I hardly ever see myself as that, right? I don't see myself as a person that has sort of made it and on a nice career trajectory. But, because I started off as a banker and sort of worked my way into like an analyst and then where I am, which is more of a generalist, I think I'm going to try to answer the question directly. So, I think it has a lot to do with the educational background and my will to collaborate and to a certain degree maybe my charm. You can attest to that. I'm sort of aware of what sort of sets me apart as an African individual, not a lot of black people speak the way I do and have a lot of confidence to the degree that I do. So, it also comes with, uh, I'm trying not to be cocky, but sort

of self-aware that most certainly there have been individuals that are far more talented than our than I am, but I think we live in a time where it's about the ability to sort of put yourself to the fore and advertise yourself. So, I think it's a collaboration. My progression is strongly collaboration of my ability to build networks and also complement that with some actual work, whatever is expected from the organization. But most certainly it has to do with networking.

Researcher

So, networking, collaborating with people, but also obviously the work that you do has to be of a of a standard.

Jabulani

Correct, correct. It doesn't matter if you trying to be all charming in your language, however, your output is a complete flop, so.

Researcher

OK, alright so were you comfortable to reveal your sexual orientation to members of the organization and maybe you can just describe that experience?

Jabulani

I think before I became an employee of a [financial company] I'm first an individual in my own space and then my community and then family and whatever the case is. I think my journey with my sexuality, even up until today; Uhm, OK, I'm gonna tell you my life story right and then talk to you about why sometimes it's so difficult for me to actually identify as, yes, I'm a gay guy, right? But it took me so long for me to come to the realization and accept my identity and at times, I wonder if I'm, like, I would go back and forth, back and forth, so sometimes it's not just your comfort with who you are. I feel like I'm getting to a point where you're comfortable with your identity and sexuality, UM. Being real in the workplace, also makes it slightly easier. Now tell you why I'm saying this so, part of what I used to also do was collaborate with a lot of stakeholders across, across the continent, and these are Africa regions, and you would know that in most African countries, homosexuality is also illegal. Now I'm also aware that sometimes it's not the content, but the package that also prohibits you from hearing the content, and I would sometimes times wonder to myself if I sound too gay. Which one is it? An eloquent Black man or just the over-the-top gay man that they are hearing.

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

Uh, so those have, have been my anxiety. Fortunately, in this time, I was working with a, I worked with in a team of women, and I think it was after like 2/3 months. I don't sort of tone down my sexuality, but what I do because I have issues in my head so I'll, I'm always wondering if people can tell. People around me say you are like, you are nowhere close to being in the closet, but anyway, I would always feel the need to sort of iron it out. Because in conversations people would say, when you see you can hear that people are refraining from talking about

relationships and things like that because they don't how to refer to you as like hetero or where's your wife? Because that's how people speak generally. So, when we talk about relationships, it even becomes like a little bit tricky, so I've always made a point after some time, after a certain level of comfort, to sort of make it clear that, you do know that I'm not heterosexual? Yes, we've known they would say. Uh, so to answer the question directly, there is a strong sense of comfort in my sexuality, but I feel like some, some level of rapport needs to be built.

Researcher

yeah, but it also sounds like it's almost like a repeated coming out.

Jabulani

Correct, correct, correct.

Researcher

If you work then you, you have to repeatedly come out as gay.

Jabulani

Correct, correct, correct? I like that, that's so true.

Researcher

Yeah. Alright, so in terms of what...

Jabulani

Before we move to the next question, do you think that's OK?

Researcher

What, what do you mean?

Jabulani

Did we constantly coming out like a repeatedly because I've tried to work it in my head to say like, heterosexual people are not even bothered, it's like second nature right? And I have to acknowledge that homosexuality to certain degree, is an anomaly, but I don't like treating it as such. I don't like it mattering that I am homosexual and the constant having to come out or announce it, sort of bugs me to a certain degree. Why am I doing that because heterosexual people don't do that all the time so why does it even matter, but it matters to me. So that's one thing I want to work on.

Researcher

Yeah. It's strange, so, I suppose maybe it has something to do with you trying to feel comfortable, and that means you have to be open and constantly telling those that don't know so that you can still feel like I'm able to be comfortable. But yes, I agree, heterosexual people don't have to go through that kind of challenge at all. There's an assumption that you are

heterosexual until you communicate that you're not, kind of thing. So, maybe that's why, in order for yourself to feel comfortable, you constantly needing to address it with, with people.

Jabulani

Thank you.

Researcher

Yeah.

Jabulani

Thank you.

Researcher

So yeah, yeah, it's a tough. It's a tough experience and I and I think most gay men or even LGBTI community members all have that same challenge. It's something that they're constantly confronted with, you know, and we're going to have to do this all the time. Do I just have a meeting when the whole organization is there, or do I send a message to the entire organisation? So, I think it's the kind of thing that, that many people sort of struggle within our communities. So, so, if I could ask you this, what would you say are the negative consequences of revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace?

Jabulani

And this is just an opinion, right? UM. The truth is, people are, so people try to be professional, especially in a virtual space, so it's really hard to read people. People try to be professional. And therefore, people conceal how they feel but it doesn't change their feelings. And because it may be internal, it may manifest in different ways. Uhm, I think what the threat would be is not knowing what you're dealing with and those people having an influence in your career projection or career growth. I think that's what the threat is, because to be honest, I'm part of a diversity inclusion forum, which I steer, however, I'm realistic to a sense that we may have like two-hour webinars and whatever the case is. But what has been engraved for the longest time in your life, the probability of me changing that personality, that perspective over two-hour online seminar is not really that strong, you see. So, we may have these interventions where we sort of encourage you to sort of keep an open mind, but it really is up to the individual. And yes, policies can protect homosexual individuals in the organization, but then you are being limited can play, can influence your growth in the organization and unfortunately those are things that, at times, you wouldn't be able to even tell.

Researcher

Yeah so.

Jabulani

It matters not what it is that you do, so the threat is dealing with what you don't know.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so I mean on the surface you might be seeing somebody that seems to be accepting, but you don't know what's underneath that surface.

Jabulani

Correct?

Researcher

And whether that will then impact in terms of career progression or growth?

Jabulani

Correct, because we have to acknowledge that there are these unconscious biases that we do have, and I think those are the most dangerous. I've been friends with individuals where, like very close friends, that at times when we have conversations about the LGBTQ plus community, there's prejudice, and sometimes there I discovered that I am the one that's being tolerated, but not necessarily the entire community, which is heart-breaking.

Jabulani

Right?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. So, it's limited to you, the sort of inclusion of you, but not necessarily everybody.

Jabulani

Yes, yes, which is not cool.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, I hear you. So, what do you think are the obstacles in your organization that may prevent gay men or other LGBTI+ employees from achieving leadership roles? And I mean, you, you've kind of stated something that obviously on the surface you might be included, but you don't know what's going on underneath the surface that might be preventing it. But do you think there's, there are other obstacles?

Jabulani

I see there's a recording button there. I didn't notice because I was wondering, are you taking all these notes? But I see the recording.

Researcher

Yes, it's recording.

Jabulani

That one is slightly tricky, right? Because I can't. I can only speak for again, like, the whole Covid story and working from home makes, makes it slightly difficult to spot prejudice.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Jabulani

And I can only refer to where I am in, like, reinvented within the communities I have sort of touched. Because the organisation is quite big, right? That's really, that's a really tricky one because I've had conversations, I don't know. I'm not answering the question. But I've had like, sessions where we talk about, imagine, we have to firstly appreciate where we are, we are in Africa, and even though South Africa may be ahead of the curve but our legislation and all of these things, people have sort of not matched that in terms of progression and I've just also wondered to myself where, as someone from HR right? I've also wondered to myself that imagine if I had to have host an interview for a technical role and its male dominated and then a transgender person applied for the role and they had to be on camera and when they speak, they, they look like a woman, but when they speak they sound differently and the form says Male.... But you know, all that confusion and I think to myself, would the team, would the business partners, because all I'm just doing is going to be in the session and I can't make that decision for them to recruit that individual, right? I can just sort of try to facilitate fairness. I wonder to myself that; would people see past their expression and their identity and all of that and really park on this individual's potential and ability to influence the success in the team or whatever the case may be.

Researcher

Yeah.

Jabulani

I wanna say we are not there yet, but I will, it's just that I don't, I can't account evidence that in both situations, but I feel like we are not there yet.

Researcher

Yep.

Jabulani

Because you hear of times where it's Mother's Day and a transgender person would not be given, or women day or whatever the case is, and a transgender person would not be given uh, flowers when the entire team of women are given flowers and things and people still don't recognize that person as a woman in like all of these things. But these are because the community is so small and because the community, it's also for us difficult to know. We can't ask uniformity, are you gay or not, right? So again, it becomes really difficult and because it's also the organisation is so big, maybe the prejudice would only be happening in the corner and

would really hardly ever get to our table, but note in my head, no doubt, there are some limitations to be the 'G', to being the 'G' word in the organisation.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, it sounds like, you know, it's not necessarily obvious things or overhead things.

Jabulani

I hope you don't mind me drinking while, it's coffee, I promise.

Researcher

No, no, that's fine. So, in other words, it's not necessarily overt or obvious, but there is perhaps, it's based on a feeling that a person gets in the organization that you know it isn't 100% OK or comfortable or safe to be open.

Jabulani

Very similar to like harassment. As someone in HR, we know that. It's so difficult to pin it down, you know, when there is discrimination or when it's sexual harassment, unless they are texting. Whatever the case is. But if it's happening in the work because, yeah, that's always so difficult and tricky. I think very similar to the matter at hand.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Jabulani

Plus again, not everyone is going to declare their sexuality.

Researcher

Do you, have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to impacted and the journey to achieving a position of leadership. Maybe you can explain that if you have.

Jabulani

I have a mentor who, it was important for me for that individual to be homo, so they, they sort of understand the journey that I'm on and they would also understand. Uhm, the limitations that occur because this individual also like had to, is an executive now in the organization, in the [LGBTI+] community, people and culture community. So, what's the question again?

Researcher

What was your experience of your sexual orientation having impacted your journey in the organization and achieving leadership in the organization?

Jabulani

So, my, the mentor that I was referring to, sort of launched me into people and culture and from there, I've been moved from one team to the other, one team to the other. Uh, so most definitely, it has worked in my favour because my mentor was the 'G' word, and I was deliberate in selecting him. I mean, I think again, I think women are more open to homosexuals as compared to men. I don't think it's, sort of, been a challenge for me because of my sexuality, I think it's primarily been around the people, the community, that I have kept and sort of been extremely nurturing.

Researcher

Yes, yes, OK. OK. So, in other words, for your sexual orientation not to impact your journey, you need the support of a, of a community of people that, that are there in organization able to support.

Jabulani

Fully agree, very true. I remember, I mentioned earlier on that, networking is important. Yes, it's extremely important. It's extreme and we have, I don't know if you know this, we have a forum called PRISM, uh, which is mainly designed for our community members, LGBTIQ plus and there are like a variety of initiatives that we, that the forum has a part of that. The forum sort of referred you to us, right?

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

So, Mr T, he could even, could tell you a lot about what that does. I think it helps a great deal. I think the challenge right now is that it's our marketing is not as great as it should be, so it has not sort of been filtered down to our general staff members and I think that's where we will need to move into. To show that there's also a support group for our community members.

Researcher

Yes, it sounds like it's very important. OK, so, so, maybe this ties in with what you were saying a little bit earlier about who you are and the qualities you have. But what, what characteristics or qualities do you think that you possess that may have helped you overcome some of the obstacles in the organization?

Jabulani

I think the strong self, sense of self-awareness. Oh my God, I'm like, I'm gonna try to answer this question by not blowing my own horn, right? Like, so that's going to be really difficult. How do I not sound narcissistic?

Researcher

Yeah.

Jabulani

I think what's important is that self that sense of self awareness and understanding your rights. Uhm, and a very strong sense of confidence. I think that's extremely important, and you will see Ajay is very confident. I don't know if you've had a conversation to talk to him?

Researcher

No.

Jabulani

He's one of the black guys that have not come to do an interview.

Researcher

Oh.

Jabulani

Uh, uh, like, reflecting on myself, I think you'd really need to be confident and unfortunately, it's like women in the workplace. When I was working with the ladies that I was working with, you need to help me right? Because sometimes I can deviate. When I was working with the ladies that I used to work with, I just said, oh my God, like, you women work like super-women and I'm not even talking about them being mothers and whatever is the case, but just at work. That was the one time I had felt enormous pressure, and I've worked with straight people before, but they really don't have that much pressure. I think for women, it's like, you have to prove yourself, especially like in their initial position and things like that, you have to work extra hard. And women, even in leadership positions, will tell you that up there it's like a Boy's Club and those boys don't even work as hard as we do. It's like you have to work extra hard to prove yourself. I think it's quite similar to our community. You have to prove yourself and to a certain degree, in my head, I think you know, in the olden days, homosexuality was sort of paired with mental illness. So, it's like you have to be like a genius and extra brilliant for you to be recognized. It's extra effort that you have to invest as compared to hetero counterparts. And how people also relate to you and all of that. So, I think it has a lot to do with extreme hard work and confidence in your abilities. I think that's what plays an important role in your career progression.

Researcher

Hard work, strength in your abilities or belief in your abilities and networking, networking with people, the right kinds of people.

Jabulani

Correct, yes, yes, put in the work. Network and you just have to be better than everyone, unfortunately.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Researcher

So in terms of personal characteristics or traits, what characteristics or traits do you think gay men require in order to achieve leadership in organisations?

Jabulani

I think this strong sense of confidence. We all have that impostor syndrome, right? But it's strong sense of confidence and uhm, I believe that perfection is a moving target, but continue to strive for it. I think we work extra hard as compared to other straight people. That's just me. I don't have evidence of that. That's just how I feel. So, I think it's like the work ethics have to be like up there, you have to embody excellence.

Researcher

OK yeah and be very confident.

Jabulani

That that is also it. Like that is it, and I continue to park on confidences because for a lot of Black people, African people will not, and like a lot of us are not for many reasons, cultural. You know the eye contact story, the comfort in language. You know, most Black people, if not all, ok, let me just leave it at most, like 90% of us, English is not their home language and maybe you, (**Researcher**), English is not maybe your home language or whatever the case may be, but you are more prone to speaking English as compared to any other language.

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

I feel like we also need to acknowledge that some of our most of our black people have been taught English in there, like, in the African languages which like, so our English is not the best and therefore we are not comfortable, and we've also been taught that your ability to speak English well also is an indicator of your intellect, which is not true nor fair. So, I, I continue to talk about confidence because as someone in a HR, I've also been sat in interviews where the person has great potential and the content is great, but the confidence is just not there and that can sort of dim your light.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah, So, then, what organizational assistance do you think that you received as a gay man on your journey to getting to leadership?

Jabulani

I haven't received any. And I'm being honest.

Researcher

Yeah, so there hasn't really been much, in terms of organizational assistance, for you in getting to where you are?

Jabulani

Yeah. No, uh, apart from, apart from the mentor that I had, and this is someone I had to sift out independently. He was doing a presentation because of some changes that we're having, and I approached him, and again that requires confidence to do that, right?

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

But structurally, from an organization perspective, I only learned about PRISM, uhm, after I became a little bit more popular in the organization and people would then, you understand, and that's why I also mentioned, again earlier, that PRISM needs to again be brought down in all corners of the organization, because it really isn't.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Jabulani

So, I don't think I've had much support apart from my mentor. That's a very good one. That's very good point, because PRISM should be that right. But if it's not filtered down, down, down there, to even the most rural branches, for example, in KZN, then the prism ideal will continue to just be a just an idea, which is not fair because already people enrolled in it are the ones that are confident, you see.

Researcher

Yep. So, in terms of organizational strategies or assistance, what do you feel is necessary to encourage the equal opportunities and development of, for instance, LGBTI+ employees?

Researcher

So, you were talking about Prism, so an LGBTI Forum in the organization that reaches everybody, that sounds like what you think, yeah, yeah. Do you think there's anything else that organisations, strategy wise or assistance wise that they could do?

Jabulani

I like, I think I, remember I mentioned that I'm also part of a forum called Diversity and Inclusion? I think the organization can first start off being intentional in fostering inclusion and once you are in- because I don't want it to be under an umbrella to say we are an inclusive organization just as much as when you have ads saying we are an inclusive organization blah blah and we encourage people of disability to apply- in that line, we should also have people of disability, the LGBTQ plus community, you understand. So, you need to be intentional and also highlight it to evidence your inclusion. I think that's very important, so that's one of the things. But I'm mentioning that because it's coming top of mind, because that's one of the conversations I've have already started that even in with resourcing those are the things that we need to start talking about.

Researcher

Yes, yes. It's like almost needs to be in the titles and in the documents, so yeah.

Jabulani

Yes, yes, yes.

Researcher

OK, OK, so very much in the policies.

Jabulani

Yes.

Researcher

So, so, apart from forums and committees focusing on inclusion, we need policies and, and kind of the wording of documents that that also back it up, yeah.

Jabulani

To back that up. And I'll tell you why. PRISM can like, we can have sessions and talk about why it's important until a tongue dry up, but it's again up to that individual, that has probably had 35 years of people saying that homosexual people are possessed or whatever the case may be, that's not going to change anything. The policy is the one that's going to prompt them to make those decisions, whether you like it or not. That's the bottom line, but we may talk as much as we want to, but it's, really is not of strong substance if the policy does not back it up. So, the policy is extremely important because it holds, it holds us accountable.

Researcher

Yep, yeah, OK, it's a way of enforcing their accountability of all the people yeah.

Jabulani

Correct, correct.

Researcher

So if I just this ask the last question, how effective do you think organizational strategies and policies are at non-discrimination and protecting the rights of the LGBTI people. The current ones anyway.

Jabulani

You know, for someone who converses for diversity and inclusion. So, to answer the question straight up, I don't think they very much are effective. And people care about the bottom line, and by that I mean, it's poetic, for us to say we need to be all inclusive and all of this like, have women in leadership positions, let's recruit and I'm, I'm keeping this as broad as possible to just show that it's not just a homosexual issue, but I now know that your subject matter, on homosexuality, alright, but have women in leadership positions, let's recruit more disabled individuals, blah blah blah, but those prove that progress has only been achieved through policies. We've been preaching that let's have women in leadership positions, the time it became a target and leaders needed to evidence, like at year-end review, that's when it started moving. Even with disability, right? It's not happening. I don't see it happening in our communities with the LGBTI, I don't see the inclusion. I don't see it. We can talk about it as much as we want. It's not happening, so it's not effective because we have very little policies that support the agenda so, it's like lip service.

Researcher

But it also sounds like what you're saying is, it almost has to filter down from up above. From the very most senior leadership in the organization. They have to insist that, you know, everybody below them, performance is rated according to how inclusive they really are and that those things are measurable in terms of performance.

Jabulani

Correct. Correct, I'll just wanna say something right, that even though we've had these conversations around true inclusion and blah blah blah, last year around, I think it was October or June, our CEO released the letter, of which we will also excited about and proud, that he talked about Pride Month and he talked about, no, it was in June, you know, national Pride month.

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

Uh, he talked about South Africa being progressive in human rights and because [a financial institution] does not just operate in South Africa, he also needed to sort of, because this is what we also talk about in PRISM. We only reinforce it in South Africa because that's where it's legal, for the most part. But he also talked about, as we continue to respect legislation in different African countries, we want to make it clear that, as South Africa and [financial institution] SA we

stand for LGBTI rights. That's me, paraphrasing, and for me it was a big deal, right? I mean, when we have these webinars, at least it's aligned to what senior leadership also believes.

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

But again, where's the policy? This is the challenge, right? And this is what I think of. I was having a conversation with the head of diversity and inclusion, and even though I can't vouch for gay rights and inclusion and all of that, on our end, we also have to be cognizant and realistic uh, around our limitations, because how are you going to measure that for women? I just went black did you hear that?

Researcher

Yes, that's fine, don't stress.

Jabulani

Uh, for women we can measure that and say these are the numbers, this is what it looks like. And we are able to measure it because it's OK for you to take female and whatever the case is. But how do we measure it from a homosexual perspective and the LGBTI? Because you have the right to non-disclosure.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Jabulani

Do you understand and again when it comes to, so maybe you can help us with this. Even if we are targeting, um, growth for the LGBTQ plus community, one of the things that this other lady, she's White, so I'm gonna, I think it's important for me to mention that she's White. We laugh about it. I mean, we talk about reporting, she says white men are an endangered species, right? Because you know, affirmative action and blah blah blah.

Researcher

Yeah.

Jabulani

So maybe we could get a straight guy who's White to say, I'm gay, just so that they can also fall under somewhat of a benefit so.

Researcher

Yes.

Jabulani

My point is, how do we measure it? How do we measure it? For woman, it's like, it's clear that this is a woman, and really, there is no universal look for the LGBTQ plus community members. So that's the one thing that's tricky.

Researcher

Yeah, so even if you were able to get statistics, you wouldn't have accurate statistics because, just like I'm experiencing in trying to recruit people for my study, people are not being open about their sexual orientation or being members of the LGBTI community. So how, how would you measure it? And I guess it's only, it comes down to creating safe spaces in organisations so that people are able to be open because that way then you will get a more accurate reflection in those organizations and perhaps, we, we're still far away in South Africa from getting that right.

