

Towards Dismantling Heteronormativity at South African Universities: Heterosexual Students' Perceptions of Heteronormative Ideologies and LGBTIQ+ Identities

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Abstract

South African literature demonstrates that heteronormative ideologies are evident at universities and inform various discriminations against LGBTIQ+ students. These heteronormative ideologies emanate from the traditional heteronormative socialisation in the South African society. While there is notable literature based on the experiences and perceptions of LGBTIQ+ students at universities, not much research pays attention to heterosexual students' perceptions. It is imperative to consider heterosexual students' perceptions of LGBTIQ+ identities to challenge heteronormative ideologies and transform universities into inclusive spaces. This article is based on heterosexual university students' non-heteronormative perceptions of LGBTIQ+ identities. I argue that there is the potential to dismantle heteronormativity at universities since the heterosexual students in this research are critical of heteronormative ideologies and question stereotypes about sexual minority identities. Through semi-structured interviews with 10 self-identifying heterosexual students, the article established that students' perceptions of LGBTIQ+ identities were affirming as they resisted traditional norms of sexuality and gender and demonstrated sensitivity to sexual diversity. The paper calls for further research to critically engage heterosexual students in conversations around heteronormativity to advance the acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ students at South African universities.

Keywords: heterosexual students; sexual diversity; LGBTIQ+ identities; heteronormativity; sexuality; universities; South Africa

Introduction

Gender and sexuality literature in South Africa has established that heteronormative ideologies, which recognise heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexuality with no other possibilities, are pervasive in various social spaces and inform people's perceptions and views on gender and sexual diversity (Francis 2021; Lynch and Maree 2013; Mkhize and Mthembu 2023; Msibi and Jagessar 2015; Reygan and Lynette 2014; Smuts, Reijer, and Dooms 2015). These heteronormative ideologies are engrained in socialisation and spread through various agents of socialisation, including family, schools, media, religious institutions, and workplaces (Tamale 2013; Ubisi 2020). Accordingly, heteronormative ideologies are prevalent at universities and inform LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and other sexually or gender diverse) students' experiences of discrimination and homophobia. Various sexuality scholars have conducted research on LGBTIQ+ students' experiences at both rural and urban universities and found that sexual minority students experience some university spaces as pervasively heteronormative and exclusionary (Mayeza 2022; Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2017; Munyuki and Vincent 2018; Nduna et al. 2017). Some research in South Africa has found that most heterosexual students at universities uphold heteronormative ideologies and hold homophobic views about sexual minority identities (Arndt 2009; Barry 2014; Smuts et al. 2015); however, the studies are mostly quantitative and mixed method.

There are limited South African studies on heterosexual students' perception of heteronormativity and its implications on sexual minority identities, making it difficult to gain a nuanced understanding of the students' perceptions. This article reports on a study that employed a qualitative research design to explore heterosexual students' non-heteronormative perceptions of sexuality and develop possible avenues to challenge heteronormative ideologies at institutions of higher education in South Africa. Thus, this study sought to answer the question: How do heterosexual students' non-heteronormative perceptions of gender and sexuality contribute towards dismantling heteronormativity at universities? I argue that it is necessary to include the heterosexual student voices in conversations on heteronormative ideologies and sexual diversity to successfully dismantle heteronormativity and to continue the efforts of creating inclusive and safe spaces for sexual minority students at universities.

The following section delves into an exploration of heteronormativity within university settings, examining international and South African literature to explore its impact on the experiences of sexual minority students. It then discusses how Foucault's work can guide the deconstruction of heteronormative discourses at South African universities. This is followed by an outline of the research design, including research tools used, and an in-depth analysis of the findings, focusing on how heterosexual students interact with and possibly resist heteronormative ideologies. In conclusion, this article will culminate in a discussion section, highlighting key findings and significant contributions that the study offers to the existing body of literature.