Jabulani

Correct, I was heading. I was gonna say that, you know, on a yearly basis, um we have like a survey they it's sort of like a dipstick into understanding how employees feel about the organization and most of the time we have to, because I'm in HR, we have to push them to complete the survey. And some of them just tick, tick, tick because they don't want to do that survey. Because there's first of all, they feel like even if I tell you, you're not going to do anything different, right? And secondly, maybe I may be victimized after this, especially since that we have to be able to identify. And even if we say it's anonymous, can still say (**Researcher**), you didn't complete the survey, so how anonymous is that, right?

Researcher

Yeah, and how honest are they, even if they do complete it?

Jabulani

You see, and again, so you have it spot on when you say we have to create safe spaces, but that's the tricky piece. Uh, we are trying, we are building a community at [a financial institution] from individuals who come from all walks of life, and I'm not saying it's impossible, but I feel like we need to appreciate the challenge that we're dealing with. That we have to create a safe space, no doubt, but my experience of the organization, you could be speaking to someone else, and you'll wonder, are you talking about the same [a financial institution]? Because where you are, the leadership, the structure, that whatever the whatever may be different. My experience of the organization may be completely different to someone else, and I think that's what the challenge is, that's what the, really the challenge is. How do we ensure that consistency in experience? Or feeling that support.

Researcher

Even taking it a bit through that, I mean, even if you have a safe environment in your organization, the cultures that we have in South Africa might still prevent people from being honest in organization, because knowing that somebody in the organization knows about me or my sexual orientation and it can reach the community, who aren't inclusive or supportive or safe,

would also impact on whether they would be honest or not. So yeah, there's, there's a lot of hard work, I think to happen, and I think, this is what my study is trying to show. Is, you know, we, we've got the legislation, we've got really great constitution, but whether that is still allowing LGBTI, and specifically gay men, to achieve leadership with no discrimination and no prejudice, I don't know. It just doesn't seem to be translating into the organisations yet.

Jabulani

Correct, correct? You know. and this is a little bit off beat, there was a session, and this is me now being distasteful a little bit, just a little bit distasteful. There was a session that [a colleague] had, and it shouldn't be that, right, because I think he is trying to foster inclusion in our communities, but I was on like, there's so many gay people who are unemployed, right? And I get it, since I don't have evidence because I'm not a **Researcher**, so many gay people with potential, um, but what is it that we have? This is even, before you get into an organization and are like flourishing. Outside, right, what support do we have? And I know I said offbeat, so please let me be compete, outside, before you even get into [a financial institution] or any organization, outside, what support is there that is mainly meant for our community members to better enable them to get into the workplace, and maybe we'll have Prism, that will help them have a better or smoother sort of experience in organization. But there are so many people outside and we know how competitive the gay community is, right, and how nasty we are to one another. So, outside, what support is there to have them come in, or better yet help them create opportunities like business blah blah blah because we do have, again, structures that support women right then, I mainly meant for women, but then again.

Researcher

You know getting women into the organization.

Jabulani

Correct, correct? But then goes back to the problem that I spoke about identifying and validating they belong to the community, so yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so yeah, we've got a long way to go.

Jabulani

I wish there was like, where you can test if you are or not. I think that would make it a lot easier.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, so well, that's it's. Those of the questions for, for my study and I really appreciate you speaking to me. It's been great, UM, and if you know of any African men. They don't have to be

in [a financial institution]. Anybody that you know that's openly gay and in senior leadership or executive position and you think they might be willing to speak to me, please?

Jabulani

I know when engineer, I'm gonna give you, his number.

Researcher

OK. OK, thank you.

Jabulani

Uhm?

Researcher

Just, just to warn him.

Jabulani

Yeah, let him know but I'm gonna be like you know the proper manners. Let me speak to him and then let you know, I'm gonna give you his number and then let him know. And then from there, he also has like his own community of individuals, perhaps that he can refer you to.

Researcher

So yeah, you know, as I say, it's really, it's really important for me to speak to people that are working like you, in mainstream organizations, like the banks. That have achieved leadership, because how have they done it? I mean, is it an internal thing, have they got internal characteristics that have got them there or have they got a support structure in an organization? Is the organization helping them to get there? Yeah, well, I mean, what I've deduced in terms of your development is it's definitely been an internal process. It's been your characteristics, more than what the organization has been able to do, that's got you where you are. And it seems to be, you know, from the interviews that I've done, that in a lot of cases, that is the situation. Yeah, it's more the internal characteristics because the challenges are still out there.

Jabulani

Correct, correct? So, what are we saying? Is it, um, some are not strongly driven? Or is the confidence that still needs to be built?

Researcher

Yeah, it's the confidence and maybe they don't have the support of people who are, maybe they don't have the mentor like you've had. Maybe that's something that the organizations need to look at is making sure you've got somebody in the community that can be a mentor and can encourage the growth and help people, yeah. So yeah but thank you very much. I'll give him a call and see if we can set up something. If you think of anybody else, please, you're welcome to let me know, because yeah, this has been a major challenge.

Jabulani

Do you prefer Black guys, or do you want more White? I don't know.

Researcher

I have more White people and I don't know whether it's just, are they more White leaders, which is probably the case. But also does the culture that they come from or the communities that they come from, are there more understanding or accepting? I don't know, I've spoken to, to White people, I've spoken to Indian people, I've spoken to Coloured people, but for some strange reason with African people, I just can't seem to find people willing to participate. And I want to hear their voices, I want to know what they've experienced and what things are like because I think it will help me in terms of producing a thesis that's valuable.

Jabulani

I agree, I agree they're robbing you.

Researcher

So, if they're out there, I'd love to speak to them.

Jabulani

Wait, did you speak to the other people at [financial company], what did they say?

Researcher

Uh, my uh, they they've responded saying they showed interest, but I haven't got further than them just saying they're interested but I'm still trying.

Jabulani

I suggest you schedule time with them and in that session make them signed the consent while you on the call.

Researcher

OK. Yes, OK, thank you, I'll try that.

Jabulani

OK cool keep well.

Researcher

Thank you, thanks very much. I appreciate all your help.

Jabulani

Pleasure, keep well and goodbye.

Researcher

Goodbye.

End on interview

Interview Seven: Jan**Researcher**Hello **Jan****Jan**Hi (**Researcher**).**Researcher**

How are you?

Jan

Ya man, nice to meet you.

Researcher

Nice to meet you too.

Jan

Yeah, yeah where are you, in Johannesburg.

Researcher

No, I'm actually in Pretoria. Is there anything that you want me to explain to you or anything that you would like to know about the study?

Jan

No, I think I'm clear. I mean yeah so, so you do it through which university?

Researcher

Through UNISA.

Researcher

[South African university]. The study is the lived experiences of gay men in leadership in South African organisations.

Jan

OK.

Jan

OK.

Researcher

I'll, I'll tell you a little bit about why I study came about, you know, can I? I've worked in incorporated. I've worked in government and something I noticed was you never hear about gay leaders. You just don't hear about LGBTI leaders, for that matter. You don't hear anything about them, and I suddenly started to wonder. You know what is, what is behind that? Why are we not hearing? Does it mean that there are no gay leaders? Or is there something else going on? Are they not open about their sexual orientation or are they not achieving leadership? Or are there barriers to preventing them and obviously going through the, the literature and the studies that have been done, all of them are saying yes, there are barriers still for LGBTI people in corporations, specifically in South Africa. That's what's expected. So, then my, my reasoning was how if there are gay men in executive leadership, how have they done it? You know what, qualities, or what things have helped them to achieve it. So that's where I'm kind of coming from with my questions.

Jan

OK, OK perfect.

Researcher

All right, so maybe you can tell me, uh, just briefly about your professional life just in general in terms of what qualifications you have and your previous working experience or employers.

Jan

Uh, yeah. So, I done an honour's degree in business management and, and so I've been, I've been in South African pharmaceutical healthcare industry for about 20 years now. So, I started off as a medical representative and under different roles over the years and different organizations. I've worked for, uh, mostly multinationals, but I've also worked for, at that stage when I joined [a pharmaceutical company] there was an African business. But now, their shareholders are now majority Indian and they bought back into the business. So, I've worked in various roles in pharmaceutical industry, for, for multinationals over the years and, and then I've joined [a healthcare company] three years ago as a commercial director. And then I was appointed as the interim general manager and then after a while I was appointed to the role permanently and the general manager of the organization for the past two years I would say.

Researcher

OK great UM. And the position that you're currently occupying is, is general manager in [a healthcare company].

Jan

Yeah. Nutrition, [a healthcare company] Nutrition so we've got five divisions, we've got a GM for every division. Four of us depending on the size of the business. And I'm running the nutrition business for [a healthcare company] Nutrition looking after South African and a few African markets.

Researcher

OK. So, in terms of your experiences occupying this role, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Jan

My experience, I'm sorry in, in what sense?

Researcher

Well, we, you know we, we are investigating the lived experience of gay men in leadership. So, it's just about your experiences as a gay man in, in leadership in this organization.

Jan

Yeah. In this one or over the years in different roles?

Researcher

This one specifically if you can, but you can talk about the other ones, yes.

Jan

OK. Yeah, you, you know, I think, I think the thing for me is, you know. I've always been, I mean, you know open about my sexuality. Even if I go for interview, I'm very upfront about it. I always say, if they, if they for some reason, they don't want me in the interview process, then I'm not a right fit for that organization and I would rather miss out on that opportunity, So, so they will even interview in me. I mean they've asked me, you know, from married or whatever and I see that's such no, but I've got a, you know, life partner and and you know, I'm in a gay relationship and yeah, they were very, very comfortable with that so, so they all know my, my uh, uh, leadership team. I, I reported to Europe that all away. I mean, you know we've got a WhatsApp group with all the GMs around Europe and myself is on a group I've posted pictures of [my partner] and myself, let's say doing something or whatever, so they are pretty much aware, you know. So, my partner's a Coloured guy, you know? So, if we are not the same race. So, my team as well, you know, beginning of this year, for example, we had our kick-off conference because a virtual conference, but myself was presenting the awards from a studio. And well, what we've done this year. As with quite nice by the virtual awards we actually got the whole family involved. You were allowed to invite three of your family members to evening? And we had food delivered to the house and you know, turn and I took [my partner] to, to the studio and when I did my deduction, he was standing next to me and I did say to everybody on the call, even my, my, the families of my, my colleagues, you know this is [my partner]. Then I told everybody kind of thing. You know so you know I'm not, you know I tried to be, you know, uh, my, I'm not there to make a point or anything like that. I think you know, I talk about diversity and inclusion a lot in meetings, so it's about, you know we accept everybody, whoever you are you know, as an organization. We are we, we are driving the DNI agenda very hard, and I think the fact that I am living proof of that and I'm comfortable. People feel comfortable that I can really be themselves and, and I think that gives me advantage. You know, I think you know, because, you know, there's not this male dominant culture. I mean, I am, I think because I'm I'm

already a bit different and that makes people feel very much more, I think, relatable to me as well, and the barriers of you know the labels completely go away because I think people see it. You know we are all equal and I'm not, and I'm not a normal guy in the sense of the word. I'm different. If we can do that and we all different right? And that makes creating a much more diverse and inclusive culture. So, I think for me it's, it's given me a lot of advantage in life and work specially and you know, it's always been in my favour

Researcher

OK so, so tell me a little bit about your career path in this current organization. Uh, uh, what advanced or aided your career development and and getting to the position you're in now.

Jan

And so, so I mean, I joined as a Commercial Director and I would say for four weeks and then the GM that appointed me was asked to go back to [the far east] and they had a vacancy in the, in the organization, I mean, the [deputy vice president] (DVP) which I reported to at that stage called me and he said this and I'm going to give you a chance and I know that I'm taking a big risk and I know that your aspiration is to go into this position but we're gonna give you the chance because we were we were just in a conference, in the first two weeks that I was there and I was leading the whole conference after 2-3 weeks in the organization, and the leadership team attended all of that, the leadership team from Europe was there and they really saw my abilities and they liked what they saw and they decided they're going to give me a chance.

Researcher

Ok

Jan

And so you know. And then I took over the role. I've never been in, that was quite a big jump for me, but I mean, they gave me a nine-month probation period which I delivered more than the results they were expecting and.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Jan

And you know, at that stage when I joined, the organization was very unstable and his biggest thing was to me, as make sure you get the people to stay, get talent in the organization and make sure you deliver. We're not giving you a very stretched target for the year, but we just want you to make at least some kind of bottom line in terms of profit. So yeah, so in the end, I did it well and I did better than expected. And then I became permanent right? So, that was the main reasons for the, for the promotion.

Researcher

OK. Yeah, yeah, so tell me what, you were comfortable with revealing your sexual orientation to the members of your organization, could you just describe that a little bit?

Jan

Yes. Yeah, you know. So, at my previous organization, I worked for was [a manufacturing company].

Researcher

OK.

Jan

And and [a manufacturing company] are even much more progressive than, than [a healthcare company] to be honest. And then just before, a year before I left [a manufacturing company], we had a uh, LGBTQ conference in Prague and they were asking representations from every country. And I eventually represented Africa at the, at the conference. And then, you know, we, what they call it? But the "open out" is the name of the, but you can belong to at, at [a manufacturing company], and I launch that after I came back to South Africa. I launched that just, uh, two weeks before I left, I launched it at [a manufacturing company] Business, the Open and Out forum, you know, and I think that was the first time I was really completely open about it and I think what I've realized, number one. I've realized how many allies were there in the organizations with people that really said that we are not gay, we are straight, but we want to be an ally. We want to be supportive. So, there's a massive support in the organization and there was a first thing and then I also realize, especially in Africa, you know, what responsibility do one have as a leader in an organization where you live in a country where there is a democracy, where we can speak out and I mean, I'm not going to go to jail because of that. No one can discriminate. I mean I can't give not give me a promotion because of that and but then for the rest of Africa, it's not the same. So, then I realized what a huge responsibility someone like myself have in an organization like that. So, when I moved to [a healthcare company], I realized you know that comes with the territory. The fact that I'm the general manager and I'm leading it from the top make it so much easier. You know? So, because the, the leader of the country is, is, is driving this agenda so and but I know I've got a responsibility, not towards myself because I'm comfortable with oh, I've got enough confidence, you know, I am the general manager, so it's already made it so much easier. But for the people in the continent it's, it's important for them to know that they can, with [a healthcare company], they've got someone to reach out to if they if they want to have a discussion.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. I like a, like a role model for the people there.

Jan

Yeah, that's it. I think that's that and I think they know that you know they, maybe they live in Rwanda, or they live in Uganda or Nigeria. They, they, you know they might go to jail for the rest of their life, but at least I have an ally, that can speak to someone this side and say listen, this is

how it is. You know? What advice do you have for me, or you know, so I have received a few calls over the years from people, regarding the the like the asking questions and asking for advice etc. because I'm, I'm open about it, yeah.

Researcher

OK, good, good. So, I mean maybe not speaking about your own experiences, but what would you say are the negative consequences of revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace?

Jan

Uhm, you know, I think it can, so, I mean small things that I have experienced with this, you know, going to a conference, where you have to share room with, you know, they give you a. You know when I was [sales] representative (rep), you know your reps, normally you share with another roommate, you know. Then sometimes that might be uncomfortable with another guy that he doesn't want to share room with a gay guy, you know that that's the kind of the thing. I've been in situations where people will make awkward or uncomfortable jokes about gay people. You know, like a joke is fine, but I think sometimes it was malicious and then afterwards they realize it. That you, know you, you were in their company, and you know that becomes, can, can become very awkward situations. I do think in some organizations, I mean, I've got a friend of mine, a very good friend working in the steel industry. I mean, there's no way he will ever come out at the work and say that he is gay. You know that industry is also very different, and I think that will stand in his way in terms of promotion. So, it can definitely impact people in terms of promotions. And you know, for example I had I had a discussion of my DVP, my boss based in the UK and say OK, I, I want to make international move and we've actually discussed this, you know, countries where I can't go and work as a promotion to general manager. So, in the Middle East is going to be very, very tricky right, for me to go there as a gay man, to lead the Middle East Muslim men it's not gonna work, right? So, so, there's also limitations on where you can be based in what roles and for example in the Middle East, they can put me in a role for example that's not necessary customer facing versus you know, So, let's say I can have a supply chain job in there. It's not customer facing but I won't be able to have a sales director function because I'm customer facing, you know. So, I think it has also had limitations on where you can also relocate to and which areas you, you can work and with which clientele you can work and where your job is going to be? Because if I've got a gay guy that is very flamboyant working for me for example, I'm not necessary send them to one of my Muslim clients in Durban, right? So, I will then say OK, it's not necessary the right fit, I will send rather this person instead of that one, to go and see him, you know. So, I think it makes it sometimes tricky in terms of, but for me personally, I haven't seen people not getting promoted to because of that. I mean, you know, I've always worked in very, very open-minded organizations. Even when I worked for [a pharmaceutical company], which is African pharmaceutical company that states very, very Afrikaans male dominant, at that stage and you know the sales director and myself got along, the main commercial director and he even promoted me into two roles and he knew I was gay and he was very, very supportive of that. So, I've never experienced anything personally bad. But I think there is potential risks. Like I mentioned in different various things.

Researcher

Yeah. Well, I think that that's basically my next question. Is, what do you think the obstacles in

your organization are that may prevent gay men or other LGBT employees from achieving leadership? It sounds like there's not really much that would prevent them from achieving leadership except limitations in terms of countries where they would have to work or clientele that they would have to work with. Yeah, yeah. So in terms of your organization, it seems like they're quite supportive and encouraging.

Jan

You know they're very progressive, you know, so I mean on, on LinkedIn, for example, during the month of June, they would change their global, our global logo to, to the gay flag, for example, you know. So, they're really very open about it and very, very supportive.

Researcher

Yes, yes. All right, you you've, you've basically answered this and I think I just, just to ask it again. Have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted on your journey to achievement of executive leadership? And if so, can you just tell me how or what happened?

Jan

You you know you know, **Researcher**, I think, the big thing for me is that when I was a bit younger, I was a bit insecure, I did struggle with accepting the gay thing myself and that was the reason that my career didn't progress as fast as it should because I thought I don't deserve to necessarily move on. So, there was one stage that I was my own worst enemy because I felt I didn't deserve it.

Researcher

OK, OK so more than anything else, it's, it's kind of, you feel it was that that stopped your growth or development.

Jan

Yes, yes, my own, my own thing. Like as a gay guy, I can't be in that role, that position. Whatever kind of position. My own mental block that I had to overcome. And once I've done that and accepted that and then, you know, I realize it's more in my head than the people around me. You know, they actually don't give much of a ****. It was my own, my own stumbling block and I think for a lot of the things, I'm sure, you could relate, there's a lot of things in our own lives that, like that. Is your maybe your nose or your whatever? Some of these more complex than other things, but this is definitely something that, that was a mental block for me for progression.

Researcher

Yeah ok. What characteristics or qualities do you think you, you have that helped you overcome whatever obstacles there might have been? Or in other words, what qualities do you think you have?

Jan

Uhm? Yeah, I mean. I mean I in terms of my work specifically.

Researcher

Well, you just you as a person, your personality or.

Jan

Yeah, I mean I think I, I, I'm one, I'm a very compassionate towards people. So, you know people relate to me very well. I'm very people-oriented, and I think that has always been my strong point is that you know I know how to get along with people well, to relate to people and to get results. You know, with that you know, I'm very clear of giving them direction and guidance in terms of you know where, where we are going. So, I think I've always been very good with strategy and then then the last thing I would say is, is getting results. So, I've always been, I've always been a guy that delivered more than any organization. If they give me a target, I would mostly in my life get over the limit on that, but I think it starts with the people, giving them clear direction and support, and then that leads to results, and I think that's the reason why I've been, been successful.

Researcher

But it also sounds like one of the qualities you developed or grew into was confidence in yourself or trusting yourself that you could do it.

Jan

Absolutely. Oh absolutely, absolutely.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah alright yeah that's great. And what if you were to say, what personal characteristics or traits do you think gay men require to achieve executive leadership in an organization? What qualities do you think they need?

Jan

I, I don't think it's necessary different then that would be for straight person, right? I mean, I think, you know, depends on what is the job that you do, you know? If you're, if you're in a financed role, it's obviously different than a commercial role versus something different. So, I think it's different things, but I don't necessarily think it is different than with straight people. But I do think, one thing is important and that is being accepting of yourself, right? Being comfortable around it and confident in who you are. I think it's an advantage that a gay person has, if you're authentic about it. I think authenticity is very, very important. So, you think about it, and you know and, and use it. You know I, I will use the fact that I'm gay. I mean, people know that, but I don't talk about it in every meeting, but I will be very subtle about you know, my myself being gay. So, every now and then I will have a picture of myself, my partner. It's arriving for the weekend, and I'll give him a message from what I've learned for, for the weekend, kind of thing you know. So, I think it's about being authentic, but I don't think that the quality of the job is different. I think it's very much the same, right?

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Jan

And but you know there is unfortunately challenge of someone being too flamboyant. I think that can be a South African context, it can still be, you know, uh a challenge. You know, you know, I, I worked for me for example, you know, I dress a bit more colourful than the other people, but I think you know overall you know I'm not that camp, if I can put it that way? You know some of that can also be, you know that people don't necessarily take you seriously or whatever. So, I think I get across like you know, fairly, you know, I'm not pretending something I'm not, I'm just, you know, operating as I am. But yeah, to get back to your point. I've never, I never thought about that question, so maybe I'm speaking a lot and I'm but I. I don't think your qualities needs to be different. I think you need to just to be authentic. I think that is it.

Researcher

Seems like being authentic and genuine to who you are?

Jan

Yeah, absolutely. People like that, they really liked it and that's when they trust you, right? You know so at times you know I, they know at work. Every now and then, if I get emotional, I show a tear right. Like you know, if I'm very happy with your result or I'm very sad about something, they know I'll say it and I'll have this. But I'm not, I think that makes people feel, think, feel comfortable that if the leader in an organization can be vulnerable, it's OK. It's, it's fine, you can be that. So, I think authenticity is very, very important. And you know, being you. That's the environment that I'm creating in the workplace. You know, an environment where they feel safe to be who they are. You don't have to come to work and hide something. You know I've done that for many years, early in my career, I've hidden it and yeah and obviously now I don't have to do it anymore. There's, there's so much more, so much more fun right to be yourself.

Researcher

But you know my next question is, you know what organizational assistance you received as a gay man on your journey to leadership, yeah, maybe you can just on answer that and let's see what you say.

Jan

No, nothing. As for me it was, I think, a lot of personal work I've done a lot of personal work with spiritual work of a journey, with mental health coach or business coach. I had a spiritual coach. I'm still doing some of that work, so I think it's more about work I've done outside the organization to accept myself for who I am and love myself. I had no support from anybody in the organization because I was, I was gay. Not at all, no.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so there wasn't really any assistance. What organizational strategies or assistance do you feel are necessary to encourage equal opportunity and the development or the promotion of gay people? And you kind of mentioned something already, that it's kind of leading from the top being that role model in the organization or having that role model that inclusive or accepting person. But maybe there's others feel.

Jan

So, so for example, you know, they're a bit more progressive, so we, I am now at the moment, we're not that advanced yet but like for example at [corporate company] they had ERG's, (employee resource groups), right so one was for leadership and women, one was Muslim in the workplace, one was Open and Out. So, I think it's important to, to create those ERG's and to make it vocal and to make sure the leadership team and organization you know. So, if the GM or the area director is not necessary, LGBTIQ themselves, let them be an ally. I think that's important to us, that people that can speak about it. You know, make sure that the organization that that is valuable and, and I talk about DNI (diversity and inclusiveness) at every opportunity that I have. I talk about that in the organisation. Because it's not just about me being a gay guy, but, I mean, you know, female, black females in Africa. They have a very, very hard time to prove themselves a lot of the time and organisations. And my star performance and my team at the moment is all African females and I think they are so, so resourceful and so, so yeah, I think it's about talking about it and, and make sure people are aware that that's the organisations stance.

Researcher

Yes yes OK OK UHM and, and then maybe the last thing is how effective do you think organizational strategies and policies are at non-discrimination and protecting the rights of LGBT people?

Jan

Horrible, no, I think it's terrible, right? I mean, I think I'm in a unique situation and in, you know, and I've always kind of. But it, it's not the norm. I mean, a lot of my friends that I know will not that work, let's say in the banking industry or like I said, in mining or in engineering or one in the steel, they would never be able to have these conversations that I'm having. You know, they would not be able to necessarily bring their partner to thing. And so, I think organizations is very, very poor and not just with LGBTQ. I think with DNI in general, but obviously LGBTQ is what we are discussing today. Not very, very good. It's not a clear strategy. Uh, you know. It's a, so it's, it's not great.

Researcher

So, so despite us having a constitution that protects the rights of LGBT people, and even if there are strategies in organisations, you don't think they're particularly effective in actually doing that, protecting the rights or, or preventing discrimination.

Jan

You know what, let's say, for example if we if you're going to go to the CCMA, I will probably

have done things in the right way. I think it's more the culture that we create, an environment that we create. So yeah, even if the framework is there, it doesn't mean we create that environment where people feel comfortable to be themselves. And I think that's the difference.

Researcher

Yes.

Jan

But yes, I think I mean, we in South Africa, we are probably one of the best protected and legislated in the world in terms of how advanced we are, but that doesn't mean it's happening in the workplace. In theory it's good, but in practice there may not be the environment that we want to create.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah, I mean it does sound like **Jan** you've kind of, you've kind of mentioned what, what we need is we need some LGBTI leaders. Because if, if we've got the leaders that are more understanding and more supportive and inclusive, just in the way they are, and the way they manage, it seems like that would be the, the key to making organisations more inclusive.

Jan

A leader normally determines the environment and the pace. So, if your leader is not supportive or not an ally of this, you're gonna have a problem, right? So, I think that is the main thing. So, you need senior leaders in an organization, you know and for example and at my previous organized [corporate company], the chairman of the organization, opened up our conference, right? And that was then put that evening on the Internet to the whole organization. So, here's the chairman of the company supporting and he's at the conference with his flag and hugging people. Well, uh, you know how can you, how can you, uh, not? How can you go against at right? I mean the that's the so, so I think it's if the leadership is supportive and create that environment. Then it's so much easier for the people that that can't influence that much.

Researcher

Yeah, I mean, it's great to hear that from you. And obviously, what I'm hoping with my studies is that if we create awareness that we need gay leaders and there are very few or they're not vocal about it, maybe that that will help organisations in South Africa, particularly to make changes, And you know, that's the last thing I was just wanting to ask you **Jan**, if you, if you know of people in a similar position to you in in terms of executive leadership or very senior leadership in in South African organisations. Because I'm, you know, trying to recruit participants has been a challenge for me. And I'm not sure what that says. Does it say that there are very few, there are very few gay men in senior leadership? Or is there something else going on that I'm struggling to find those participants, So, I don't know it? It might be proof of what I'm studying, or it might be something different.

Jan

Really, so you've been struggling to find people.

Researcher

Yeah. I mean, if you think I've been, I've been recruiting people for what it's about almost two months and in that time, I've managed to recruit eight people.

Jan

And how many do you want to recruit?

Researcher

Well, just in terms of my study I'm I was hoping to do between 10 and 15 if I could. So, if there is anybody that you can think of that you think might, might participate, it would be great just to to speak to them.

Jan

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that I can forward to two to one or two of my friends, right?

Researcher

Yes please, that would be great.

Jan

Yeah, I've got a few friends and they all need to be in corporate right?

Researcher

Yeah, well, in South African owned organization that's basically the thing, something that originates in South Africa and where they are quite senior in the in the organization.

Jan

OK, and then and they have to be open about it.

Researcher

Now they have to be open. They have to identify as male and have a same-sex sexual orientation.

Jan

OK, OK, I've got three or four people that I'm gonna WhatsApp it to now and see if they come. I've got a lot of my friends is successful so and a lot of them and I know is, is open with where there are. So, I do think there's a few, but I think we got a long, long way to go still, you know, in terms of creating that environment, yeah? Yeah, so, so, I think you, you know. I mean, I just, I lived in South Africa quite a lot in different places, right? You know, I'm just thinking just you know, that's what I like about Johannesburg to be very frank. I lived in Pretoria. I'm not fond of Pretoria because it's not such an open-minded city, you know, and people are much more conservative. That's why I prefer living in Johannesburg was because really people are more

accepting but if you look at South Africa, outside of Johannesburg, it's, it's very much a conservative, even the Western Cape is extremely similar. You know, it depends on which circles you move into, right? There's some is very, very conservative and that's what I like about Johannesburg, the diversity of the city. People don't really care what colour, what race you or what sexual orientation you are. It's very much more accepting city now even comparing it to Pretoria for me.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, no. It makes sense to me because I've noticed that myself. So, what you're saying is that there might be a link between the inclusiveness in organisations and the geographical area.

Jan

Oh absolutely huge difference.

Researcher

Yeah OK, OK.

Jan

Definitely. Yeah, and also you know, general thinking. Of all you know, I think what you're gonna find in say, and this is generalization. I'm, I'm sure that you would find, for example in Roodepoort or Boksburg or Sandton and Illovo, it's going to be very, very different. How people think, just, just because where they grew up in the area, etc. You know that it makes a huge, huge difference in terms of the demographics and that you can see how people vote.

Researcher

OK.

Jan

Not, you know. For example, you know the Freedom Front will never win in the city where I stay, in Johannesburg. But they're gonna do probably very well in Potchefstroom, right? So, geographical location makes a huge, huge, huge difference, you know. And I could tell you know, I mean, I'm sorry.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

No, you mean we might even graphical form II separated it into the various provinces, but now I'm wondering if that's something that might be changed, making that even smaller? You know

what parts of the provinces, so we can get a better idea in terms of yeah, what areas in Provenca tend to be more inclusive or and which ones don't?

Jan

You know you, you see it in the USA when you got the Bible belt in the middle and the coastal so. So yeah, I think it's all over the world. It's the same thing, you know. I think the challenging thing for me. You know, as, as that I am, I'm in a gay relationship with my partners, also, even of a different colour so some people find it extremely and I could be very honest with you. You know my sister; I've got a [sister] who married to a farmer in the Free State and she can't accept that. She found it extremely difficult to accept my partner that he is a difference race. Where, you know my brother that lives in the Umhlanga metro which exposed to very different things. He is very, very fine with it. So, I think a lot of times it's the people that we mix with and engage with and the religion etc have a huge impact on, on that. And I think about that, and Pretoria people find it a bit more difficult to understand the mixed relationship while in Joburg where I live, in my complex, we are 14 units and we've got three mixed couples that live here. So, people really don't care that much, you know. So, I think geographical location can have a huge impact.

Researcher

You know, it's a very interesting thing, and it's something I'll definitely try to look at with more results to see if I can find any kind of correlation. Yeah, no interesting to think of.

Jan

Correlation. Yeah, so you're busy with your studies, but I mean what? What have you done? What is what is your career being in the post?

Researcher

Well, I'm a psychologist, so I'm a counselling psychologist so I have a private practice and I also work in government as well. I work as a psychologist for them.

Jan

In Pretoria

Jan

Oh wow, OK, that sounds quite interesting.

Researcher

Yeah, well it's. It's basically doing employee Wellness. So, so a lot of the things that you were saying now, what was also in my mind, thinking you know, that in government, having these various groups and allies as you mentioned, I think it would perhaps be a very valuable tool to implement if it was possible.

Jan

Yeah, absolutely. And so, like I said, if it comes from the leader, it always makes a difference, right?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah for sure, for sure.

Jan

But sure, let me forward with what Ajay sent to me to a few of my friends and see if they're interested. Then we can let them make contact with you.

Researcher

Yeah, that would be. That would be great they are welcome to send an email, or they can give me a call as well. Whichever, it doesn't matter.

Jan

And you will see. I mean, you will share the results with me when it's done.

Researcher

I can definitely do that.

Jan

You know I will be very curious to see what the outcome is of your, of your research please.

Researcher

That's great, thank you, I appreciate your experiences. It really helped me.

Jan

Awesome.

Researcher

Alright look after yourself and thanks again for participating.

Jan

Same to you. Take care bye bye.

Researcher

Bye

End of interview

Interview Eight: John

John

Hi (Researcher). How are you?

Researcher

Good thanks and you?

Researcher

So yeah, I I don't know if you, if you got from the, the forms that you filled in. I just wanted to tell you the actual title of, of my study. Uhm, is on the lived experiences of gay men in the achievement of leadership in South African organisations. So Yeah, you know, as a, as a person working in a organisations, I notice that something that you don't hear about or something that you don't see in organisations, particularly ones that I've worked in was hearing about gay men that are in leadership and, and that confused me because I assumed there must be gay men in leadership. But why don't I hear about it? Why don't you hear these things? So it was that that's really started my interest in, in the study. So yeah, if there's anything you would like to know (John), in any information that you would need, some, yeah, please go ahead and ask me.

John

No, I don't really think so. I think I've got a good idea of of you know what your what your research interest is. I think I understand some of the, the concern that you raise about about the kind of. It's almost as though there's a hidden presence of gay people in leadership. Um, and it might be interesting to try to, to unpack what's going on there. So yeah, good, sounds good to me.

Researcher

OK. OK, so you're happy for me to carry on and ask you the questions.

John

Sure.

Researcher

Alright, so just, just initially, if you can just tell me a little bit about your professional life. UM, in terms of qualifications, your previous work experience, previous employers, that kind of thing.

John

OK so I have a very, very strange background, so let's try to start from the beginning. I guess, initially I did a BA degree in languages, history and maths. Um, and with a view to possibly teaching, I think, but I never ended up going on to that. At the time, I was very, very religious and very involved in a church and so I ended up doing my national service, followed by being appointed, that I'd already done some sort of studies through the church, being appointed as a probationer minister. In the Methodist Church in [South Africa] for two years. Uh, and while I was doing that, I was busy working on theology degree as well, and eventually at some point then I've got that and. and honors degree in theological ethics. Um, while I was working. So, I was the probation minister for I think was four years and then I was ordained. And then I stayed in the ministry for a total of about nine years, I f I remember correctly. Uh, I left the ministry partly because, you know, I, I'd realized I was married and I realized that that this wasn't going

to work out and that I've been trying to deny a part of myself for too long. So eventually my wife and I spoke about it and we agreed that we would separate, which we did.

Uh, we had two children and, and so that complicated things, but we find we always have been we, we remain good friends and and, and so we've managed that reasonably well. I then went on to uh, to work for a couple of years as a training and development consultant. And then join the company. Uhm, that were essentially a software development company, but they were looking to sort of computer-based training. A division producing some of the, I guess the very early online, wasn't online in those days, it was done on disks and things but, but computer-based teaching stuff. And I stayed with them for gosh many, many years and my role changed quite a lot, but eventually many project management on, on some quite high tech type projects and then, company moved me up to to back up to Joburg. Uhm? And the year after I came back, I realized that there was a course in, a master's course in Applied Ethics at the Philosophy department at [university], and they did their teaching on Saturdays, so it would work for me. So, I registered for that, ended up getting the MA and applied ethics. From there I was invited to do a PhD, which I did.

It's come through [university] because my, my supervisor had moved across there. Uhm? And then towards the end of the period that I that I was doing my PhD, that took me 3 years. Uh, and in the last couple of years I did quite a bit of part time teaching at [Johannesburg universities] and then at the end of that, once I've got my PhD, I got a full-time position here at the [bioethical department at a university].

I've been here for 10 years and started out as a lecturer on a contract being promoted to senior lecturer, then associate professor and then my director uh had come to retirement age and when she retired, I applied for the position, and I got it. So yeah, that's the background.

Researcher

OK, OK great, great so you now working as a director of this institute.

John

Yes.

Researcher

Alright, OK so in terms of the, this position that you currently occupy. Can you tell me a little bit more about the role?

John

OK, so the center itself it's, it's interesting 'cause it's not an academic department. But I would say that we are probably, we probably about 60% an academic department in fact, and, and that's the other 40% that I guess makes a difference, and that's why we're a center. So, one of the reasons we are a center is because centers can, can bring in their own money other than just research funds. So, we can and we do get money from, from various organizations which can you know, obviously opens up more opportunities for us in terms of outreach and doing work outside of the normal sort of university confines.

Researcher

Yes.

John

So quiet, you know we can do a lot more service type stuff and can be more involved in

developing. Uh, policy and, and being involved in, you know, these big international committees that that come up with big declarations on ethics and that kind of stuff, some of our time can be given to that because we get funding from, from outside.

Researcher

OK.

John

So yeah, the center itself is, is not very large in terms of numbers of people. Uh, so we have, uh? Five full time academics, plus we have about another seven part-time or, or honorary academics, two administrative staff. But we are very much part of [a university faculty], so our responsibility is right across a whole faculty. We don't teach, just in one department we teach. We teach all of the, the undergrad students who are training for any of the health professions so, pharmacists, all the therapists so, physiotherapists, the occupational therapists, nurses. Uh, there's uh, we also teaching a Bachelor of Health Sciences program. Uhm, the dental school. We have dental, dental students themselves and then obviously the medical students as well.

Uh, so that's our large undergrad stuff and then postgrad we have a, an honours and masters and the post grad degree in bioethics itself, and, uh, and PhD, and so probably, half, if not more of our teaching time goes into supervising a large group of students. We have about 45 master students in the program at any time, about another 10 PHD's. And yeah, a couple of others.

Researcher

OK, OK so you have quite a lot of people um studying under you at the moment.

John

Yeah.

Researcher

OK, quite challenging, I imagine.

John

Yes, so not my favorite part of the job.

Researcher

So in terms of occupying this this role, what? What would you? What are your experiences like working in this role?

John

Just broadly speaking.

Researcher

Yeah, just broadly speaking, yes.

John

Yeah. So, it was quite hard for me in the beginning. I wasn't sure if I wanted to apply for it in the first place. And one of the reasons was quite happy doing the work that I was doing, and I realized I would now have to do all of this managerial stuff, and I'd have to get involved at senior executive level at the university, and I'd be called into far more committees, and I'd be handling all kinds of things that have absolutely nothing to do with my passion. Uh, and, and, and that I was that that that was going to be a bit of a drawback. What convinced me in the end to go ahead was two things, one was that Uhm, I realized that we didn't know who would come in and

we hadn't had a great experience with the previous director. Most of us in the staff had found working under her very difficult and so there was a feeling amongst us that it was better for us to have someone from the inside then from someone from outside.

Researcher

Yes, yes

John

And for me, certainly it meant not having to being able to basically set the agenda myself. Uh, and if it was someone who was going to come in that I really trusted, I wouldn't have minded that, but I wasn't there, was not guaranteed. And the second thing was that my colleagues really pressed me to do it. And so yeah, I went ahead with it anyway, had a bad translation because I ended up being in hospital for six weeks. And just over the end of that year, from late November into the first week of January. Uh, and my, and the previous director to with whom I had a strained relationship anyway, uhm? refused to talk about hand over to me until the appointment had been made and the appointment was made when I was lying in hospital bed. So no, no handover ever happened and so I basically had to learn everything on my own. And so, it was tough. um what I found was that I often felt quite lonely and quiet and not taken seriously within the faculty and, and I think partly that was because my previous supervisor had had a very high profile and many people kind of kept deferring to her because she was still around in the faculty somewhere else, but not in the center. But that wasn't so much the problem. I think it was. It was also, it was also you know, the fact that bioethics as a field in a [university] faculty is a humanities subject in a science faculty essentially, and we are very different.

Researcher

Yes, yes, yes.

John

And so it took me awhile, I think, to kind of convince people that that that I was OK. But I mean that's, that's happened relatively well. I'm apart from that. It's the same, you know. I think there's like, for instance, the same as anyone else in a big university institution, and that is that there's lots of politics and the worst kind, the internal kind we it's, it's rivalries between different people. Academics can be incredibly, arrogant and they are quite often not particularly nice to one another. Uh, in, in there if it's too to kind of get to the top of the pile, it's very competitive. Yeah so, but I don't think it's been any different frankly than anyone else's experience, yeah?

Researcher

OK in the in the in academia, yeah?

John

Yes, in academia.

Researcher

So, so in in terms of the current career path in your current organization, what, what do you think served to advance or aid your career development and achieving the, the leadership position?

John

Um, so personally, I think it was simply that I, that I worked very hard to make sure that I, I got

myself the right kind of profile. So, I made sure I was publishing, enough publishing in the right kinds of journals, made sure I got myself an NRF rating. Basically, I just kind of you know I, I know, I know that there's, there's certain, there's certain boxes you have to, you have to check to be able to advance here. What are those boxes? And I deliberately set about making sure about, making sure that I checked those boxes um, and I think that that's probably what's different between me and some of my other colleagues who have lagged behind.

Researcher

Yeah.

John

It's, it's purely a matter of, you know, knowing what you have to do to be able to, to make the next steps and doing it.

Researcher

OK.

John

And, the other thing I think was that I just built an incredibly close relationship with my, my colleagues and the team here, so I had I had their support right from the start, and I think that's made a big difference.

Researcher

OK, OK. Do you, were you, were you comfortable to reveal your sexual orientation to the members of the organization? Can you describe that experience?

John

So. I guess you know, when I applied for the job, obviously I wasn't going to say to people this is, this is what the situation is and not if anyone did not ask. Not because I would, I would have had any hesitation to do it, but just you know, straight people don't do that, so why would I have to? You know, and, and, and but you know, uh, quiet, quite early on made sure that it was clear that I had a partner and my partner's name was [S]. Um, and, and we, he came around to the office once or twice to help me with setting things, because he's into IT stuff. To help me setting sent some things up and, and one of our, our younger female lecturers came to me afterwards and said, "who's that, he's hot?" Uh, and so I said, well, actually he's, my boyfriend. And I guess that kind of broke the ice. So, universities are very full of gossip, so I think they would have got around rather quickly and and then we ended up going to a kind of welcome dinner with the staff about two months in or whatever, and as we were allowed to bring partners and so I just bought [S] as my partner and didn't say anything. I didn't prepare anybody for it and the idea was you get what you get.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

John

Yeah, and that was it really. And in terms of yeah, you know, and, and subsequent to that I don't, I don't make a big deal about it. Uh, so obviously I, teaching [an ethical subject] we are going to deal with issues around sexuality and, and we'll talk about, you know, discrimination of various kinds. So, this kind of thing comes up. I do a lecture once a year with the medical students called 'gender is not binary' and we look at some of the issues that a doctor might have

to deal with, with patients who are intersex with patients who are. Uh, gender nonconforming and want to transition. Uh, and, and you know we kind of deal with some of the, the challenges that that might bring. Uhm? And, and I have been asked a few times, our [university] students bioethics society, which is quite close to the center, we support them financially. They always organized something every year on, on, in Pride week.