Heteronormativity: A Barrier to Acceptance and Tolerance at Universities

Bell (2009, 115) defines heteronormativity as “a powerful but often unmarked set of assumptions, practices and beliefs that constantly reinforce the normalness and naturalness of heterosexuality as the only normal, natural form of sexuality.” Furthermore, heteronormativity can be described as a sociocultural institution where heterosexuality is learned and is continuously reinforced through socialisation practices and ideologies that render sexual identities which fall outside the perceived normal, deviant and inferior (Lynch and Maree 2013; Tamale 2013; Warner 1991). The concept of heteronormativity has been widely employed by various scholars to understand and interrogate sexual identity discrimination, homophobia, intolerance and violence against LGBTIQ+ people worldwide. Many of these international and South African studies found that heteronormative ideologies are deeply entrenched in socialisation and popularised through various social institutions, including homes, schools, workplaces, religious institutions and universities (Bryan 2021; Harton, Rydstrom, and Tonini 2015; Lynch and Maree 2013; Orellana, Alarcón, and Schnettler 2022; Reingardé 2010; Reygan and Lynette 2014). These studies prove that heteronormative ideologies are widely held in various societies, creating barriers to the acceptance and tolerance of LGBTIQ+ identities, since they are seen to be deviating from acceptable heterosexual norms.

Various international and South African literature demonstrates that heteronormative ideologies are evident at universities and inform how LGBTIQ+ students experience university spaces (Munyuki and Vincent 2018; Nduna et al. 2017; Orellana et al. 2022; Seal 2019). International research provides evidence that heteronormative ideologies at universities inform the homophobic violence and exclusion of LGBTIQ+ students (Duncan et al. 2019; Jackson et al. 2023; Orellana et al. 2022; Yilmaz et al. 2021). These studies explore the issue of heteronormativity from the perspectives and experiences of LGBTIQ+ students. Some international studies, particularly quantitative, have explored the issue from the perspectives of heterosexual students (Duncan et al. 2019; Holland, Matthews, and Schott 2013; Neviyarni, Riska, and Wiwi 2019). While these studies discovered instances where heterosexual students displayed sensitivity towards sexual diversity, most of the students held heteronormative views and did not demonstrate tolerance for sexually diverse students (Holland et al. 2013; Neviyarni et al. 2019). Similar to the international literature, both quantitative and qualitative research studies conducted in South Africa have revealed that heterosexual students often hold homophobic attitudes, which subsequently contribute to the mistreatment of sexual minority students at universities (Barry 2014; Base 2022; Graziano 2005; Smuts et al. 2015). While quantitative studies measure heteronormative attitudes, qualitative research focuses on homophobic views and perceptions and does not offer in-depth discussions of heteronormative ideologies from the perspectives of heterosexual students. Additionally, there are limited South African quantitative studies that focus on non-heteronormative heterosexual student perceptions, creating a narrative that all

heterosexual students subscribe to heteronormative ideologies. Hence, this study aimed to bring non-heteronormative heterosexual voices to the forefront to advance our knowledge of how heteronormative ideologies can be questioned and challenged from the position of heterosexual students.

South Africa has been progressive in its legal recognition of sexual minority identities; though studies indicate that heteronormative ideologies continue to be produced and reproduced through social interactions among students and university personnel, rendering some university spaces unsafe for sexual minority students (Jagessar and Msibi 2015; Kiguwa and Langa 2017; Mayeza 2022; Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2017; Munyuki and Vincent 2018; Nduna et al. 2017). For example, Kiguwa and Langa (2017) conducted a qualitative study on the experiences of gay male students at a South African university male residence and found that these students encountered heteronormative ideologies that propelled them to hide their sexual identities and avoid discrimination. Similarly, Mayeza's (2022) qualitative study on LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Pansexual, Queer) students' access to healthcare at a South African rural-based university found that access to healthcare on-campus clinics was hindered by heteronormative cultures that informed the differential treatment of sexual minority students.

The similarity in South African studies is that they employ qualitative methodologies to explore heteronormativity from the perspectives and experiences of sexual minority students, which is justifiable considering that LGBTIQ+ students are most affected by dominant heteronormative ideologies that inform discrimination and homophobia. Studies conducted in South Africa have consistently documented the intolerance and homophobic attitudes exhibited by heterosexual students within university settings (Mayeza 2022; Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2017; Munyuki and Vincent 2018). However, this recent study offers a glimmer of hope by suggesting that there are indications of shifting perceptions among a subset of heterosexual students. The study contributes to South African literature by employing a qualitative methodology in considering the voices of heterosexual university students who embrace sexual diversity and do not subscribe to heteronormative gender ideologies. I argue that including heterosexual voices in South African literature on heteronormativity at universities is necessary to interrogate heteronormative ideologies among heterosexual students and possibly change the narrative. In the following section, I bring attention to the seminal work of Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, and highlight how it helps us gain an in-depth understanding of heterosexual university students' non-heteronormative perceptions of gender and sexuality.

Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Towards a Non-heteronormative Sexuality Discourse among University Students

In this study, Foucault's (1978) theory played a pivotal role in facilitating a nuanced analysis of heterosexual university students' perceptions of heteronormative ideologies

and LGBTIQ+ identities. The theory not only guided the analysis but also illuminated the complexities surrounding heterosexual students' perspectives, shedding light on the intricate interplay between societal influences and the students' individual perceptions of sexuality and heteronormativity. Through his analysis of the history of sexuality in the West, Foucault (1978) established that sexuality has primarily been subjected to heteronormative discourses that do not acknowledge sexual diversity and encourage heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. Foucault (1978) argues that at any point in history, sexuality has been governed by discourses that support a particular type of morality and dictate acceptable and unacceptable modes of sexual conduct. The most dominant discourse of sexuality is religion, which emphasises heterosexual marriage and condemns sexualities outside the heterosexual norm. However, Foucault (1978) acknowledges that discourses of sexuality evolve, particularly when people choose to reject certain discourses and accept others. For example, historical pathological discourses that saw same-sex desires as a sign of a mental defect that required medical attention were discredited after it was established that being attracted to members of the same sex is a normal positive variant of human sexuality (Campbell-Bridges 1981; Drescher 2015).

While Foucault's (1978) analyses focused primarily on the historical context of the West, some research in South Africa has employed sexuality discourse analysis to question religious arguments and African cultural traditions that condemn sexual minority identities (Lewis 2021; Msibi 2011; Peter 2018; Ubisi 2020). The cultural traditions and religious discourses inherent in heteronormative ideologies are dominant in various social spaces in South Africa, and research indicates that they are inherent in childhood and adult socialisation (Francis 2017; Ubisi 2020). As such, from a young age, people are socialised into heteronormative ideologies on sex, gender and sexuality, and they carry them throughout their lives (Butler 1993). Upon entering universities, students often carry with them heteronormative ideologies that may have been assimilated and integrated into their personal worldviews (Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2017). These heteronormative ideologies may be reinforced by some longstanding university cultures that do not acknowledge sexual diversity (Kiguwa and Langa 2017; Mayeza 2022). To transform heteronormative ideologies amongst university students, there is a need to interrogate the cultural traditions and religious discourse that assert a heterosexual way of life and embrace inclusivity and diversity.

Foucault's (1978) insights allowed for an exploration of how heterosexual students can challenge heteronormativity, a dominant societal discourse, by endorsing progressive non-heteronormative discourses that regard LGBTIQ+ identities as natural and valid expressions of human sexuality. While it may be relatively easier for sexual minority students to move away from societal discourses that embrace heteronormativity, it may be a challenge for heterosexual students since they are not in the same position and may not be affected by the stigmas endured by LGBTIQ+ students. However, in line with Foucault (1978), the findings of this study point us to a non-heteronormative sexuality discourse that is developing among heterosexual students as they resist heteronormative

societal discourses on sexuality and lean towards acceptance and tolerance of sexual diversity. The findings of this study demonstrate that there is hope in changing the longstanding heteronormative ideologies at South African universities and moving towards discourses that do not see sexual diversity as an oppressive tool but as an opportunity to unite in differences. Hence, the utilisation of Foucault's (1978) theory becomes imperative, given its unparalleled relevance and necessity in conceptualising the emerging non-heteronormative sexuality discourse observed among heterosexual students at the university under study. In accordance with Foucault (1978), heteronormative sexuality discourses amongst students at universities can only transform if they are resisted and replaced with non-heteronormative discourses. We learn from the heterosexual students who participated in this study how this transformation can occur, including acknowledging sexual diversity as part of normal human existence and un-doing early heteronormative socialisation.

Research Methods

A qualitative research design was adopted to achieve the study's objectives since it allows researchers to gather in-depth understanding of phenomena from the participants' viewpoints and unique contexts (Babbie 2021). Therefore, a qualitative research design was relevant to obtain detailed information on how young heterosexual students understand and perceive heteronormative ideologies and LGBTIQ+ identities within the university context. Since the study formed part of a broader mixed-methods research project, the participants were recruited through a quantitative survey that sought to gather the students' attitudes and views on gender and sexuality norms at the university. At the end of the quantitative survey, information about the qualitative component of the project was shared with the students, followed by a request to leave their contact details if they were interested in being interviewed. The participants were identified using the purposive sampling technique since the criteria for selection were shared with students, and those who were interested could leave their contact details. Twenty-three students were identified through purposive sampling. Fifteen participants identified as heterosexual, and eight identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Due to the specific focus of this study on the perceptions of young heterosexual students, only the narratives of 10 heterosexual participants between the ages of 18 and 28 were considered. Age played a crucial role in participant selection, as the research aimed to delve into the perspectives and views of the younger generation of students. Young people are the future of the country, and paying attention to their views on heteronormative ideologies gives an impression of how the future looks in terms of the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people within university settings. Three participants were male, and seven identified as female. The uneven distribution regarding sex did not present a dilemma since the study did not seek to compare male and female views, but focused on their perceptions.