Researcher

OK, yeah.

John

As part of their as part of what they do and twice now they've asked me to be part of that, and so you know, it's I think it's pretty clear to people that, that I that I am in the queer community. Yeah so, it's out there without me having a rainbow flags on my door or anything.

Researcher

Yes, yes. So, what, I, I had somebody that's explained it's like running around with faerie wings on?

John

Yeah, yeah, I haven't. I haven't tried that yet.

Researcher

OK. So, what, what would you say are the negative consequences of revealing your sexual orientation in the workplace?

John

Well in this workplace, it can be an advantage to be honest, and I think you know, [South African university] obviously has a very long history of being a kind of a progressive liberal university. Even back in the apartheid days and, and you know, you'd be hard pressed to get away with making a, a homophobic comments on this campus without someone calling you out about it. Uh, and you know we have, we have the, the, the wonderful Constitution that's there and fortunately it does seem as though most of our medical students anyway seem to think that the Constitution is the equivalent of New Testament.

Researcher

Yeah.

John

that or something and it can't be wrong. And even if they hate what it says and they feel very uncomfortable or having to, to live up to its, they live up to it anyway.

Researcher

OK.

John

Uh, but I mean, I'm I'm pretty sure that's not the case elsewhere. That's not to say that there isn't a kind of a quiet, a quiet sort of a prejudice that may exist. Uh, especially so I think in a faculty like Health Sciences, where I think attitudes or less progressives, and they would generally be in social sciences. I think there's, there's, we have a very large religious community within the faculty and, and we have many people who are very, what's the word I'm looking for? Fundamentalist and Christians. Uh. Quite a few people from Islam and also, a big Jewish

contingent still. So, there are people who, I think, put up with the constitution essentially, but in their private views, they may hold a different view. And if those people are on committees and if they hold positions of authority, it is possible that some of that prejudice could affect somebody. And I think it, I think it may have been certainly in other times. I don't think I've found myself in that unfortunate position yet. Uhm? But, it's not inconceivable.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, you know it's interesting, because the next question was basically you know, what do you think the obstacles in your own organization are that may prevent gay men or other LGBTI+ employees from achieving the leadership roles? Do you think that those, those religious groups or those kinds of obstacles? Or are there others?

John

I think it would mainly be the religious groups that, I think there are very few people that I'm aware of on this campus who, who, who would have any problem anymore with, with the gay community generally, unless they, their ideological position as well, which is quite strongly influenced by some sort of fundamentalist, publicist kind of religion.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

John

Yeah, and then there are probably maybe some, but I think they're rare. And, and obviously it's not the kind of place in which you just have the kind of sort of thugs that you get, on the streets, who, who you've probably be find they're meant to be some kind of affront to their, their sexuality or something. I don't think that's really a problem here, but I think where you could run into some prejudice. Uh, is the kind of thing, that the idea that gay men or like women. They're, they're emotional. Uh, I think that's sort of prejudice that women often experience. You can't be a manager because, because you'll let your emotions get in the way of business decisions and you won't be able to control yourself in certain situations. I think that can also be applied to, to gay men, and unfortunately, I think even more so to those who, who present in a way in which someone would, would you want to call them effeminate, or something of that nature? Uh, I think often they, they, they may be more targeted than, than others might be. But I, I do think that that still exists. I've certainly seen some prejudice in terms of, of behavior towards the one or two transgender students that that I am aware of on campus. Uh, and you kind of notice the sort of gossiping and snickering in the corner, and that kind of thing that's still going on. But I guess that's a different issue. So, it's, it's. Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah. Different. Do you? Do you? Do you think that the UM in, in your organization? Have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to impacted on your achievement of leadership?

John

No, I don't think either way to be honest. I mean, I don't think it's it's, uh, it's been a positive or a negative thing. And, uh, would there be others within, within the faculty, for instance? Um, not that I'm aware of, no.

Researcher

OK OK so then.

John

But it is a liberal university.

Researcher

yes, yes, yes, OK.

John

It's not an engineering company or mining house.

Researcher

Yeah. Well, an important question for me, uh, (John) is, is intrinsic characteristics of people. So, what characteristics or qualities do you think you possess that may have helped you to overcome obstacles in organization? Or the things that we might expect?

John

Um.

John

I guess. I guess one thing is simply a kind of self-belief and self-esteem. I don't think I'm way over any feelings of lack of self-worth as a result of, of, of being a gay person, or even just being different, and I think I did experience quite a lot of that when I was much younger, uh, I think throwing off the shackles of religion. And did it was a good thing for me, but even then, you know, certainly belonged to a clearly very progressive church as far as that was concerned. In fact, my, my Bishop at the time said I could stay and be gay. It was fine. Just keep quiet. I wasn't prepared to be quiet.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

John

So, I think that a certain amount of just resilience as well. I think I've dealt with a lot in life and I put up with quite a lot and I've just learned, that you know in the end you've got to make your own future and you just get on with the job. And, I'm not going to countenance the possibility that I have any less of a chance of something because I'm gay. I'm just, it's not going to even enter into my mind. Uh, yeah.

Researcher

It's interesting how, it seems like what you're saying is given that for some people its kind, there's a buying into stereotypes that there are limits and for you it was just not an option, you weren't prepared to accept that as a, as any reason for you to not achieve what you wanted.

John

Yeah, absolutely, and I still wouldn't. You know, I don't, I don't have terribly many ambitions to go very much further than where I am now, largely because it would be just increasing the amount of my work with the proportion of my work, work that is doing stuff that I don't like doing. I've already had to do quite a lot of that to get this position, and I certainly don't want to become the Dean. or any of the you know, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, anything of that nature. But my reasons for doing that are personal, I just don't want to put myself through that. You know, if I had any ambition to do it, I would go for it. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, and you wouldn't feel impeded all limited in any way. Yeah OK, so in it just carrying on with this idea. What personal characteristics or traits do you think gay men require to achieve executive leadership in, in, in any South African organization?

John

Ja. Um, I do think that they, that they do need to believe in themselves, and I think self-belief is a, is a very important thing. I guess they would apply to everyone. But I, I suppose the problem is that very often when, when around you people are saying negative things or these negative perceptions, or you live with a certain amount of discomfort about how people may see you that, that some people may find it hard to, to do that, and I think you know, I guess we all know that that probably one of the problems that a lot of, of gay men experiences problems with self-esteem, self-belief, those sorts of things.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

John

And, and I you know, can understand within the context that you're in why that might be, that might be the case. It's, you know it's, you know I, I realize all the time, for instance, that my experience is so different from someone who lives in a Township. And you know, I can go to a restaurant in my area and hold my now husband's hand if I want to, I don't have to, but I can. But I know that there are parts of the country in which you would still be very scared to do that. So, so I think that you know, probably there are issues of self-doubts. There are issues of legs off steam and, and those things I mean. I think for me I think that's the key. I think it's, it's learning to, to feel good about yourself no matter what the context around you, and I think it's also just, just what you believe about what's possible and as soon as you believe that they are obstacles in your way and those are insurmountable, it's going to be a problem for you. If you don't believe that those obstacles are insurmountable. If you think that that you can compete, and I think I think it's, it's obviously easier to, to get there. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher

Yep.

Researcher

So, I mean, self-belief self, self-worth and self-confidence are for you major players, but it does seem to be context dependent. In other words, the area or the place where you're living or working, that would have an influence on, on that. Even if you were confident.

John

Yeah. Yeah, I think it could. I mean you know. I mean, I think if you found yourself in let's say, a government department. Uh, and you are sort of like senior management level or middle management level and there are senior management jobs coming up. If you find yourself in a typical South African organization now, you might find that quite a few of the people who are in those positions, for instance, are quite committed Christians. And we have a very, very churchgoing population, and many of them hold. Secretly hold quite conservative views, even though they might publicly nod in the right places and all of that kind of thing. Uh, the honest truth is that they are still quite prejudice, so we experienced that here. For instance, when we talk about abortion and, and you will discover that although a lot of people will know the rules

and other law, no, the act in order that when it comes down to a personal choice, they will be very, very judgmental of the woman, for instance, who has had an abortion.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

John

And so if you've got those kinds of people and, and very often you know how it is friends, get jobs for friends in these organizations. So, you're essentially got a kind of cabal of people who hold quite conservative views. And in a situation like that, you may very well find yourself hitting a ceiling.

Researcher

Ja, Ja.

John

And I, I think that that is, would be much harder and yeah.

Researcher

What, what organizational assistance do you did you receive as a gay person in in achieving leadership? Was there any?

John

None, no, no, it's not specifically so, possibly because you know it's been pretty, pretty acceptable for someone to be a lecturer and be gay in English speaking universities anywhere in this country for probably 50/ 60 years. I, I don't think that particular efforts are made anymore. I think it's kind of understood that here its well its understood, I think it's assumed that here we don't have a problem, so you know, at the moment we're busy setting up gender sensitivity workshops and race sensitivity workshops. But no one is setting up with sort of like, uh queer sensitivity workshops yeah.

Researcher

yeah, yeah, yeah. Like inclusive workshop for everybody, yes.

John

But I mean if it's sadly I don't think that we're doing terribly well as a community within the university, either. There is a there is a student society I'm, I'm sure what it's called and there's I think, at one stage, there was a sort of society for staff members, but I don't think that really happens anymore. Uh, and possibly because it's become so easy here, it's kind of like no-ones bothering anymore, uh?

Researcher

Yes, yes

John

But what it does mean is that, and, and yes, OK. And one other thing that we haven't spoken about and that is the fact that for various reasons when they came up with the whole employment, equity stuff and transformation and all of that. Uh, it was decided not to include sexual orientation as a, as a, as one of the, the previously disadvantaged groups. So we do not have legal protection in an affirmative action kind of way, in the same way that that other people

who experienced a lot of prejudice under Apartheid government did. I think that was a mistake. And it would have made quite a big difference in terms of I think getting people into, into higher positions. But that is the way it is. The certainly are people around the university who think that for us to talk transformation we need to think more broadly than just what the law requires.

And, and there definitely some who, for instance, think that we should take diversity more broadly, as a as a requirement. So, even if someone is a white male, but they happen to be transgender, that that in in order to have more diversity in our staff that that, that person should be prioritized. And so, there are, I think some people who might, uh there may be some, some job interviews in which that would count, but certainly in my case it, it didn't.

Researcher

It didn't, yeah, yeah. So if you think in in in general terms, again, what, what organizational strategies or systems do you feel would be necessary to encourage equal opportunities for the LGBT community?

John

Look, I think I think more can be done and I think the mistake we're making now is kind of becoming complacent. That just because you know there's, there's no formal problem just because. Uh, you know, blatant discrimination would be very, very hard to get away with. That, that means that there's no discrimination at all. And I think that that's probably something that Wits could work on. So my husband works for [a telecommunications company], and it's interesting that that they have a very, very active staff association and and, and their HR department spends a lot of time making sure that they do things specifically for the LBGTI, our community, that these programs for them, and they deal with exactly these kinds of things. They've also organized sensitivity workshops. So I mean, I've, I've seen, I've seen other organisations in which much more is being done. As I said, they probably be need to do more.

Researcher

yeah. Yeah.

John

Because I think they're a bit behind in terms of the kind of general feel around the place, but that doesn't mean that that nothing should be done.

Researcher

Yeah, It does sound like it's a, It's a, it's an inclusive environment or in assumed inclusive environment and as a result they felt there isn't a need for these things.

John

Yes, yeah, pretty much. I think that's kind of where we, where we've come to. And that's not to say, you know, I mean, our, our bullying policy and our, our gender policy and all those sorts of things certainly deal with, with some of the LBGTI issues. It's not as though it's ignored.

Researcher

Yeah.

John

And, and, and certainly if you experience prejudice and, and reported it, within this, within the system, it would be dealt with and, and I think you know so. So, there are protections and all of that. But that doesn't mean that a shy, a shy gay, young gay men is not still going to feel kind of

overpowered by, by a bunch of really, really kind of heavy talking, loud, very confident academics.

Researcher

Yes

John

Uh, and, and feel that that that he just can't compete in the in that context. I actually, I sometimes wonder about lesbians within the, within the system here. And one of my colleagues is a lesbian, so so at least we were able to talk to each other and share notes. But yeah, I think that they say they suffer because as much as we'd like to say, it's a very egalitarian institution, women still do not get promoted as quickly as men do. And, and, and so then, on top of that they also have had their, their sexuality as, as an additional. Uh challenge yeah, yeah, yeah, so it will be interesting to see what, what a, what a lesbian you know participant from [a South African university] would say and, and the experience might be, might be somewhat different, yeah?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, interesting to think about that. So, in, in terms of the effectiveness of organizational strategies and policies regarding nondiscrimination. Uhm, how? How do you think, how effective do you think they are in in the organization you're in, at Wits?

John

Um, so I think they are, yeah, they're relatively effective. Uhm? What worries me is you know, we, we did some, we did some work on bullying in our faculty two years ago. Uh, and what came across was, was that there still is a lot of it and, and that it was in fact quite serious. Uh, and especially senior colleagues bullying junior colleagues and, and obviously often lecturers bullying students.

Researcher

yes yes.

John

And, and, and was, was very clear at the time was that gender played a big, a big role in that, and certainly the people who are most likely to be bullied were, were women. But in the same in the same light, I would imagine it's quite possible that, that gay men might also be bullied in certain contexts, and that's despite having all of these policies in place. Uh, and that's I think you know the problem with policies is that they, they probably make it easier for you to defend yourself officially.

Researcher

Yes

John

But the concern is that very often people don't want to defend themselves officially because the cost of that can actually end up being higher than the benefit. Uh, so you know. I mean, we know that whistle blows very seldom end up keeping their jobs, and they very often end up never being able to work in the industry again. Uh, and that's despite having some of the most amazing whistle blowing legislation in the world. So, policies don't do it. And so I worry that that

even though we have these policies in place, it doesn't stop a, a, a boss or manager of a group of people constantly belittling, constantly putting obstacles in the way of someone's development, constantly finding ways to, to, to make sure opportunities are given to others rather than to someone else. That kind of thing can still go on.

Researcher

Ja, Ja. So, it's, it sounds like it, it's, it's kind of the, the microaggressions are possible still, and just in terms of the LGBTI community but for other communities too.

John

Yes, yes

Researcher

You know, it's something that you had mentioned you were saying that you know for, for the female and particularly the lesbian group of people, that advancement might not be as easy, and I wondered how that, the LGBT community and their, their statistics into in terms of advancement, compare?

John

Yeah look it will be hard to say. I mean I I don't know terribly many other gay people in the faculty, and they must be more than I don't know. But because I'm not in the medical side of things, I'm not in the wards and I don't, don't see patients. There's sort of a whole group, if you like, of academics, I have very little to do with, so I see the people mainly in the sort of support services and, and then heads of departments and people of that nature.

Researcher

Yes

John

From what I can tell, I'm certainly not aware of a single head of department or anyone at my level. Uhm, apart from me.

Researcher

Yes.

John

Uh, which itself probably says something, and that probably suggests that there's more more going on. Uh, that's getting in the way here then, then I'm aware of. And again, I'm in a very strange position. I mean ethics department. It's a little bit like, it reminds me of the church days. It's a little bit like having the dominee come over when you are having your, your wedding party or something and everyone thinks they have to behave.

Researcher

Yes.

John

Uh, certain people still think that about lecturers too. I mean they think that we were angels or something, which we definitely not. So, so I think maybe there's been, been more caution around someone like me then there might be with someone else, but at the same time I say that my colleague who's a lesbian has been struggling to get promoted and and partly it's because efforts are being put in place to, to try to help women, Uh, to, to be promoted more quickly so,

so so sort of buy them some time off to be able to to do more research, that kind of thing. Uh, and if it's in place, obviously to deal with some of the racial disparities.

Researcher

Yep.

John

But we have nothing similar for the LGBT, LGBT community, so and, and that's probably because everyone is trying to make sure that they can tick all the right boxes in terms of employment equity. Uh, so there's a sense in which you know broadly, people are not considering the, the diversity aspect, other than that, that that amount of diversity that we are required to respond to by law.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, I think I, I think something that I've found in, in, in the literature was that perhaps because we have such a problem in, in in terms of our racial history in South Africa that, that the LGBT community kind of got lost amongst the seriousness of that and, and, and perhaps what you're saying is that actually the, the, the educational system is perhaps exactly that. There's there's so many other, it feels like perhaps more serious problems to others that the LGBT community are kind of left behind.

John

Yeah, well is you think about it's, you know you you hear so much in the states these days about the so called gay agenda and and and there's this. There's almost this fear of organized of organized queers. And yet here we don't seem to have that. I mean, because there isn't the same sort of sense that, that they, that they, they're coming at us from everywhere, and that's probably 'cause we're not.

Researcher

No, no exactly.

John

Because, because we took at and you know, I mean for myself as well. I've been. I don't very often get involved in in in pushing for LGBT issues. The ones that I have to deal with in my teaching and that I do, and I've done some, some publishing on intersex stuff. But mostly I focus on, on other things because that's my job and I've got a broad bunch of students to be concerned about.

Researcher

Yes.

John

And and, you know, during the end of the apartheid era, for me it was much more important to be doing something about that, than to be worrying about about, about gay people. Uh, just fortunately, Mandela managed to sneak in something into the Constitution for us, thankfully.

Researcher

Yes.

John

Uh. Had that not happened, I think our lives would be very different to be honest, yeah yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, judging by the rest of Africa, I, I assume you right about this.

John

Yeah, yeah so.

Researcher

Ok shame, (John), I really appreciate you, your comments and your, your information, UM? Yeah, there is nothing else so is there anything that you would like to ask me or anything else you want to know.

John

No, I don't think so. I I guess at some point you'll, you'll probably try to get this out and published it in some form.

Researcher

Yes. I hope so.

John

Yeah, so yeah. I look forward to that.

Researcher

OK, then there's just one last thing, (John). As you can imagine, I am actually quite struggling a lot to find people in executive sort of leadership in organisations. Do you perhaps know if somebody that I could approach that has, you know, a South African person, a gay man, out in his organisation that could be interested in participating?

John

We don't have very many friends to be honest. We work too much.

Researcher

It's sounds awful.

John

And we've only got time for family and nothing much else. So, I can't think of people off hand, but I'll, I'll, I'll think about it.

Researcher

Please. Yes, if you do, you can let me know.

John

Yeah, the, the problem is a lot of the, a lot of the successful gay men I know are either in some kind of private practice or work for themselves somehow, and that's not quite what you're looking for. So yeah, yeah.

Researcher

No, I'm trying to see what, where are all these gay leaders in our mainstream organizations. Because I, I assume they must be there. Judging by the portion population that they are. But I'm not, you don't hear much and I think that's, that's what we this research sort of emerged for me.

John

OK. Yeah, yeah, sure yeah.

Researcher

So ja, if you do think of anybody, please feel free to let me know and I can contact them and.

John

Sure, sure I'll do that. Yeah, I I also speak to [my husband] and find out if, if he thinks that, if he knows anyone at Vodacom. And secondly, if maybe the, the staff organization there might be open to an approach. Yeah, OK, cool.

Researcher

Yes yes yeah. I heard that that [a telecommunications company] is, is, is UM aware and trying very hard in terms of the LGBT community.

John

Sure, yeah, yeah.

Researcher

If, if he knows of anyone that would be great.

John

Excellent.

Researcher

OK, great, thanks very much John, I appreciate your time.

John

Cool.

John

Pleasure, go well.

Researcher

Alright look after yourself.

John

Thanks, you too?

Researcher

Cheers bye.

End on interview

Interview Nine: Thato

Researcher

Hi (**Thato**).

Thato

Hello, how are you?

Researcher

Good thanks and you?

Thato

I'm good, thank you, I sorry I. I think you had muted me. I was trying to unmute myself.

Researcher

Oh yeah, sorry about that. Yeah, I don't know why it was doing that. OK, great, it's so nice to see you (**Thato**) and nice that you were willing to participate.

Thato

No, it's only a pleasure. Anything to help advance the visibility and acknowledgement of our kind.

Researcher

Yes, yes. I actually wanted to ask you if there's anything you want to know about the study before we start with the questions. Anything you want to know or understand?

Thato

OK, come from the small snippet that I read is that you want to see how well we are treated, if there is any prejudice to decipher against the person being a homosexual and in an executive house. Well, to me it came down to how seriously am I taking as a human being based on my sexuality.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Thato

I need to execute my work because of my sexuality.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, you know, it started, **Thato** was this. I work partly in government and I've worked in the private sector as well before and just my own observations as a gay man working in these

organisations, I suddenly wondered where all the gay men were in leadership and I suddenly thought to myself, why is it that I don't know of any gay men in that are high up in organisations? I just don't hear about them, and I wondered, is this a general thing that's happening in organisations in South Africa. So, you know, the more I started looking into it and the more I did my research, in terms of the literature, the more I realize that there are still a lot of prejudices even though we have a very good constitution and even though we have the legislation, it still seems like the literature is saying gay men in and other LGBTI communities still experienced prejudice or discrimination. What I started to think was. well, if you have a gay man that has achieved senior leadership in an organization, then there must be something about that person or the organization or what's happened in the in their journey, that's got them there. So, I started to wonder, you know if they've done it, how have they done it, and could that information not be valuable to other gay men looking to become leaders?

Thato

It might be valuable, but some might think that we are downplaying it. Not to sound like a non-activist, I am well, I'm not an activist. However, Uhm, I turned to feel that I was maybe appointed because I never disclose anything as much as a straight person doesn't have to disclose anything. The only thing was mostly, are you married? No, I'm not married. OK do you have kids? No, I don't have kids. That I gave the answer to what they were asking me. But when you start having a conversation with me about a partner or your girlfriend or whatever, I'm like no, my partner is...I'm, I'm not shy to just say that, but if it has nothing to do with work. I'm not going to mention it. My competence is not defined by my sexuality, so work first and then if you wanna be personal, then I will be personal. I'll tell you I am a gay man, I am with my partner for this long, we stay together, and this is how it is. And then your nose will move to your, to your forehead and that would be bad.

Researcher

OK, no, that's perfect. All right. So maybe let's start with the questions and, and you must just let me know if there's anything that you want me to explain. So, maybe we can start? First of all, just tell me a little bit about your professional life in general, in terms of your qualifications and your previous work experience or employers.

Thato

Interestingly enough, it was all, uh, I consider myself a hard worker, so I worked in companies from one position to another by just being trying to be competent. I haven't studied further. I am only studying further right now because of the affordability and the, the background that I come from. So, I only have a higher certificate in business administration, and I have done the internal Graduate programs with the companies to move from one position to another. So, I hold that and a lot of those in the companies.

Researcher

OK, so like in house training and think things like that OK?

Thato

Exactly, yes.

Researcher

And what is your position you currently occupying in your organization?

Thato

I'm a unit sales manager for the Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North-West, Free State, and Northern Cape regions.

Researcher

OK, OK so more than half of South Africa.

Thato

More than half of South Africa. I'm responsible for the team that services all of them. Yes.

Researcher

OK, So, maybe you can tell me a little bit about your experiences of occupying the role that you're in now.

Thato

So, I started off in in the call center during the minimal as everyone would, so I'm very inquisitive so, I would personally approach the manager and say I am, I have plateaued in this position. Give me something else to do so that I can advance and as opportunities opened, I would be the first one to be considered because I already knew the job, I was in-house, and I also showed initiative in the work. So that's how I pushed myself forward and from then on, I moved from being call center to being an administrator for the key account managers and then from at being an administrator for the key account managers, I went on to be a key account manager and I worked for [a logistics company].

Researcher

OK, I see.

Thato

So I've been in the pharmaceutical supply chain for it's now 12 years. It's been 12 years now, so I've moved from one to another end. It's only been through dedication and UM being forthcoming and a dedicated approach.

Researcher

OK, working hard?

Thato

Working very hard.

Researcher

Good, so your career path in this current organization is basically going slowly up the ladder, climbing from post to post. Is that the right way to describe it?

Thato

Yes, it has.

Researcher

And, and what do you think served to advance or added your career development and getting to the position you're in?

Thato

It's basically not being a pushover.

Researcher

OK.

Thato

As young as the other person might be, people tend to push, push them over and the being single and being like not married. Or you always get overlooked and it's always being the one to raise up your hand and say I am available, I am here for the job, and this is where I, I want you to go, in my career. So being at the back seat of everything and waiting for everything to be handed to you or doubting that because I don't have this qualification, uh, yes qualifications are very important, but the qualification is not the one thing that's going to be doing the job. You are going to be doing the job, so as much as if you have that willingness to do and be available to better yourself, that way you'll be recognized.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, but it also sounds like it takes a lot of lack confidence in your ability, confidence in your skills, and your willingness to grow and to learn.

Thato

Exactly, and I think it's also, it also takes you being comfortable in who you are. I think that moving up and you really have skeletons, for lack of a better word, that you're trying to hide from everyone. You won't be able to reveal yourself truly to everyone and letting them see your potential. So, being out to yourself and being comfortable with who you are, it goes a long way.

Researcher

Yeah, it sounds like what you're saying is being genuine, just being authentic?

Thato

Exactly.

Researcher

Were you comfortable to reveal your sexual orientation to members in the organization and could you maybe describe what happened?

Thato

Yes, I was. And it's a, it's a small conversation. It starts with oh, how is your girlfriend? I wouldn't say, no my girlfriend is fine. I would say, no, I don't have a girlfriend, I have a boyfriend. I wouldn't put it as I am gay. No, I don't have a girlfriend, I have a boyfriend and he is fine, that that's how I'll put it, I'll correct the questioning and give an answer. It's very. it's a very comfortable way for me to come out. I don't believe in coming out. I just believe in you being your authentic self and when you are there you don't shy away from answering questions thrown at you from any angle.

Researcher

OK, OK, yeah. What would you say are the negative consequences of revealing one's sexual orientation in the workplace?

Thato

Uhm, stereotypically homosexuals are classed in with your single people with no family and partying and not being serious, always being jolly. Yes, we are jolly, but we know where to draw the line but those opportunities are the opportunities that we are deprived of. Our earning opportunity because they, they feel that the, the more money you get then the more reckless you might be. So, that's the only the only deprivation, I'd say, I have encountered.

Researcher

So it, it means that you have to portray yourself as not somebody that's flippant or partying or not taking work seriously, that it's very important to, to show the leaders in an organization that you are serious.

Thato

Yes, and that takes working twice as hard than someone who is heterosexual and married.

Researcher

OK alright.

Thato

Yeah.

Researcher

OK, so in terms of the obstacles do what we what do you think are the obstacles in your organization that may prevent gay men or other LGBT plus employees from achieving leadership?

Thato

Well, in my current organization there is nothing. Oh, so uh, they are very open minded. We actually have quite, not a few, there is two of us, two of us that I know of. Oh no, no. There's three of us so, there is one who was just appointed in the Western Cape in George. And there's two of us up here in in Gauteng. I was headhunted for this position by them, they were considering this other gay guy who is also shows potential he just didn't want the position. So, they focused on your work ethic rather than, you, being yourself outside of work. So, the more work you put in, they consider you from that point of view. You are here to work. And this is how you should be treated and the respect that you get. And I haven't, haven't ever, I've never had any prejudice from anyone in the company thus far.

Researcher

OK, OK, so in your current organization. You don't really think they or obstacles that may prevent a gay person from advancing.

Thato

Not at all in in in instead, even with me studying further, it was a conversation I had. I had already started with my education and I went directly to the MD and I was like, is there any program that you guys offer that could sponsor someone to study further and she saw it as an opportunity for, for them to sponsor me to move ahead, and there are talks of moving up the ladder and all the other opportunities maybe nationally.

Researcher

Yeah, OK, that sounds great. So, tell me, have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted your journey to achieving an executive leadership position?

Thato

Yes, I have. And this, uh, as much as I never wanted it to be like that because I never wanted it to feel like me, being myself, is an obstacle but it came across as the case because we were pinned, I would say we were pinned against each other in my previous company, at [a venture capital firm]. There was a guy, we were similar age and he had come later than me. However, because he was heterosexual, and he was planning to get married, he got promoted far quicker than I was. And those are, that, that's a person that came in after me, and I trained him and then he got promoted immediately after that, and I've followed to the same position after him, but I

had known the job forever after, that it I was I think I was promoted about six months after he was.

Researcher

All right, so it sounds like what you're saying is in your experience, it's been as much about your sexual orientation as your marital status, which might have prevented your journey or your growth into leadership.

Thato

Yeah. So much so, but also because I am homosexual, so the recklessness part of it, I think, was also taken into consideration. Even though I am literally not a party person, I'm always in the house.

Researcher

OK, so it's assumption that you might be reckless, not the truth of who you are.

Thato

Exactly, it's an assumption of what is portrayed by media and what they see out there and they say they put us in one blanket.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. OK, OK, thank you. So, what characteristics or qualities do you think that you possess that may have helped you overcome obstacles in your organisations that you've worked in.

Thato

I am very tenacious, very tenacious and I never mix, I never take anything personally when it comes to work, so if you going to, excuse my French, if you're going to ***** me into saying this was good for business and I can see that, I will take your word for it. But when it comes back to bite you, I will not hold back and say, uh, OK, so what are you gonna do now? When you come back and ask me to help something that I could have done better in the first place, I would ask why now, why now? And I'm also very assertive, well, I think I am very assertive in my teams and I'm very dedicated. So, dedication and transparency.

Researcher

So it's dedication, transparency, commitment, but also determination and perseverance.

Thato

Yes there is. I, I persevere a lot.

Researcher

OK. OK, good. So, then do you think there are personal characteristics or traits that gay men might require in order to achieve leadership in organisations.

Thato

I think assertiveness, assertiveness and we already command the room so, that out the way. So, assertiveness and perseverance because we might be able to assert ourselves, but most of the time, because we are very jolly, we not taken seriously. They think that we are very playful but being assertiveness and being dedicated to your work and being able to execute, at all times. Although I feel like we have to, to work twice as hard to prove our dedication and our ability to perform, we get overlooked a lot.

Researcher

So, so maybe that's with the perseverance comes in, is having to work much harder to push yourself much more and to prove yourself more that you deserve that leadership post.

Thato

Exactly.

Researcher

OK, OK so.

Thato

And, I think from a subordinate point of view, the people that you will be leading, because they are sometimes undercover homophobes. So, you need to be that assertive towards them, so that they understand. You need to be more methodological than to just speak to them like human beings. You have to work harder, push through that wall of, "Listen, stop looking at me as a homosexual. Look at me as a human being who's doing their job not the homosexual managing you."

Researcher

Yes, so you have to kind of push through a wall of prejudice, maybe and kind of prove that it's about the work, it's not about you as the person.

Thato

Yes, exactly. And that most of the time it doesn't come from executive management, it's from your own subordinates.

Researcher

Yeah, OK.

Thato

So to earn their respect, you need to be a little bit forceful on them.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. What organizational assistance do you think you received as a gay man on your journey to achieving leadership? What organizational assistance?

Thato

It's the support from my executive my, managers so uhm, the little bit of pushback that I got when I joined this company was first, I'm younger and I'm a homosexual. So, they always felt like they should go to my manager for issues that concerned me, and he would always push them back to me and I would address them. After, after three months, that's when they, they kind of got it. OK, he is our manager, he's part of the team, but at a higher level, not just a subordinate like us. So, that's the support I got and I'm grateful that I've got the support from up above because when subordinates see that you're not being supported by anyone above you, then they don't even consider you as a manager.

Researcher

Yeah, so in other words, it has to come from sort of the most senior levels in an organization that supportive atmosphere, or that support for you as a person, but maybe specifically as a gay person.

Thato

Uhm that it needs to come from above. It needs to come from above because some people, let me put it this way, from before you get to your senior level as anyone, you worked with those people as colleagues at the same level, and the higher you move and they are left behind, not to say there is some resentment, but they still see you as one of them rather than the person who's a little bit above them who now has to oversee everything that they do so. That is the support from above and reiteration from them saying you need to take whatever direction he's telling you to take, from above other than you are telling them to do something, and they run above and then they get the direction from someone who's above you. That then undermines your authority as a manager.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. OK. So, do you think that organizational strategies and assistance, or which ones, do you feel are necessary to encourage equal opportunities and the development or promotion of LGBTI+ people?

Thato

Uhm, I don't think it should only be LGBTQI. However, it should be based on competence. Competence and the willingness of the person to take up the role. So, I might be competent, but if I don't want the role and I'm, I'm forced to take it and leave people who want the role. They are

also competent because we are all here because we're competent but give everyone equal opportunity based on their competence.

Researcher

OK, so in other words, sexual orientation shouldn't come into the equation at all. It should be about how well they do the work.

Thato

Exactly, sexual orientation doesn't define, and especially if it's, I wouldn't say if it's not physical, because even in a more, say, blue collar job, there are women who have more competence than other men, but it I'll speak mostly on the white-collar jobs that I'm in.

Researcher

Yep.

Thato

Your sexual orientation shouldn't define what position you are given or what promotion you get.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. OK, so how effective do you think organizational strategies and policies are at nondiscrimination and protecting the rights of LGBT plus employees?

Thato

I don't think there's ever been one that's written or acknowledged. But it's still plays on the very heteronomy culture. It's a very heteronomy culture. But the more that a lot of us come out, the more they get to see. But I don't think it's that support. If they're not turning a blind eye on it, but it's not included in their structure and their policies or strategies.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so you mean at this stage there's no obvious strategies or policies that protect the rights of the LGBTI+ people?

Thato

None whatsoever, none that I can pinpoint. It's just a policy that governs everyone. There's no specification on who it affects and how it's going to be executed. If this affects an employee, this is what is going to be done.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. So, it's almost like a general thing for everybody, not just for specific communities like LGBTI+.

Thato

Precisely.

Researcher

OK, do you think? Do you think it's necessary for organisations, do you think they should have something that does assist LGBTI+ people specifically?

Thato

Yes. Uhm, but especially when it comes to the ablutions, the toilets, because it can be a safety thing and it can also be a comfortability thing. So, restrooms are still marked as for women and these are for men, and these are paraplegic. But you end up finding a lot of gay men going into the paraplegic restrooms because they don't belong in any of the two.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, I know I'm just thinking in terms of transgender people, part of the LGBTI+ communities, which would also be a significantly difficulty for them. You know, if they're trying to be forced to choose one of the other would be difficult so, I know what you're saying is things like a unisex bathroom might be more accepting of all people.

Thato

I mean, look at it this way. If we are a community, every household has a unisex bathroom. So if, like I cannot have a unisex bathroom at the workplace and we have it at home; and we've spent most of their time at work, it doesn't really make sense for me because everyone who is at the workplace, is accounted for and will be held responsible by the company if anything was to happen. And you can report anything and everyone there is, should be treated as a responsible adult who respect other people's privacy.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. OK. So, specific policies in terms of protecting the rights of, of minority communities because it does seem like, as you say, for instance, if we're talking about just bathrooms, paraplegic people or people with disabilities. There's some uh accommodation for them, but in terms of maybe the LGBTI+ community, there's not so much accommodation for them, or it's not really acknowledged.

Thato

Yes. Or none whatsoever at some instances.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, OK, thank you. You know that really all. It's just those 13 questions. So, I don't know if there's anything else you want to ask me about the study, or anything that you want to know.

Thato

I haven't had any questions. I just wanted to hear from you as to what had brought it up on you to have this study. So, I think you touched on that when we began, we began this interview that I'm really grateful that you are paving the way into inclusivity and for everyone that belongs to any of those letters.

Researcher

Yes, yes, I know it's complicated to say them all. There's just one last thing I would like to ask you quickly. Do you know of any other African men in senior executive or leadership positions, because what I found the most challenging is finding African men and I'm not sure what it is that makes that specific portion of the gay male community so difficult to find participants in. Uhm, I just wondered if you, if you perhaps know anybody that you know is also there in executive or CEO positions?

Thato

African I know, I know one that I live with.

Researcher

OK.

Thato

When I got the message, I asked him if he'd be interested but he hasn't come back to me so he's not available today. But I will ask again. I will also give him your details. He has his own practice. He is in an MD or a director. The managing director. He's a psychologist, an educational psychologist. So, I'll ask him if he would be interested in participating.

Researcher

Thank you, that would be great. Maybe you can tell me quickly from your perspective, why do you think it is that for African gay men, it's so hard to be willing to participate or to be open in organisations? Because that's my impression, either there are no African gay men in leadership in South African organisations, which I can't believe. Or else, they're not open about their sexual orientation.

Thato

Uhm, I think they always have to put on that façade that they are these strong no-nonsense takers and throughout their career they can be gay everywhere else, except at work. And I don't believe that's a way to live and also culturally, it's only now that the younger generation, or maybe my generation are proudly coming out. But the previous generation, the generation before me, they ended up getting married to women just to hide, so they only do it, they are gay secretly, so, they're not out. They are known as married men, to women with kids and everyone but never openly gay. So, most of them in executive levels, I think they're in that, in that area.

Researcher

So, you're saying that you think it might be, that it's still not safe for people of the previous generation to have been open about their sexual orientation. In their culture or in their communities or in their workspace, it's still not safe for them.

Thato

Yeah, I, I feel it's still not safe and they think that it's still not safe for them.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah OK, it's just, it's just a question because I've really struggled in the study to find African men that would be willing to participate, and I was wondering what was causing that. Because obviously, I think they are many gay men in leadership that aren't open about their sexual orientation. But I had found White people and Indian people and Coloured people to participate but our struggled to find any African people. So, I figured maybe in the African culture, it's that much harder for gay men to be open.

Thato

It is that much harder and because of societal expectations and also our families. So, some of us, well I wouldn't say we are all lucky. I know for a fact, maybe I'm sharing too much but my mother is homophobic, she doesn't like that I'm gay, but I'm just that strong willed to say I am gay, and this is who I love, who I'm gonna be with and to this day it's been six years together with my partner but she doesn't want to hear anything about it.

Researcher

Yeah. So, there's still a lot of resistance for gay men in families and in the communities, especially, it seems when it comes to the African communities.

Thato

There is. There is a lot of it, yeah?

Researcher

OK, well thank you very much. I'm so glad I have spoken to you because it was a helps me to understand what the resistance is that I'm, I'm struggling with. Because you know, it's, it's been quite hard to find African men and I've really wondered what it was so speaking to you has really helped me understand a little bit better.

Thato

Yeah. It's only a pleasure.

Researcher

Good, good. OK. Thank you so much. It was very nice speaking to you. I do just want to tell you

that our conversation would be kept confidential. So, if I use your information and your experiences in the study, it will be confidential. So, I'm not going to use your details, your name or anything, so nobody would even know where it's coming from, only that it's coming from somebody.

Thato

No problem, man, I'm really happy to have helped.

Researcher

Alright thanks, have a good evening.

Thato

Thank you.

Researcher

Alright cheers. Cheers bye.

Thato

Cheers.

End on interview

Interview Ten: Krish

Researcher

Alright to start again, thank you very much, Krish for, for participating in the study and for all the referrals. That was great.

Krish

It's a pleasure. I mean, I can imagine it's, it's also difficult to find people who meet that requirement, but I also have the time and willingness to want to participate in the study and.

Researcher

Yes, yes. What, what I've discovered is, is the, is the difficulty in finding people and you know, I'm, I'm not sure is it actually, the reason why I'm doing this study is that are gay men in leadership positions or executive leadership, but they're not open about their sexual orientation or, or they're just no gay leaders in organisations. Uhm, so yeah, it's, it's, it's a possibility. I suppose either way, and that's part of what I'm trying to figure out is, you know. Are they just afraid to come out or are gay men met with the glass ceiling in terms of leadership and, and attaining executive leadership? Uhm or are there some other reasons for that.

OK. So, yeah. I, I don't know if I, if it was clear but let me just tell you the title of my study. It's called "the lived experiences of gay men in the achievement of leadership in South African organisations." Uh, so yeah, what I'm trying to do is obviously discover why, through my observations in, in, in corporate and in government that they weren't, that you don't hear about people in leadership positions, especially gay men, but actually all of LGBTI. There seems to be an absence or silence from the voices of those people. And I just wondered what was the reason? And, and as I've gone through the, the literature, I've discovered more and more that there are still prejudices and discriminations that seem to be impacting on, on the LGBTI community. And as a result, they are not getting to those executive leadership positions. So, then I thought to myself, well, if there are gay men achieving it, how, how are they doing it? What qualities do they have, or what organisations are they working I, that are allowing them to achieve these things? So yeah, that's, that's what lead to the study.

Krish

OK, no, I mean, I think it's, it's quite an interesting topic, and I mean I've had so many discussions about it with many of my, my peers and friends and, and so yeah, I mean, I'm, I'm quite excited to see you know what, what sort of the final result happens. You know, subsequent to all your your interviews and and to see the final. Your final research come together.

Researcher

OK OK great yeah. So now I can definitely let you have it so that you can have a look and see. All right, if you are you happy to go on or have you got any questions?

Krish

I think I'm quite clear on, on the purpose of the interview, and you know, just, just around the, the requirements, and I'm happy for us to proceed.

Researcher

OK OK perfect alright. So firstly, can you just briefly tell me a little bit about your professional life, just in general in terms of your qualifications, previous experience, places of occupation?