For data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted with the students through Zoom. During the data-collection phase, South Africa was going through a national

lockdown, and face-to-face interviews could not be conducted. In line with Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic brought challenges for qualitative researchers since lockdown policies were implemented in most countries. Therefore, it was necessary to resort to technological tools for data collection. Since movement was restricted during the national lockdown, using Zoom for conducting in-depth interviews was a practical choice, given that it was already integrated into the teaching and learning processes at the university under study. Students were familiar with the Zoom application, making it easy to collect data because training was not required to use it. An interview guide was used to direct the in-depth interviews. Questions focused on the students' knowledge of heteronormativity, sexual diversity, and LGBTIQ+ identities within the university context. The questions sought to establish whether the students held heteronormative perceptions of gender and sexuality and how their perceptions impacted their interactions with other students. All the interviews were conducted in English.

Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2019, 594) indicate that the reflexive thematic analysis method is about "the researchers' reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process." In employing the reflexive thematic analysis method, I took a flexible approach to coding and developing themes, where codes and themes were not predetermined but emerged and developed through critical engagement with the data. The students' resistance to heteronormative ideologies and tolerance of LGBTIQ+ students were some themes that emerged from the analysis. These themes inform the arguments made in this article.

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee of the university under study. Considering the sensitivity of the research topic, it was imperative to protect the identities of the participants. As such, the participants' real names were replaced with pseudonyms and all identifying information that could link the participants to any excerpts used in this article was removed. The following sections present the study's findings, focusing on how the students defy heteronormative societal narratives of gender and sexuality and embrace sexual diversity at universities. Student responses are presented verbatim.

Findings

Defying Societal Narratives on Sexual Minority Identities

This study found that the students interviewed were opposed to heteronormative ideologies that marginalise and exclude sexual minority students. While acknowledging that they were raised in heteronormative communities and socialised into heteronormative ideologies favouring heterosexuality, the participants argued against heteronormative societal narratives of gender and sexuality. When asked about his thoughts on transgender students on campus, 22-year-old Ishmael first alluded to socialisation in his family and how it impacted his views on LGBTIQ+ identities:

Right, if I'm honest, a couple of years ago if you asked me that I would have been against it simply because of what my family and my friends uh all repeated to me. We've been brought up to believe in heteronormativity, and this is because this has been the case for me personally. ... to highlight that people aren't born thinking that other people are weird; it's being taught to them. But I've come to realise that the world isn't like that, straight isn't default being male or female and then just sticking to it isn't default; it is possible to transition. Uh ... so yes, I'm open to ... to that ... yeah. (Ishmael, 22-year-old male)

It is evident from Ishmael's narrative that to change heteronormative perspectives on gender and sexuality, it is imperative to first acknowledge the role of socialisation at home and in communities where the students grow up. This was supported by other students who held similar sentiments to Ishmael and suggested that society needed to change the narrative on LGBTIQ+ identities.

Reitumetse, an 18-year-old heterosexual male student, demonstrated strong disapproval of heteronormative ideologies. He held that he did not believe in heteronormativity and called for inclusivity. He was of the view that different relationships existed where "a man can marry a man, A woman can marry a woman" and argued that society should accept all relationships. Similarly, 24-year-old Nambitha argued for tolerance and acceptance, explaining that society should allow people to be themselves without being condemned for who they are:

Yes, yes, actually, if it was up to me, society should really learn that if you are a heterosexual, that is fine; that is you. If the next person wants to be a transgender, that is also fine. It should not affect you emotionally or in any way; otherwise, if you are comfortable with your sexuality, then let other people be comfortable with their sexuality. I find it funny how people can have an issue with gay people or transgender. How is that even related to you? How is that even your problem because you're not that perfect? It's not you who is gay. It's not you who is transgender. Why, then, should you feel the need to bash these people, to treat them differently and all of that thing? (Nambitha, 24-year-old female)