Krish

OK, so I'm a, I'm a chartered accountant. By, by training. I did my articles at [an accounting firm]. Started professionally working around 2009 and that was sort of three years articles and I worked in [an accounting firm with] officers in New York, for a secondment, and then came back as an assistant manager in the advisory business around 2013. At that point, I wanted to move out of auditing and to work more in, in Commerce and Industry and not really an audit. And then I joined [a financial institution] as a management accountant and at that point I wasn't really open about my sexuality at work and, and, and still quite not sure about whether it would be acceptable. So, you know, I found it quite difficult in that I would almost get to work, and colleagues would ask me. So how was your weekend? What did you get up to? And it would be very sort of high level. Yes, was good weekend. Let's talk about work and, and I think at that point it was starting to become a little frustrating. But I think I sensed that it would not be OK and, and, and I don't know what it what was, whether it's more perception versus being told you know, we don't, we wouldn't accept an LGBTQ person in our team. I don't think it was more that I don't think was the latter. It was more just my perceptions, observations. But I mean, I wasn't with [the financial institution] for a very long time, just under two years. And then I joined a deal making team at [another financial institution] that focused more on structured property finance which you which will hear became kind of a niche specialty of, of my corporate experience. So, I did a lot of deal making in the property finance space. Uh, so at [a financial institution] it was quite different. I mean, this team was pretty much like an all-Afrikaans boys' team who all go hunting together. We do all of these; I mean I I went hunting with the guys and it was a first-time experience for me. Would play golf. I mean in so I wasn't very open about my sexuality because I, I could see that it would have probably been frowned upon and the team would have not known how to assimilate me into the team.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Krish

And, and I kind of wanted the experience the work experience. I didn't want to be discriminated upon or made to feel that I wasn't good enough, but it was frustrating to me because I found I was not living authentically at work. Because you spend quite a large time in your, your work environment. And my biggest frustration was that I mean when everyone was bringing their spouses to sort of work events and the [financial institution's sporting event] and all of these things. I had to then not bring my partner and then also not talk about my, my, my holidays, my weekends and it, it felt there was a bit of a disconnect in being authentic and, and it, it, it and I was like well so you know this is frustrating me so much and I could sense that it still wasn't

going to be possible. So, I said listen, my next job, or my next role, I want to try it differently and I got given an opportunity to go work in a in a more senior dealmaking roll at [another financial institution] in Cape Town. And that was around about 2016 and so from day one I was very open about, I'm a gay man, this is my partner. We both moved from Johannesburg to Cape Town together. And it was a different approach, and everyone was very accepting at face value. But I think there was definitely some corridor talk from some of the senior male dealmakers, and I could sense that I wasn't being included in some of the cycle events that the straight guys would go to and I could see this very subtle, a sort of subtle disassociation, but I think for a variety of reasons, for some of the senior dealmakers, two of them were, were, were Muslim and, and religiously, it was awkward. I could sense they wouldn't make eye contact with me, wouldn't talk to me directly even though we were all in the same dealmaking team.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Krish

Uh, so I mean, yes, it may have affected my success at [the financial institution], but I think from my perspective I struggled with some of the general culture issues in the organization and it being quite a large corporate that moved at a glacial pace, I wasn't really enjoying the environment very much, which then forced me to exit, exit [the financial institution]. And that's when I joined my current role at [a private equity firm as a] transactor or associate and then I, you know, moved up the ranks and my current job title here is Investment Executive where I managed like a portfolio of companies, and I sit on the board is a director and some of the companies. One of the companies, I'm the chief executive of and I'm pretty much open with everyone about my sexuality and our team here at the holding company is very accepting of me from our executive chairman to the Managing Director or CFO and, and I, I think I'm quite, quite lucky in that people respect me as I am, and I think they, they understand that when I'm at work, life is about work. It's not about my, my, my, my sexuality. Yes, it's one part of me but I like the fact that I, you know get, get, get you on a Monday morning. How was the weekend? I can be very honest about what I actually doing during the weekend. My partner and I cycled and I saw my in-laws and then we get on with work, you know so, I think it is a privilege and, and there's something I appreciate, but I think it, it should be the normal and I guess I've gotten so used to it over the last four years that I see it as the normal that I, I don't realize that it isn't normal. It isn't the normal for many. You know other game end and senior executive and leadership roles.

Researcher

Yes. Well, I mean, it seems sounds like you've also had the bad experiences to be able to appreciate the experience you're having now in your current role and, and the, the inclusiveness of, of the organization now.

Krish

Sure, absolutely, absolutely and and I think yeah. I mean, it really depends on a bunch of people that you work with. And even in a large corporate and you know, while the organization might have strong views on inclusive, inclusivity and, and that sort of thing, the pocket of people

that you work with on a day-to-day basis, be it credit heads or other executives, is what then drives that that experience.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, I mean it, it sounds like what you're also saying Krish, is that that a lot of the, the experiences you had, it was a it kind of undertone of feeling discomfort, not necessarily overtly saying no, you know gay people or not accepted, but sort of a subtle feeling that you got feeling that those places were not, not accepting or notice of inclusive as what you would want or not safe for you to be open.

Krish

Yeah, I, I think so. I think it was more perceptions from my side. Uhm, particular like an organization like [the financial institution] where I was. You know. In fact, subsequent to having exited [the financial institution] and, and currently working at [an investment company], I actually reached out to my previous team leader at [the financial institution] and was actually telling him about my partner and, and everything and he was like, I sort of knew Krish, by the way, and he laughed about it. But uhm, yeah, I mean, I, I definitely think that there were a lot of perceptions and, and perhaps from my side, thinking that I would probably be not accepted, than it actually being a reality. But I think the [previous financial institution] experience that I mentioned was more the latter, you know, went out from day one, declaring that I'm a gay man. And then I could certainly observe certain people in my dealmaking team being less, less engaging and also not willing to, to also have coffees and various social activities outside of work. You know that was quite strange, especially because we were all dealmakers. And the intention is that we should be social.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Krish

Uh, so that was that was quite a strange observation for me and, and got me to realize that, you know, maybe a lot of people aren't actually accepting, and it's, it's easier to engage professionally under the guise that you're not, you're not LGBTQI.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, and this is, this is what, what we trying to understand about, about gay men in leadership. So, the position that you're currently in, in the organization you, you, you mentioned an executive role, but it seems like you have a number of different roles actually that you, you are fulfilling at this stage.

Krish

So private equity is usually it's quite broad spectrum in that you, you know you, you manage a portfolio of companies and usually in all of almost all of them you are director, and you sit on the board, and you manage the investment and in essence user shareholder representative. But often what happens is sometimes let's say executives in one of those underlying companies

leave you, as the shareholder representative, might step into an executive capacity where instead of being just non-executive and passively managing them basement, you then for fold the role as an executive. So, either as financial director or managing director in in one of those entities.

Researcher

OK, OK alright so could you, could you elaborate since you've been in this role, what have you experienced as being particularly I, I suppose in terms of inclusiveness.

Krish

So it's been actually quite good, you know, I think from, from this my personal experience. I mean, I've I've felt very included in the organization in decision making, in strategic decision making. I'm I'm always involved in a lot of the activities, which is great. Uh, and I think though you know, obviously being an LGBTQ I person in an organization, you observe certain, certain nuances that happen in boardroom meetings. So, for instance, when men tend to have very assertive views and very vocal about what they want to say, and often women tend to be a little less vocal in in boardroom meetings, so I tend to, you know, see my, my fit in the board is to be very aware of inclusivity, so I would often ask a female directors who I could see not being as vocal. So, like our CFO, I'd be like so, [B], what is your opinion? Because you know, I haven't heard your voice and opinion yet, so I think, I find that my role is being a little bit more aware of the masculinity-femininity level in the room and trying to ensure that there's an inclusivity.

Researcher

Yes. Yeah yeah, OK, so it's interesting. So, it makes you, you are more aware and perhaps helps you to, to attempt to make any kind of situation more inclusive if you can.

Krish

Absolutely, absolutely.

Researcher

All right, so in your in your current organization, what, what has your career path been? Perhaps elaborating on what, what helped you advance or develop in terms of attaining the executive leadership?

Krish

So I mean I, I joined as like an [associate]. And I mean essentially the position was to investment executive the, the responsibilities would just be a little bit more senior in that you know, you sitting on the boards as a director you making a lot of the strategic decisions by yourself and, and obviously you will consult with other executives in the organization. But a lot of the, the, the core responsibility. So, it's on your shoulders to make these bigger decisions on be it signing a new lease agreement for a property disposing of a particular asset that's that sort of thing. And I think what helped me advance through the ranks or to sort of cement my, my, my role has a lot to do with a combination of technical skills. So, like being able to review the detail the financials quickly see uh, you know the performance of the business. Make

recommendations based on the detail, but also the other part is the EQ. So being able to meet with people, listen, listening skills and, and you know, being able to understand the investment case of a business beyond just the numbers. I mean, a typical CA would understand the numbers and have an opinion very quickly. But the other part is the EQ part. So actually spinning. I spend a lot of time at some point bestie companies meeting with the executives understand what's going on in the company, granularly, you know operationally, what's other than just what the financials are saying. And, and I think that's who it makes an LGBTQ person in, in in a senior role quite successful as they have an ability to, I don't want to say read people, but actually that's sort of what I mean is where you, you listen to people understanding where they're at and and have that empathy to be able to understand what is actually going on in their world and use that to form the basis of your opinion. So, you you go through the similar process like what you're doing in interviewing a series of people in the organization. So, when I have a sort of a I spend a week at one of my investee companies that's based in [South Africa]. I would typically have a series of meetings with all the executives. Yes, I'll go through all the financial reports, the operational reports, and that sort of thing, but I would get most valuable data from my interviews with each of the executives and, and off that would prompt me to ask more questions that would, would help me understand what's actually going on in the organization and when I would come back to my holding company and type out my board report or my, my, my report on what I'd found in the, the business for the last be it, one month of performance, my colleagues here and my boss and my our chairman would notice that there's a lot of information there that wouldn't just be available if you just looked at the financials and they would be like Krish, wow, well done for actually going in understanding what's going on in the business building those relationships.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Krish

And, and, and being able to get gather very meaningful information that you can support. It's not just hearsay and it's not just based on conversations and interviews. You've actually gone and done the homework and substantiated what was said to you, and being able to set the size that into, into factual into factual and meaningful data.

Researcher

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, but I mean it. it sounds like you're saying that part of the, the skill developed through being an LGBT person is rapport, knowing or having the ability to develop rapport. And yeah it, it's obviously got to do with empathy and, and emotional intelligence, but also helps people to feel comfortable to be able to talk to you.

Krish

Absolutely absolutely because I. I mean, people will only tell you certain things based on their level of comfort with you. So, if they see you as you know you're just a shareholder representative and you're just there to drive an agenda and you don't actually care about what's going on in their world, they'd be less willing to actually share information with you about what's actually happening. You know. Rather, just give you the sensitized so it's all OK, kind of version and you're on your way, whereas if they act.

Researcher

Yeah. They don't tell you about any of the problems that they might be having or difficulties, yeah.

Krish

Absolutely, absolutely. And, and I think that's where building trust is important. And like you said, when you have that ability to do that. Uhm, you then uncover quite a lot of information and you've got treated with, with, with the appropriate amount of confidentiality so that that particular individual who told you those things doesn't feel that now their job is at jeopardy because they've told a shareholder representative about what's really going on in the company.

Researcher

Yes, yeah.

Krish

So having that ability to synthesize information and share formation in a manner that you know both maintains trust with all stakeholders.

Researcher

Yeah yeah yeah OK. So, in terms of your sexual orientation, where you're comfortable revealing it to the members of the organization and, and could you perhaps describe that. It seems like again, when you joined you were like I'm going to be completely open from the beginning. But do you think they made it comfortable to do that?

Krish

So when I joined the current organization, I wasn't completely open from the beginning and, and I, and I think, especially after the experience at [the financial institution] team in I was like I'm gonna just take this one a little bit more cautiously. And if the moment presents itself, and if it's the right moment, then I will. I will be very open about who I am. But the moment didn't quite present itself in the first few months that I joined the organization until we had like a team, a team offsite and in this team offsite that was facilitated we, we had a moment where we were, all sharing a bit more about ourselves around the table around things that have made us who we are, whether it's a scar that you've had, a loss of a loved one, and in that in that safe space circle with all the senior executives and all the junior staff from our tea ladies, our receptionist. Everyone was being vulnerable and everyone kind of shared. You know whether it was a loss of a loved one through cancer, uh, you know a divorce. Uhm, they were sharing very intimate

information about themselves and, and even my boss. He was quite vulnerable as well, which I've never seen him because he's always very, he's very prim and proper, and he's very uhm, how do I put it is always composed, Uh, and he's a typical [Black African] man who's not very vulnerable. I could describe him as that. But I mean he was also being vulnerable in that, and I thought it was a perfect space to, to tell everyone. You know guys, I'm not sure if all of you know or some of you might have suspected, but you know I am LGBTQI and you know, it's been a tough journey for me to get to this point in my life. And you. Yes, you know me as Krish and none of that changes and how you know me professionally. But you know, I just wanted to share this additional fact with you guys, so you know who I am. Because to some degree you are a version of work family and if I have to think of the culture in organization ever since that offsite and there's been this huge sense of work, family, kind of culture, where you respect each person beyond just a professional designation and their role, you, you understand that there's an element of work, family that brings us together.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Krish

And, and, and that was in essence, the journey. And that was probably about three years ago.

Researcher

But it also sounds like you have to go through a coming out process more than once in your life. Then yes, the, the, the initial perhaps coming out process. But in the organization, you have to make that decision and if you do decide to be open you have to go through that sort of coming out, even if it is in a in a relatively safe space.

Krish

Yeah, I mean I, I guess that's probably how it unfolded for me. I'm just trying to think of, you know, my my next sort of approach. You know if I am in a different organization, what would it be like? And I, I kind of see that not being in an official way, just telling everyone. It would almost happen at the coffee station unconsciously when someone asks me how's your weekend or what did you do, and I would just show them a picture on my phone on my social media. And you know. And it just happening unconsciously, I don't see that needs to happen as an official, you know, coming per say because I mean, our heterosexual counterparts don't do that.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so yeah, it's and it's strange that you would even feel that that would be necessary, but it seems like it is.

Krish

Yeah, I mean, I guess that happened around the 2017/2018 timeframe, and I mean I, I do think that you know, as the world progresses and if you think of like COVID and its impact on us and how it's made us a lot more technology aware and it's also affected. A lot of people, personally. I

would hope that you know we the world is progressing in the right direction around how it sees inclusivity and how's it how it sees engaging with people.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah. So, tell me what, what would you say our or the negative consequences of revealing sexual orientation in the workplace?

Krish

What would I say are the consequences?

Researcher

Yeah, the negative consequences of that.

Krish

So I mean, I, I think you know, as highlighted around my, my time at [the financial institution]. I think it's you know, being, being excluded, is exclusion from certain conversations; exclusion from certain social interactions. Uhm? Perhaps you know, especially given the, the undertone of masculinity that exists in corporate South Africa, seen as being less, less capable or less, less assertive, UM, in certain discussions, UM and, and then, I guess, also from a from. From just thinking of you know, engaging with women colleagues where there's a certain sense that, OK, we can tell Krish anything because he's gay, but in essence I'm still a work colleague as well, so I should always be treated like a work colleague. And I don't really want to know certain things about your personal life because I'm a gay man. Oh, it doesn't necessarily mean I want to comment on the clothes you're wearing or the shoe you are wearing, so I think there's, there's a balance that I, I think is important and in many, many heterosexual individuals are still learning how to. What is what is what is socially acceptable when you engage with an LGBTQ person? Uh, you know, is it? Is it acceptable to ask like let's, let's say for instance, I would disclose that you know this is my partner showed him a picture, but is it socially acceptable to ask someone who's LGBTQ, so, who's the top of who's the bottom? I mean, is that acceptable communication in a work environment?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. Your work environment.

Krish

Absolutely, so I think those are some of the negatives, yeah?

Researcher

So it's like, it's kind of the, the stereotypical viewpoints or ideas, normative kind of ideas that still filters through. So, there's, there's a, there's an attempt to be accepting more inclusive, but there still seems to be that influence of stereotypes.

Krish

Absolutely, absolutely.

Researcher

OK, so in, in terms of your organization, what do you think the obstacles in your organization are that may prevent gay men or LGBT employees from achieving leadership?

Krish

So I mean, I, I think if I have to look at my progression and this my experience. Uhm, I don't think there are many. You know. I think there's a, there's a huge degree of respect. Uh, amongst our senior leadership for inclusivity. Uhm, granted we are quite a small holding, holding office team. And yes, we manage quite a large number of companies, but I think given the fact that we're a small team, it's very easy to identify if there's misalignment in cultural values and then correct it. So, for instance if someone in the team made, and made a comment that was very offensive and it wasn't done in jest or in, in a joke and it was oh even if it was a joke. But it was offensive because we're a small enough team, I think it's very possible to walk up to the person and address it then and there and then it's done. Uh, I think the issue though, is that if it's in a larger organization, it does become challenging, you know to be able to address these things, and then it has to go through a formal disciplinary process, and that in itself then just creates a lot of mistrust and then that in itself is an obstacle. You know where you have to take things through the formalities rather than being able to address it with the individuals directly. So yeah, I mean just reiterating the point. I think there aren't that there aren't any obstacles that I see for someone who joins as an LGBTQ person in the team. And in fact, I mean I've hired. I've hired individuals who are, you know, openly gay to work in our business and we've hired a general manager to run one of our hospitality businesses, and he's been promoted. He's not, you know, he's Chief operating officer, so he, and, and he's done extremely well. And I think what I, what I appreciate from you know, our executive chairman is that he sees the individual, as you know, high performer, based on how he does his job. He's sexuality is, is less of a concern actually. He can just be who he is, but you know, provided he gets the job done, adds value to the business, you know, that's what matters more.

Researcher

Well, I mean my next question is also about perhaps you have you have experienced your sexual orientation to have impacted the journey to achievement of a position of executive leadership. And I think you, you kind of see that in [the financial institution], yes you did. You'd experienced it and, and it seems as if what you've done, if I, if I look at what you've told me so far, is, is that you kind of lift those organisations where you felt there might be some kind of barrier.

Krish

Absolutely, absolutely. And I think and, and I and I guess that's you know you. You hit the nail on the head where you know I may have perceived it to be a barrier and, and, and chosen to leave. But I guess the question is, is whether it was actually an actual barrier. You know which, I mean, to be honest with you, I can't account with without, I find it difficult to definitely give you

that. The attestation that it is an actual barrier you know without actually going back to into the organization, working there and, and being able to assist assess it. And that in itself is probably quite a valuable insight and observation. Often as LGBT people we perceive there to be certain barriers that exist but whether or not they are actual barriers, and they are limiting us from being authentic and progressing, is a question mark.

Researcher

Yeah, but it does seem as if it you know, and I, I was actually considering that as you were speaking earlier, that it, it does still say something about the safeness of the space in other words, perhaps there's no overt discrimination or prejudice, but these is a sense that this is not a safe place to be myself. If that makes sense?

Krish

Yes. And, and I, and I, I guess you know, that's where human intuition is, is an important one. I think we all have an ability to, to, to assess the room and assess the space and, and if you feel uncomfortable or feel, I mean like there's subtle things, for instance. Like, if colleagues are making homophobic jokes in the corridor and it's acceptable, you know, of course it's not going to feel like a safe space. And, and I had that at [the financial institution], you know where you know colleagues would make like very silly remarks and it's at a particular male who appears more feminine, and I mean, I, and I think if I had to look at myself, I typically look like a very sort of heterosexual man. Because I have a beard or I, I don't have particular mannerisms and how I talk so, but in a way we see colleagues making jokes about another colleague who's a little bit more feminine in his mannerisms and that actually makes the space feel unsafe for me as well.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. So, it's, I think what they call microaggression, so it's, it's things that are there, but it's, it's very subtle and very yeah, it's, it's not, not overt, so it's, it's hard to pinpoint as a reason, but it's definitely something that makes the space unsafe.

Krish

No completely agreed.

Researcher

OK, so what characteristics or qualities do you think you possess that may have helped you overcome obstacles in this organization or perhaps previous organizations?

Krish

I think I have a, you know, and I don't know if it's just me, I think many gay men have it. It's that ability to be a bit of a chameleon. You can choose how to assimilate into any almost any environment. But it can have a flip side to it, a dangerous side, where you know you don't have an authentic identity because you're constantly putting on that chameleon mask and choosing to show certain sides of your personality and not just being present and being yourself. And so that, that's, that's definitely something I know I have that ability to do that and, and I've used it a

lot of the time, and I and I and I still use it. Even in, you know, as much as I said, I'm openly gay in our organization, I sit on boards of several different companies, and in some of these companies where some of the, the executive are extremely masculine, 70s like let me say 55 to 65 year old White Afrikaans men who are, we wouldn't be able to connect with me if I was talking about the Pride parade party that I went to last weekend, but in essence my job is not to go there and talk to them about a pride parade party. And if they ask me, Krish, you know what did you do last weekend? I'll still have the same answer of saying, well, I went putting available power went out with my partner cycling. I'll just say, well, my partner and I cycled this past weekend was good weekend, but I don't go out of my way to explicitly announce my LGBTQ status to every single individual across every single organization, unless it's unless I boulder level of closeness to the individual and I feel comfortable. And so, I think it's about having that ability to read the room and, and knowing when to be when to, to show the level of, of vulnerability that you think the person on the other side of the conversation deserves.

Researcher

Do you think it's different for heterosexual men in the same space as you, or in, on the same level as you? Do you think they have these same considerations in terms of reading rooms and it being necessary to do that?