Nambitha demonstrated an awareness that she was living in a heteronormative society and condemned the ill-treatment of LGBTIQ+ people. In her narrative, she acknowledges that while heterosexuality is a normal aspect of being human, society should learn that sexual minority identities are also normal. A similar narrative was shared by 20-year-old Aliya, who stated "I personally view homosexuality as not being a choice. I view it as you were sort of born with it." A 24-year-old female student, Noma, agreed with Aliya and further stated that if being LGBTIQ+ was a choice, she did not believe that anyone would choose those identities because people who carry them go through a lot of persecution and stigmas. As such, there was consensus amongst the participants that heteronormative ideologies are irrelevant as they impinge on LGBTIQ+ individuals' agency and threaten their freedom to be their authentic selves. This finding contradicts previous studies (Graziano 2005; Kiguwa and Langa 2017; Munyuki and Vincent 2018; Smuts et al. 2015), which found that university students

held heteronormative and homophobic views. It is evident through the participants' narratives that heteronormativity at universities can be dismantled by unlearning longstanding traditional heteronormative narratives about sexual diversity. The participants in this study demonstrated this by moving away from heteronormative ideologies that they had been socialised into before entering the university spaces.

Embracing Sexual Diversity as Resistance to Heteronormativity

The findings of this study illustrate that heteronormativity at universities can further be dismantled by students learning about sexual diversity and embracing different sexual identities instead of using them to stigmatise and exclude other students. The participants were sensitive to the need to change heteronormative attitudes that encourage homophobia and discrimination. They shared non-heteronormative views on sexual diversity and emphasised the fluidity of gender and sexuality:

It's difficult because, uhm considering where I grew up, I grew up in a very heteronormative society, uhm, so the people in my community, I mean, there were a few people who were not heterosexual. So, when homosexuals and bisexuals express their sexuality, they are shunned by society or the people I live with. I feel like that mindset, and that belief is obviously not necessarily the best because, like I said, the world is not black and white. I have homosexual friends who were victims of verbal abuse and all sorts of insults because of who they are and what society believes they're supposed to be, and so I feel like it is very rude and contradictory to impose your beliefs on someone else without trying to learn theirs. I feel like it's a very poor way of thinking because if you are a heteronormative human being, you should still be able to accept people of different sexualities and sexual identities and just be comfortable with who you are. (Rego, 20-year-old male)

While Rego stated that he grew up in a heteronormative community, his views demonstrated agency, as he denounced the dominant heteronormative ideologies that he was exposed to when growing up in his community. From his narrative, we gather that his association with gay friends who were exposed to discrimination also contributed to him unlearning early heteronormative socialisation and advocating for inclusivity. Kimberly, Clair, Kabelo and Lee-Ann shared similar views to Rego, as they emphasised respect for sexual and gender diversity and spoke against heteronormative gender expectations:

A relationship does not have gender-specific things. The definition of a relationship is a partnership where two people are together and they relate, be it whether sexual or if a person is asexual and they're not intimate, but these two people are relating, you know, they are coming together; they are forming this partnership, so it affects people, it doesn't say a man and a woman. (Kimberly, 18-year-old female)

Mhhh hahaha, I mean, in terms of sexuality, I mean everyone should be free. I mean, isn't it just about like I'm attracted to this, but it's okay? Well, I feel like it's OK. Everyone should just express themselves and sleep with whoever they want to sleep

with. Yeah, I feel like everyone should date whoever they want to. So, if a person feels comfortable with being a woman but looks like a man, then go change yourself to look like a woman so that you can look how you feel and you're comfortable yeah. (Clair, 28-year-old female)

I'm an advocate for happiness, honestly, I feel like if something makes you happy then you should just do it. Whether you like girls, you like guys, you like gays, you like lesbians, you like nothing, it's up to you at the end of the day. It's just a matter of being happy, whether it's taboo or not. I feel like if you want to do it, if it makes you happy, you should do it, it's okay. (Kabelo, 21-year-old female)

If someone born a man wants to be a woman and they become a woman and vice versa, there's nothing wrong with that. It's not their fault that they want to be a different gender! ... I mean, a lot of people will hurt, harm or murder you just for being of a different sexuality and it shouldn't be a thing cause, regardless, they still are human. (Lee-Ann, 20-year-old female)

While 20-year-old Relebogile shared similar views of acceptance and tolerance, he spoke from his position as a heterosexual man and explained that while heterosexual men may not be well informed about various sexual identities, they should be willing to learn and understand them.

I feel like as a heterosexual man you should be open to understanding everyone and their sexuality; and if you don't know you must learn cause I don't know everything about sexuality and all the gender norms and uhm and all of that but I'm learning so I feel like you should be open to learning because heterosexual males tend to box themselves off. We believe in what we believe predominately like men should be with women and women should be with men. People of different sexual orientations should be with each other, but we are not willing to learn about what they go through or what they are experiencing as it doesn't directly affect us, so I feel like we need to break out of that and be willing to learn and accept people for who they are because nobody really asks to be who they are so it's being more open-minded in terms of other sexualities, other genders and understanding that the world is not black and white. (Relebogile, 20-year-old male)

Relebogile's emphasis on the need for heterosexual men to learn about sexual diversity is relevant, considering that studies such as that of Kiguwa and Langa (2017) provide evidence that particular spaces dominated by males on campuses tend to be heteronormative. Relebogile's views do not only contradict studies that have found heterosexual males to be heteronormative and homophobic (Base 2022; Orellana et al. 2022; Smuts et al. 2015), but encourage the dismantling of heteronormative ideologies amongst male students by learning and understanding that sexual diversity is normal. While findings from previous South African studies have emphasised the heteronormative nature of universities through the exploration of LGBTIQ+ students' experiences and heteronormative student perceptions (Jagessar and Msibi 2015; Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2017; Nduna et al. 2017; Smuts et al. 2015), participants in this

study are changing the narrative as they demonstrate an awareness of the heterosexual privilege at universities and hold views that are inclusive and non-heteronormative.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study drew upon the perspectives of 10 young heterosexual students and did not suggest the absence of heteronormative ideologies at South African universities. Instead, it sought to incorporate the voices of heterosexual students to foster a more comprehensive understanding of how heteronormative ideologies within universities can be potentially challenged. The article suggests ways in which students can resist heteronormativity at universities based on the participants' resistance to society's heteronormative ideologies and embracing sexual diversity. The reality is that students come from homes, schools and communities where they were socialised into heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality, and some of the heterosexual students are not sensitised to sexual diversity, which may contribute to homophobic attitudes and violence towards their peers. Although previous studies reported heteronormative cultures and homophobia at universities (Kiguwa and Langa, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2017; Smuts et al. 2015), this study sheds light on non-heteronormative perspectives from heterosexual students, which is an indication that there are possibilities to dismantle heteronormative ideologies at universities. However, the study's limitations are acknowledged, as it attracted participation exclusively from students who did not align with heteronormative views, despite extending invitations to all university students. Hence the need to bring these voices into the conversation.

Contrary to previous studies that reported mostly heteronormative attitudes and homophobia among students at universities (Arndt, 2009; Barry, 2012; Smuts et al. 2015; Yilaz et al. 2021), this qualitative study provides evidence that some heterosexual students hold non-heteronormative perspectives and advocate for the acceptance and tolerance of sexual diversity. Theoretically, we are witnessing a non-heteronormative sexuality discourse developing amongst heterosexual students who are deliberately going against society's sexuality discourses that are conservative and exclude alternative expressions of sexuality. As predicted by Foucault (1978), the findings of this study are evidence that sexuality discourses evolve as members of society reject pre-existing definitions of sexuality and morality and employ different ones. Accordingly, the participants in this study are moving away from heteronormative sexuality discourses that they were socialised in while growing up, and are now employing progressive non-heteronormative discourses in the interest of social justice.

While quantitative studies are useful and necessary to understand the students' attitudes on heteronormativity and homophobia, I argue that it is imperative to adopt qualitative methods to gather nuanced understandings of heterosexual students' perceptions of heteronormativity. Furthermore, instead of exclusively examining heteronormativity and homophobia through the lens of LGBTIQ+ students, this paper calls for qualitative researchers to engage heterosexual students in the conversation to bring about much-needed social change at universities. This approach allows for the identification of

opportunities for intervention and possible strategies that are necessary to transform heteronormative ideologies embedded in university student cultures. The existence of students who embrace non-heteronormative views offers hope for the transformation of heteronormative ideologies at universities. Ultimately, it is through dialogue between heterosexual and LGBTIQ+ students' narratives that heteronormativity at South African universities can possibly be dismantled, hence the need for further research on heterosexual student perceptions of heteronormative ideologies at universities. Further research is necessary to effectively tackle the ongoing challenge of fostering inclusion and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ identities within universities.

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