Krish

No, you know there's. There's definitely a certain sense of privilege that comes with being a heterosexual man at an executive level where you know, you don't have to think about those things, you can voice your opinions about everything and anything without even thinking twice about anyone else in the room. And I would hope that, you know, that things like racial you answer, and gender nuances are becoming things that every heterosexual person still thinks about. But I've, I've observed that's not always the case. You know, often intrasexual men in a boardroom just transferred into the conversation, and every it becomes a. I hate to say this this nasty term, but it becomes a bit of like dick swinging contest where everyone tries to voice an opinion to prove whose opinion is better or, or be louder or more valuable and less about being aware of the fact that if they would just be willing to listen to everyone in the room, be it the African female CFO is sitting in in the same board room who's been very quiet and asking her for her opinion and just listening and taking it in. And then the gay Indian man sitting in the room and listening to his opinion, then voicing their opinions, we might actually make a better collaborative decision as a collective, by, by, by listening to everyone's opinions in the room, you know.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah, and including all those that are there, and perhaps the, the knowledge that they have.

Krish

Absolutely knowledge and, and, and often knowledge is, is very much in the context of that person frame of reference, their cultural experiences. Uh, and, and being able to tap into that data is, is valuable, you know to, to make better decisions because you know cultural nuances influence decision making without adult and, and I think the, the most successful large

corporates in, in, in the world have learned how to master that, how to master using inclusivity and diversity to drive decision making.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, and I mean it. And it's true, you know, because it's during this process I, I've spoken to one or two people that work for multinational companies or companies that have branches in South Africa but are not necessarily only based here and often, the originating company is in some place like USA or the UK, and it does seem like the experiences of, of LGBT people in those organisations or a bit different from South African organisations.

Krish

It's very interesting. I mean, I would think there are some South African organisations that are also leading and like the likes of like [financial institution]. Uh, and I'm trying to even think of [accounting firm], [accounting firm]. There's a couple of South African corporates that are trying to drive inclusivity through diversity, but I still think we do have a little bit of a way to go before we could say we are on the same level as many of the international multinationals.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, so we own our way but we're not there yet.

Krish

Absolutely.

Researcher

OK, so in terms of organisations or what organizational assistance did you receive as a gay man on your journey to leadership?

Krish

It's, it's a very good question and I, I, I can't think of any actually. Uhm? Yeah, I mean let me try and like to reflect. None at [the financial institution], none where I am currently, But I, I guess for me the question which I would ask myself is would I need any additional support? And, and I, I guess in my personal life my personal capacity, having to deal with my sexuality in therapy was helpful. And you know, seeing a therapist, seeing a clinical psychologist, and unpacking issues was helpful.

Researcher

Yes.

Krish

Uhm? I guess I would expect my company though, if for instance I'm having a particular issue that's linked to that and it's affecting my work. My work, my work performance. I'd expect the company to be able to offer some kind of support via through an [employee wellness

programme] membership or that sort of thing and my company does offer that. I mean the past company is like [the financial institution], all of them offer you [employee wellness programme] support, but I don't think it's done necessarily from an at perspective that they're assisting you as an LGBTQ male, yeah.

Researcher

So you don't, you don't, I mean the, the, the services but whether they would actually say to you know, yeah, I can see that this culture is difficult for you as a gay man. Let's give you some assistance. That's probably not going to happen.

Krish

Yeah, I don't think so.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, OK, so I'm. What do you think? What organizational strategies or systems do you feel is necessary to encourage equal opportunities? And perhaps the developments of LGBT population? What could they do?

Krish

So I think it's impactful. Firstly, to actually understand the individuals who work in your organization. And I think, many companies don't tend to ask enough biographical information of new joiners when when they apply to join companies up front. I mean, I was actually just completing some postgraduate study applications in the USA and exploring a few options for myself and there's, there's very nuanced questions that get asked about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

Researcher

Yep.

Krish

And obviously, as asked as a question that you have an option to disclose, you're not, you're not compelled to disclose your, your sexual orientation and your gender identity, but it's optional and its valuable optional information as an employer that you should be asking because it enables you to better understand the people that you're hiring and, and put measures in place. So, the first point of call is understanding. Understand who you are.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Krish

So just assume that because I'm a, I'm an Indian male, that I identify as an Indian male. Actually, ask me the question.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, it's an interesting thing. That, that's one of the things that I discovered in the literature, and somebody said it so well, was that, UM, perhaps because of South Africa's racial history and because of that, there's so much as a result of Apartheid that's influenced us, that the LGBTI+ struggle, if I can put it that way, were almost disappeared under the, the, the problems with race in, in South Africa. I don't know. Maybe that's what you're kind of saying is that they're, they're more aware of the racial thing. They will perhaps, you know, ask that. But when it comes to your sexual identity or gender identity, they won't necessarily worry so much about that.

Krish

Yeah, I think that's a very fair observational. I mean unfortunately SA history of race, it definitely feels like it's been a bit of like a pall over a lot of other issues, like this blanket or cloud that sometimes we forget to ask the other important questions around gender identity, around LGBTQ people, but also, you know, often even in terms of women, women empowerment, and women employment equity in the workplace, you know it, it's, it's, it's surprising to me that so many companies still don't recognize that they are significant, you know, challenges around women, employment equity and and it's still not prioritized in 2021. You know it's still like almost seen as, oh, we'll get there, but it's not really an issue, but actually it is. I mean, the fact that you know women statistically are paid less than male counterparts. Women are statistically less employed than male counterparts in in corporate South Africa. Yet from a demographic POV, women in South Africa are a larger part of the population than men, so there is still a need to actually address it, but it's not really seen as a significant enough issue.

Researcher

Yes. Yeah, so there are definitely still issues there. OK, so, so, so maybe I must ask the last thing, UM, how effective do you think organizational strategies and policies or at non-discrimination and protecting rights of LGBT people?

Krish

I think it's a good question and I and I think you know; many companies haven't quite thought about it. Uhm, employment equity is probably like legislated and required and, and you know, a lot of companies are looking at BBE rating, so they'll consider race and employment equity, because it's almost like it's a have to consider but considering things like LGBTQI rights, particularly around as an example, paternity leave, you know things like that, incorporating policies that are equitable. You know, I don't think many organisations have thought about. Yeah, I mean I asked the question because in my current organization so my partner and I obviously contemplating having kids and adopting kids. So how does paternity leave work? You know our policy doesn't cater to it, so when I'm ready to take paternity leave, am I gonna get three months leave? How's it going to work? Because I mean if we are adopting a new-born infant. You know, I'm gonna need time to actually bond with my child. And, you know, deal with the issues of as of being a new parent and they haven't quite thought about it. I mean, some companies, like I know in [a financial institution] there they are quite progressive and they've done a great job like so [a large financial institution], a friend of mine and his partner recently

adopted and they work in two organisations so the one works at [an accounting firm] to the other works at [a financial institution] and they had to ask the question and so they both were given a certain amount of paternity leave. But it was outside of the policy, so they had to go to the HR manager and the HR manager had to then take it to HR executive and they had to come up with an equitable plan to say, well, OK, great. The first partner, you can take two months leave provided that your other part, your part in the signs a document saying that he's not going to apply for the same leave during the same period. Blah-di-blah-di-blah, but it was almost outside of the policy, which leads me to your question. I don't think policies and procedures you know are being updated to take into account LGBTQI rights enough currently, and it's not seen as a pressing matter. It's not given priority.

Researcher

Yeah, so I mean let legislation wise we actually do have the list legislation, but in terms of implementation of policies and strategies and things like that, perhaps we're not quite there yet.

Krish

We're not, but you know, this is we're also, as much as it's very easy for an LGBTQ person, say. Well, listen, I'm the victim here, but I mean, I think it's important for those of us who are in leadership roles. Someone like myself. As an example, you know when I re look or prove an HR policy, is to ask the question you know and to, to get our policies, update them to, to drive that change. I mean, I sit on rhyming remuneration committees on different boards, and we look at things like remuneration policy. So, it's, it's an appropriate forum to raise, you know whether it's an employment equity issue or like a you know like and LGBTQI rights issue, or even just a policy statement about things like leave or discrimination or whatever it is. But having these things up, sort of listed in our policies and in, in our procedures.

Researcher

You know, so having having LGBTI people in executive leadership will hopefully help to filter down things like policy and strategy that would make the lives of those coming up in the organisations better.

Krish

Absolutely.

Researcher

OK great well thanks, thanks Krish, that's great. Is there anything else that you, you want to say? Any comments that you have about what we've been talking about?

Krish

No, I I think it's been a good discussion, you know, and I've, I've been quite vocal about my experiences and, and obviously it is one data point. You know. I think it's each person experiences different and, and, and I think I've been, I wouldn't want to say I've been lucky, but I think I've also had good experiences based on the, the organizations I've worked in. And yes, I've had some not-so-great experiences. But I think that the good to a larger extent

overshadows the bad, in that you know, even in the current organization I've been in, I've been quite accepted. And I think as an LGBTQ person in leadership, I think I've been given, in essence, it's been seen as a positive thing, and it's been seen as a strength rather than a weakness, which is fantastic, but I think also as a LGBTQI person, the onus is on that person to take the initiative, to live their truth in the organization. And regardless of what the consequences are good or bad, one has to do to accept that you know you've, you've got to drive it, you've got to drive your authenticity in the workplace and regardless of what the consequences may be, you should aim to always be authentic and in essence see that as your strength. You know, by being authentic, you were able to, to add a lot of value to the organization, whether some executives and certain selective select people and organisations don't see that, you gotta understand the value that you bring to the table up front and, and, and go in, go into the organization with that sort of mindset?

Researcher

Yeah. You know, so somebody previously mentioned something that I think is, is very important and that is respecting yourself and, and I suppose that's part of being able to be genuine or authentic is, is having that respect to believe in yourself and your right to be genuine or authentic.

Krish

Absolutely. absolutely, absolutely.

Researcher

OK well great, thanks Krish. It it's been great speaking to you. I really appreciate you, you, you are speaking and giving me your experiences. It's, it's helpful. I'm starting to see some patterns in what people experience as I say, but yeah, we'll see how it goes.

Krish

Yeah, it's a pleasure. Well, good luck with the research and I hope that it goes well. And I mean always feel free to circle back if you need any assistance. And if you're running short of interview candidates or I'm happy to refer a few, few more friends. Another friend of mine was quite keen. My partner who works at [a retail company] was also quite keen, so I'll continually send through a few other friends.

Researcher

Thank you. You're welcome to. I haven't been able to get hold of [a particular participant referral]. I have tried a couple of times and I'm not sure if calling is the best idea. I don't know if I should perhaps send a message instead.

Krish

Yeah, maybe send him a WhatsApp and if you don't get a hold on WhatsApp, I'll try and share his email address with you.

Researcher

OK, OK, oh I thank you. Thanks very much Krish, I really do appreciate it. If your partner would like to participate, he's welcome.

Krish

I think [one of the participants] did send him a message, so I'll just give him a subtle nudge tonight when I see him to say, hey give, you responded on [the researcers] request to, to contribute, but he is more in a financial manager role. He's not really in an executive leadership role, but I mean, I, I don't know. I think it might still be valuable to interview him because he's also been working with the Executive in [a retail group], and he's also been authentic. You know from day one, when, when we got to Cape Town, so I think it's been it, it'll be nice to hear some of his views and he may have views contrary to mine but we don't always agree on everything.

Researcher

Yes. Ok good.

Researcher

Thanks very much Krish. I appreciate it. So yeah, we have a good day and please, I will definitely send you the, the results of the study as soon as it's finished.

Krish

Yeah, it's a pleasure Shane. Good luck.

Researcher

Keep well.

Krish

Take care cheers bye.

End of Interview

Interview Eleven: Johan (Pilot interview)**Researcher**

Good morning, (Johan).

Johan

Good morning.

Researcher

Yes. OK, Ya, (Johan). Um, we decided we wanted to put a limit in terms of, of participants and, and their experience and how long ago they got the experience in leadership, um...So if you're OK with that, then so we'll use this interview as a, as a pilot interview just to, to make sure that I'm on the right track and just your experience of what questions we ask and things like that. That might also be helpful.

Johan

With pleasure.

Researcher

OK, perfect. Alright, so I don't know if you ready, you can just let me know and then we can, we can, I can start asking you these questions.

Johan

If you don't mind me having my breakfast and.

Researcher

No. Not at all, I understand how it is.

Johan

Ya, go.

Researcher

Alright, OK so let me let me start. The first question is, UM, briefly just tell me about your professional life just in general terms, your qualifications, your work experience. Things like that.

Johan

OK. So, I have two masters degrees, one in research psychology then in clinical psychology. I did my research psychology in in the early 90s. Um, was probably going to work either at the university or at the then [research organisation], but it was also a time of transition. Uh, and

that's how I ended up in research. Uhm, which I worked in, so I did my internship. Actually, at a management consulting firm, part of [an auditing and advising company], at the time, a big auditing firm. Uh, and then I met somebody at a party. Who gave me, like it seems that it's now [a media company]. Because I worked in townships and those days to find a White Afrikaans 'boytjie' [young man] that can talk to the Black [African] market was a rarity. So that was, that was on that basis that I got said job.

Researcher

OK.

Johan

Uhm, And then, I started my own business. Uh, about six years later. So, 1999. Uh a research business with a partner of mine, [E] and in that sort of six years we built it up to be one of the top research companies in South Africa. So, in a short space of time. And I still remember the conversation, we said: Should we just stay a two-man band because we kind of actually started it so that we could work in the mornings and get pissed in the afternoons? So, it was just sort of the thing. Uh. And it's just really, did really, really well, um and, and then I started the business she then, she then decided to retire out of business. I bought her share and then I sold the business in 2006 to the [retail solution company], which is known probably in field of...Marketing. Whatever, ag and the shelf packers will wear a little [retail solution company] T shirts, so they really were glorified shelf packers.

Um And now it's not here or there, anyway. And I started, an information business, so that incorporated some of the software that we think of as field marketing right through to market research and I was 2IC at the, to the, to the Director of this, this business unit and he was a board member. Um, and the first time we really with, with some exceptions, in terms of my own career development, I had a lot of support from other people that felt I was very brave 'cause I was out from, from pretty much the beginning. So, in the 'Nationale Tydskrifte', I was sitting next to the right appropriate Black people. So that was my favorite thing was to freak them out, to the point where they found out their classes, that was not going past mine. And but yeah, I suppose that was kind of a defense against, you know, the quite obvious, discrimination, you know, discriminatory kind of ways in which people looked at me in the comments they were making, and that sort of thing. And I was like, [expletive], I'm gonna do it in any case.

And, I had great mentors in my, that really, really supported me a lot. Yes, back to it, so in 2010, I get cancer. And I was with [retail solution company] at that time as well. My director moved to

start an international business section for them in Southeast Asia, and in terms of succession planning, I should have just moved in, which I've been preparing for, for three years, had been attending board meetings, etc. They decided to bring in somebody from the outside whom they knew. A man who has a wife and two kids, which I did not have. And so then that was literally the reason for me not getting in there, nothing was said and that's when I also realized I needed to move and roughly the same time, I got cancer and decided to change my career. So I left them and that's how I got into clinical psychology.

Researcher

OK. ok, and now, so, currently, (Johan) you are in what kind of position and in what kind of organization? Or are you just in private practice.

Johan

So currently I'm in private practice, [in] Cape Town. Um, I work as part of a multidisciplinary team and we work at three of the the, the psychiatric private psychiatric clinics here as well, so. And I work, so I mainly with the adolescents

Researcher

OK OK OK. Uhm, and, and in in this role you, are you just working as a clinical psychologist or are there other things involved in terms of, of your role.

Johan

Yeah, so that's so. Mainly yeah. So apart from my involvement in, with the LGBT human rights project as part of PsySSA and that work that we do and the training we give, that's, that's the therapy, which I love.

Researcher

OK, OK yeah all right. So I I think, I think maybe we should focus on the time that you were in the sort of senior position. I I assume at [the retail solution company].

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

So in terms of that career path, UM, What's served to advance or aid you career developments and how you achieved leadership in that position?

Johan

So, first thing I think that are most important are mentors. People that already had good

reputations in the industry, that saw potential in me that liked what they saw, and they took me under their wing. Uhm, so two of the then, probably top 8 market researchers in South Africa, [Dirk] who became famous globally for his work on advertising and [Dries]. Uhm became my two mentors [one is] now deceased, unfortunately, but we kept contact even afterwards, so he's become very important people to me and they pushed and I think their association with me, I think that helped me a lot. Uhm and other was...Um, you know, I'd like to say it was because I was so bright and, and good looking,

Researcher

Yes.

Johan

Um, so let's assume that it is a market researcher and you do advance to a next level that you are potent enough for it, UM.

Researcher

Yeah.

Johan

The one thing that I did bring to the party wise, a certain color. So my ability to play the heteronormative role while at the same time giving some of the benefits of what's expected from your gay best friend.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Johan

So I, I was in a relationship a long, long standing partner relationship with a man that everybody knew because he always came to, to you know the whatever but we would have dinner parties twice a year where he would cater. So, he played the wife role. I played the male role. I was the income earner. He was the housewife. So, we literally as a couple, decided to do that. And that's what we did. And ultimately, our inability to move out of that when I moved into psychology is one of the reasons why our relationship broke down. But yes, we were hugely successful, and we were a power couple. We lived in Sandton and you know...He could be invited to our pre- Christmas parties, became a thing. Uhm, because it was a 5 course meal and you know, it was the who's who of the industry, that that sort of thing. So, we literally played that role. So, I think that made a big difference.

Researcher

Yeah, OK, and, and tell me (Johan), the mentors that you mentioned, where they inside the organization working with you or where they from outside the organization.

Johan

So [henry], actually, after national, "nationale media, nationale tydsrifte," he was actually a supplier of mine and said, what the fuck are you doing here? Come, come and work for me. And that's how we met and then, Ah. It took me about three months or so and I said look, no, let me see how this goes. And three months I was just like irritated. Well, I was bored, actually I was bored out of my skull for pushing paper and I phoned him and I said listen remember what we spoke about? Do you have a job for me and he said, of course I have a job for you. And so I worked with him in in a research company for, for 4-5 years. I don't know where he knew me from. I'd done some presentations at if I think where I met him the first time...was, yeah, I was doing a presentation at the market research [convention], at the local market research conference. It was a big thing called convergence.

Yeah, which now it's very passe, but then was like, it caused a ruction and people were fighting with each other. And you know, throwing glasses at each other and that sort of thing. Uhm, and he was so impressed with it and, and the thinking that he that... I won a prize, an innovation prize and he sent me overseas and then when he heard that [Jeremy] couldn't cope because now I'm like, I don't know 26-year-old or whatever. Don't have money. You can barely have a mattress, and he said to hell with it, he'll pay for [Jeremy] as well and take it, two extra, extra weeks and go to Amsterdam he says, which we duly did.

Researcher

Yes.

Johan

I was surprised, so we went to Brighton for a conference, which was the prize. But then we spent an extra 2 weeks in in the Netherlands.

Researcher

That sounds fabulous.

Johan

So that's how I met him and then after that, we yeah. I saw him regularly. He used to invite me often to just literally just us go and chat. And you know.

Researcher

um Ok Good, Good.

Researcher

So, in terms of this organization, [retail solution company] I assume, were you comfortable revealing your sexuality to the members of the organization and, and what was the experience of doing that?

Johan

So because they knew me because they bought my business. My direct director, German guy. Heterosexual, cisgender German guy. And, we had, so we have been talking for maybe a year or so and it was interesting. He said to me one night, he said when he met me and I was openly, you know, kind of open about it, so openly gay.

Researcher

Yep.

Johan

He was at the time, quite homophobic. He thought this isn't gonna work and you know, uh, he said as he started working with me. He gained so much just respect for me and how I dealt with situations, and he's you know, I kind of really helped him open his mind around sexual orientation. And so, we started engaging in conversations around that. But he only admitted that to me later. Because I was openly gay. I mean, I wasn't, kind of waving a rainbow flag, you know, screaming "I'm queer, I'm queer", you know, that I didn't do. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher

Yes.

Johan

I was senior management, so I dressed that part and I and I played the part in the kind of heteronormative role which was part of the succession. So now, I was the 'moffie' [derogatory same-sex sexual orientation male insult] that did not go into hairdressing.

Researcher

Yes, OK.

Johan

That did not want to wear dresses and high heels because that's of course OK with people that I didn't.

Researcher

Perfect.

Researcher

You complied with the heteronormative roles expected.

Johan

Absolutely, whilst at the same time because I was also giving some of that, so I, so part of it was to be the witty 'bitchy' because that's the kind of expectation. So, it isn't heteronormative, and often I think gay and gay people think, you know this is kind of typical to us. Well, no, it's just really typical to what heteronorms expects of you.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

And so that kind of bitchiness, the, the flamboyance or the the, the overt extrovertedness, you know, your ability to walk into a place and own it.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

So for functions. So, in my day-to-day context, I would dress quite conservative, but for a function, I might rock up there in a bright orange thing that looked like I'd, you know this, this morning my, my wife, you know, took the curtains and 'gooied' [threw it] it together. So that was because and that was because there was some of that. But then, then of course, in the day, I dressed in this lovely heteronormative outfit.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, OK. So, in terms of, of, of your sexual orientation and revealing it in the workplace, what were the negative consequences of that?

Johan

Well, the biggest one was that I was denied advancement by the directors of [the retail solution

company] because of my sexual orientation. So that's just a very direct discriminatory action. Uhm, in the company, from different parts of the company, I experienced a wide variety of discriminations from just completely ignoring me, so not responding to emails and that sort of thing, to people talking so that I could hear and making comments about me. And so that sort of thing happens quite a bit.

Uh, hum. So this day was a 75th birthday party, so it's a Jewish family who owned business by and large and that their 75th birthday. So, sort of third generation whatever. So, I took my partner, because they said partners included. Uhm, and we were the only gay couple. There were many other gay people there, but then we were the only open people then at the time. So that's, thousands that did that, and some people still come on you. So brave and I think, I'm not brave. This is my life. You know?

Researcher

Yeah.

Johan

I don't understand, if I was brave, I'd be living in Dubai. Earning three times this salary, you know? My humanity is fundamentally dismissed, so no, I'm not brave. This is my life.

Researcher

So so so. In other words, first of all there was, a, uh, uh, a barrier in terms of you achieving directorship simply because of your sexual orientation and then also sort of more subtle but obvious, UM, discrimination in terms of things, people said around you and the way they treated you in the organization as well.

Johan

So people, I mean a good example of it. So, if you know me well, you know I like 'moffie' jokes, but it's a bit like telling Jewish, Jewish concentration camp jokes. I think Jewish people can tell those jokes, so my best friends Jewish and he can tell you, you know, don't, don't bring Hairspray close to Jewish people. Because they'll gas themselves. So that sort of thing. But I think for anybody else to talk about, I think it's inappropriate.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

So, I would with the people I got to know that being somebody that didn't know me, what they

would do is they would say use the term 'moffie' or they would tell a gay joke. But they'll not just tell the joke, they would say, "sorry, I didn't mean it that way." There is the microaggression, the microaggression is not the joke.

Researcher

Yes, yes

Johan

He says, 'Sorry I didn't mean it that way,' which is nonsense of course. And so that's the sort of thing.

Researcher

OK, so...

Johan

Not everybody again, but like we did find it quite often, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah, certain people, yes? And, what did you think of the obstacles in that organization? They could prevent gay men or other LGBT employees from achieving leadership roles.

Johan

I left them. So yeah, um I mean um.

Researcher

So it's almost like they've, they, they're almost forced you out, Johan.

Johan

Yeah, they wanted me because I was a rainmaker. I was good at making money. They just didn't want me in a position of power or on their little Pretty Little AGM annual report. They just didn't want me there.

Researcher

yes, yes.

Johan

And they're quite happy to make their money. UM, but yeah, they were prepared to lose me. They were prepared to let that business suffer rather than follow their own succession plan and put me in that position. And so this is the glass ceiling issue as well, a pink ceiling is of course a

thing. But what you find with organizations like that, you find homophobia, sexism and racism tend to coalesce.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

So you find, so on the Board of Directors there was one female out of 11 and one [B]lack [African] guy.

Researcher

So. But, but at least they were represented on board.

Johan

Well. Yeah, this is where we talk about diversity versus inclusion, so certainly diversity had the seats, but gays were not included, they didn't have voices.

Researcher

Um, OK.

Johan

So the difference between diversity and inclusion.

Researcher

Yes, yeah yeah yeah.

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

Alright, so let's, let's, let's move on to the next one. Have you ever experienced your sexual orientation to impacted on your journey to achieving executive leadership? And what are the ways that that happened?

Johan

Many ways for example.

Researcher

Yeah.

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

OK, so I mean, yeah, it's, it's working in a company exactly like you were with, with [a retail solution company].

Johan

Uh, yeah.

Researcher

K.

Johan

The, the opposite and also. And this is again I think it's an important part of this and you know, I, I kind of laughingly spoke about diversity and inclusion, but I think this is a big part. So, it's this kind of window dressing kind of a thing that you have. So, the Diversity Committee, you know, it makes sure that we include everybody, I mean at least in team building shit where people have to climb. So your staff and you know that's all nonsense. That's just window dressing.

Researcher

Yep.

Johan

Putting a [B]lack [African] face and a female face. And, I don't know, somebody who looks like a hairdresser gone wrong. You know, in a boardroom that does not happen. That's inclusion of diversity, or that that's that's giving diversity a seat. But it's not inclusiveness.

Researcher

It's, it's almost like a, you know, the thing is, in other words, we, we in South Africa we have the, the acts and the human, the Labor Relations acts and things that say you have to be inclusive or you have to be non-discriminatory so they kind of tick the box. But it's not really happening.

Johan

And I think look, I personally think legislating against prejudice is a foolish mission. I think what you do is you just teach people to become slyer and the problem with that is that it becomes a tick box exercise because that's ultimately the best way to conform to legislation, so nothing has to change. You literally just have to tick boxes. So, if anything, [expletive] changes bar people

start ticking boxes, and it's a shockingly efficient process. So, you see how ticking boxes is becoming quite a, quite a good business process in many ways, HR has become a tick box.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, yeah.

Researcher

OK.

Johan

Um so, so it yeah, it just leads to tick boxing. So, all this legislation, whatever I think you cannot, you cannot legislate attitudes. We cannot legislate against prejudice. You can't. I personally think what you do is systemically, you're setting up a situation of us and them. You're setting at the situation where you're going to see an increased level of aggression and an increased level (and that what we're seeing), an increase in hate crimes in our country and it's partially because of the prejudice. It's not the constitution per say.

Researcher

Yeah.

Johan

Uhm? But some of the legislature. It's some of the legislation that's really at policy level and how their policies, those hollow policies and programs are implemented on the ground, that's causing a real effect 'cause it's one thing to have this in the Constitution and we are all Kumbaya. Lovely Rainbow Nation off we go, you know, blah blah blah. We think we fabulous Yeah, bags then you have, you know one nation and then.... But when it becomes a policies and, and procedures and programs, then it starts affecting people directly and now you're being told, yeah, [you are a bad person to think like this and the president will punish you- but you won't actually be punished because the system is not working].

Researcher

No, no, don't worry at all. Alright, so I said maybe Johan, let's talk about what, what characteristics or qualities do you think you possess that may have helped you overcome obstacles in, in the organization.

Johan

OK, so you are you familiar with the Myers Briggs indicators? OK so I'm an ENTJ. I'm the

commander, so I I can. I'm a very good leader I can get people fired up about a potential future that doesn't exist because I can see it. I can get people to work 16 hour days for eight hour pay.

Researcher

Yes.

Johan

And, and feel good at the end of the day because they achieved something and they do it willingly. I, intuitively understand how to move and how to shift the masks, and I can do that quite easily. So like that, is a large part of that, UM. I am highly analytical. I've probably thought through at least 100 different alternatives. It's like playing chess, for me. Life is like playing chess. So, and I followed, you know, Alice, Alice in Wonderland said something to the tune "If you know I I always have at least 101 new ideas before breakfast." And I think that's a good motto to have, yeah?

Researcher

Yeah, yeah, OK, right so.

Johan

So I think that yeah.

Researcher

Quite a few intrinsic skills that make you someone an organization would want to have working there

Johan

Part of what that makes me is it makes me a strategic thinker. So apart from the fact that I am a stickler for detail, so I, I believe and do it right first time. Right? And because of the mentors I had in my life I really would. I'm a good researcher, so I look at a set of tables and I don't see numbers. I see a fairy tale waiting to be told. So, for me. And that's the way that I look at it. So, it's so but more important, I can take that. And I can imagine a future for [a] yogurt [company]. That they can buy into and then I can... That's data driven, UM? S, I get so. So that gets me included because I make a difference. I'm not just the researcher, I don't tell you 60% of people did this.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

I say listen. Here's the picture.

Researcher

Yes, yes.

Johan

Here's the key facts you need to know. I, I think here's some possibilities when... Yes, and that's why I present as well so literally as you see me now, that's how I present as well. Confidence and, and I'm a strategic thinker, I think big.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

Not quite as big as [an energy company], and I don't have the money and I don't have interesting technology, but I mean that's, that was always a strength of mine, in that context.

Researcher

OK, So, what, what characteristics or personal traits do you think gay men require to achieve executive leadership in an organization, particularly in South African organisations?

Johan

Political clout, which means you need to know somebody. Uh and adaptability.

Researcher

Political clout and adaptability.

Johan

That's it.

Researcher

OK, so do you think there was any organizational assistance in your journey to the leadership positions you held?

Johan

No.

Researcher

OK, so it wasn't. It wasn't organizational help, helping you to get there.

Johan

No, if anything they were determined to prevent their own success because of their own attitudes.

Researcher

OK.

Researcher

Alright, so in terms of organizational strategies or assistance, do you, what would you feel are necessary to encourage equal opportunities and development or promotion of LGBT employees? What could organisations do?

Johan

So, I think the two things that we can do, so how do we change attitudes and how do we change cultures 'cause they are what you're asking me. So, talking about a corporate culture and how do we change that? We know corporate cultures are like families. To change our corporate culture. Sometimes I've seen it in a hospital. You literally have to fire the whole unit or redistribute them, and try again because it's like that, culture sits and even if there's only one person that culture takes hold of them.

Researcher

Yep.

Johan

Changing that culture implies knowledge and implies leading by example. It's not about processes and procedures and diversity committees, and it's none of that shit. Nobody wants to go on the fucking team meetings where you have to climb over things and then you have to be nice to the owner. The [idiot] from [a South African province], I don't want to talk to you and you don't want to talk to me, but now I have to ra ra or let's just get drunk and then we can talk [nonsense] and now we getting into trouble because normally not following. Meaning that none of these policies and procedures and team building things work. And continue to give him information because people are like [three] year old's. They learn by repetition and by example that's it. So, if top management do not set the example nothing will happen.

Researcher

OK, yeah, so it it seems, it seems to be what you're saying is it has to come from the top down to really, it has to be those top management leading.

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

And giving a good example.

Johan

That's called leadership, yeah?

Researcher

OK so last one, Johan. How effective do you think organizational strategies and policies are at non-discrimination and protecting LGBTI rights?

Johan

That's a good question. You know I'm gonna answer by giving you this and I'm not going to answer directly. So [my favorite social commentator], not because I've got because of what she says sometimes, but because of how she said, she said, and because she's just looks fabulous. But she, she says things in very direct ways, which I appreciate and biting, kind of ironic sort of ways. And that most Americans probably don't understand, sorry. Uhm, and she said the other day, you know one thing we're talking about ecological disaster what we leading to and are we going to shift in time to make the difference. And she said, you know what? It doesn't matter what you know, she said, and we have all these technologies that we're developing all this stuff, she said. And those things are different, she said. So , all the unintended consequences of those things which we can't see. And it's not because we're trying to be mean and nasty. And but there is unintended consequences to everything. I can't see. We can't focus the thing she said, but the one stable thing is human nature. Stays the same.

So if I look at fan, I think when you put a system or process in place, unless you've done your homework properly and unless you see it visibly in some form through. Uhm, contact groups or through leadership. Having a policy or process on I think is nonsense. I think it ticks boxes. It lies to us. Because it certainly looks like things are better, but in reality it's not. I think UM it's subdued or repressed. UM, prejudice is dangerous because you put 20 or hundred of those people together and one little match, and you have a riot on your hands.

Researcher

mm.

Johan

And people get killed. So I think you create unintended consequences is that you create internalized hate for them. So yeah, if you ask people you know and it's self-completion questionnaires you, how do you feel about gay people getting married? Here. yeah, so that means very little in a bigger scheme of things.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

It makes people like us think we're doing a good job in our activism. That's all it does, maybe.

Researcher

So in other words, if you're asking them questions or doing a survey with them, the chances are you know if they're concerned about a career, they'll say the politically correct thing and it's not actually how they feel.

Johan

Umm? Yep. What you need to do is to actually get a person to, to go and work there as part of the team, and go with him on the piss up on Friday night to figure out what's going on.

Researcher

Yeah yeah, I, I actually work for a division of government and one of my previous managers. Also a psychologist used to say to me, "If you want to know what's happening in the organization, you go to the, the, the bar, that internal bar on a Friday afternoon and then you'll hear what decisions are going to be made, what decisions are coming, who's involved?"

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

So yeah, yeah.

Johan

Yep indeed. Yeah, the other thing, so you know they often give people these sort of, you know, if teams are underperforming or they're unhappy. And I, you know, get psychologist in to come and you know deal with it and I think, like real contact, I think it makes a difference, so we know if you, if you have a person in your family that he's gay or trans or you know sexual and gender diverse. Uh, you are more likely to have less negative or less prejudicial attitudes. It doesn't

mean you know anything, but now that doesn't mean that just because a person is gay, that there are any less prejudice. Fence type people, so it's not, it's not just about hetero versus homo, it's about prejudice and what that means, yeah.

Researcher

Yep.

Researcher

Yeah, no, I like what you're saying. It's that it's been an experience of mine, particularly as a psychologist working in affirmative therapy.

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

There's a lot of expectations even in in in the gay community, so, or the LGBTI community so, I don't know if that's any better than the heteronormative community but yes.

Johan

Umm, but considering it supposed to be a community where particularly youngsters find community, I think that's where the toxicity of, of the LGBTI community comes in. If it is to be called a community, and I remember when I came out as a teenager and went to my first underground bar cos in those days, it was underground. Uhm? Yes, there was an older man who wanted to have sex with you, but, it was a quote. He would also actually in it to, you know, create that community with many people would get to know what to do, what not to do. Don't take that stuff. Don't go there. Do that, you know, so you would. It would be a like a main tool and where these days, I think it's just become a lot more predatory. And I think because of the online dating and I think it's this idea of you know. So, I have found the community.

And I was quite happy I was a teenager. I was. I was little [expletive] so. But as it travels, quite happy to you know, to engage and the stuff that I've been fantasizing about in return for, you know, for learning the rules of community and that, I think we've lost, and I think not just the online dating, I think also the pseudo, pseudo Kumbaya where we're wearing, are all one family thing, when we not. So, if I look at my practice and I look at.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah.

Johan

The struggles a lot of people have with this coming out. You would have thought by now there's such a number of kids we lose to suicide that I know of, just in my area, which is related to sexual and gender diversity. And I've got nowhere to go because there's none of the sense of community building. So.

Researcher

No, no, I, I agree with you Johan. You know working in the in the field. Or, you know, just as I research, I I've sort of looked for gay-friendly professionals, so I'm talking about doctors or psychologists or whatever it is, but, but gay.

Johan

Ah.

Researcher

The people that you can see are gay or part of the LGBT community and it's really hard to find those people, if you are looking for them.

Researcher

... And you know, and that was partly why I decided on this research because I work in government and I have a private practice and, something I observed, I was just walking discussing this with a colleague and we were talking about...and I was saying I wanted to do work specifically in the LGBTI community and, and do some research that is related to that, but do my PhD is in consulting psychology. Uh, so I was looking to do something that had to do with organisations and work, and the sort of workspace and you know, as I was talking to her I suddenly said, you know, one of the things that I've noticed is that you just don't hear about gay leaders, you don't hear about somebody that works in a normal organization that's in leadership. Yes, if it's a, an organization that focuses specifically within the LGBT community. Yes, of course, but you just don't hear about them otherwise, and I said I find that very interesting. I mean it can't be that there aren't any gay people or LGBTI people that are leaders. So why do we not hear about them? So that was what sort of started this interest.

Johan

Yeah.

Researcher

And I mean it doesn't change.

Johan

I think, it is such an important area of work that that you're doing. I think the work that you're doing is going to be important part of actually doing it. Publishing in academic journal, but also some more popular, popular journal publishing that because I think it's also a call to action for gay people in organisations when they are in positions of Power, they must decide what to do. They must think of that power as a privilege, not just as I did it for myself. Kind of nonsense, but as a privilege and say how do I use that and being expressively me as a way of normalizing this not just for straight people, but normalizing is for other in, in the closet gays, because if you stay in the closet as a senior manager, that's the example.

Researcher

Yeah, this is exactly it and, and I as I said, I'm sure there are people in those positions, but if we are not hearing about them, it's like you're saying that the person that is in that organization that's in the closet is certainly not going to willingly come out to the organization and and be open about their orientation.

Johan

Yeah. Uh-huh, yeah, it's a difficult thing. And I think it's an individual decision yet, so that one needs to make. Uh, and I think that that's where the, I hate personality. Typology is as a rule, but I think that's where this sort of Myers Briggs type thing is useful because certain types of people would just be much more prepared to say, "Well, yes, actually this is part of how I want to build my brand or who I am or represent myself" versus other people that say "no," you know, conform to what this organization is.

Researcher

Yeah yeah yeah no, I agree with you. I agree with you. So, it's all about personal choice in the end.

Johan

Uh-huh, which is good. I mean I've I've, I dunno. You know, but it would be nice when you know some people have a bit more bravery and they've been more belief in themselves. I think someone whose in senior positions, UM could do that. Because I think it goes and at some point in terms of privilege or power it becomes about your confidence in yourself. I think more so than about the potential consequences. Uhm, it's not connect. You know if the MD of [a retail company] comes out as gay, it's not gonna get them to sell this chocolate. It's not. It's not gonna happen.

Researcher

Ya. But that's certainly the view point of a lot of people that it would.

Johan

You know so. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher

Yeah.

Johan

That's it.

Researcher

So yeah, well, I hope, I hope my research, if nothing else, will at least start a ball rolling in the direction of organisations and changing things. And I see there's some movement happening so maybe, maybe something will come of it.

Johan

Yeah, I know there's there's some globally. There's some measurement of kind of. From you know how affirmative organisations are, and I know there was some moved to implement that in South Africa. I think they might have even done it first. First measurement. Just something I haven't heard. I haven't to be honest. I haven't looked for it. But again, yeah, that's sort of numbers. I think the work you're doing as qualitative work will be a significant in contributing today. So, if I can ask you, if you mind sending me a copy?

Researcher

Yes no. I'd be more than happy to.

Johan

OK, I'd love to read it, but when it's done not for me to critique or anything.

Researcher

So yeah, thank you. To see what we find out?

Johan

Yeah, see and also have it. Yeah, you know I can talk to other people. I can spread the word so to speak.

Researcher

OK, great, thank you. Alright, great yeah thanks Johan.

Johan

Like I said (Researcher), good luck, I hope this was useful. I think. Yeah, I think you did great. And yeah, I would, I like how you have a very conversational tone. I think that's gonna make the big difference, so yeah.

Researcher

OK, and in terms of the questions (Johan), do you think I should send them to the people before the interview or do you think it's fine to just ask them as we go along?

Johan

I think ask them as you go along. I think you want them to be more spontaneous because that's gonna break it down to the core. If people think about what they need to own it. There's gonna be lots of fluff around which is not going to make the salient things stand out as much. So, if you look at my interview, there's a few key things that will be salient because I didn't prepare for it, and I think that's more relevant than... Here's my ten reasons form that's not helpful.

Researcher

Yeah, yeah. Yeah no, I like what you're saying and that was actually what I initially thought. But then of course you know as you read through other, other PHD's and the way other people do the research then I started becoming a bit concerned. Should I be sending it prior to the interview?

Johan

Yeah, I think this this conversational, I think is going to be it, yeah.

Researcher

OK, great.

Johan

I think it's perfect, yeah?

Researcher

Thanks, thanks, thanks very much, Johan. And thank you for all your hard work and you know, I know you've been part of the, the guidelines for PsySSA in terms of affirmative practice and I'm, I'm very happy to see that things like that happening.

Johan

No, absolutely yeah. No. I hear somebody has to do it. I do like it. I I don't do things I don't like so I.

Researcher

Yeah.

Johan

But yeah, it's work. I enjoy it and I find pleasurable and the people I work with. It's a superb individuals and yeah, inspiring. It's inspiring to work with people like that.

Researcher

It's great, it's great and I see, I see it's starting to speed through African, through the rest of the world. What, what you guys have done, which I think is fabulous.

Johan

Gee, yeah.

Researcher

So.

Johan

And across disciplines. So yeah, so that's interesting.

Researcher

Yeah, I think so. I'm I'm so happy and keep it up.

Johan

Well, if I've got some cash, absolutely.

Researcher

Good.

Researcher

Alright, thanks very much, Johan.

Johan

(Researcher) and good luck with your research. And good luck with the process. Uh, yeah, I think it's fantastic work.

Researcher

Alright thanks, thanks a lot for your help.

Johan

I thank you for this. This was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun chatting to you.

Researcher

Great, thanks (Johan).

Johan

Bye

Researcher

Bye

End of interview

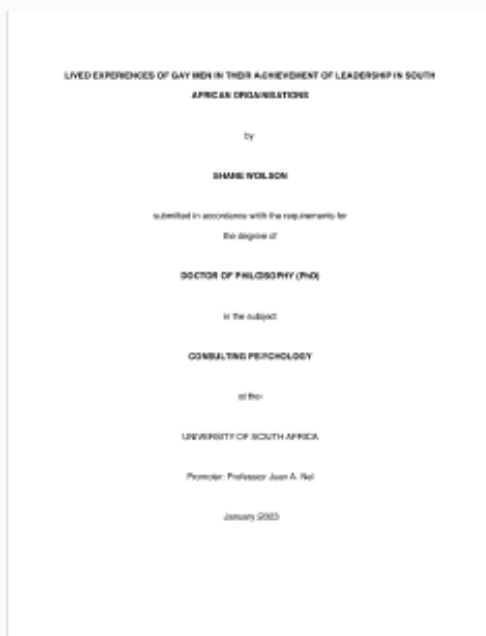


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