

HOMOSEXUALITY: THE DISCLOSURE PROCESS DURING ADOLESCENCE

By

Veronica Robertson

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Supervisor: Charmaine Louw

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

During no other time in history have sexual minority individuals been the recipients of so much attention, scrutiny and unprecedented acceptance and inclusion into mainstream culture. However, despite advances and society's ever increasing tolerance toward sexual minorities, many individuals with alternative sexual orientations remain fearful of disclosing their sexuality. Consequently, adolescents often hide their alternative sexual orientation from others or disclose to only a select few. Adolescents with alternative sexual orientations face unique challenges, such as the coming out process, during which they must recognise, explore, define and disclose their orientation in a way that heterosexual individuals need not. Disclosure of an alternative sexual orientation is a struggle for most lesbian, gay and bisexual youth due to fears of discrimination, ostracism and violence from others. Despite a growing body of scientific literature on homosexuality in general, little is known about the disclosure process and its impact on an adolescent. This study seeks to help fill the gaps by giving voice to the adolescent by exploring the experience of disclosure. Furthermore, this study seeks to provide insight and knowledge to mental health professionals to aid adolescent clients throughout the disclosure process.

This study's research methodology can be described as qualitative research which is embedded within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Purposive sampling was used to select five male and five female research participants. The methods of data collection that were employed comprised semi-structured individual interviews and reflective notes. Furthermore, content analysis was used to analyse the data.

The findings of this study suggest that many unique issues besides the normative challenges that lesbian and gay adolescents share with heterosexual adolescents characterise their development. This research study suggests that there are several milestones that are characteristic of lesbian and gay identity development, the negotiation of which may hinder development in other areas. The male and female participants described a similar trajectory to coming out, consistently identifying a feeling of being different during early childhood which resolved into an awareness of same-sex attraction that concluded in their self-labelling as gay or lesbian. The findings of this study suggest that the process of disclosure is continuous and emergent. The reactions of parents ranged from extreme outrage and expulsion from the home to support and acceptance of the fact that their child had disclosed his/her homosexual orientation. From the findings of this study it would appear that

the participants' parents were initially ill prepared and unable to support their child during his/her disclosure. The participants voiced various strategies to support an adolescent in the position of disclosing to family. There are several implications of this study's findings for mental health professionals working with lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents and youth.

Keywords: adolescent, youth, homosexual, sexual orientation, sexual identity, coming out/ disclosure, lesbian, gay, bisexual, sexual minority youth, alternative sexual orientation

OPSOMMING

Die aandag, noukeurige betragting, aanvaarding en ongekeerde insluiting binne die hoofstroom van die kultuur wat tans deur seksuele minderheidsgroepe ervaar word, is ongekeerd in die geskiedenis. Ten spyte van vooruitgang en die toenemende verdraagsaamheid teenoor die seksuele minderheid in die samelewing, vrees diegene wat 'n alternatiewe seksuele oriëntasie toon steeds om hulself bloot te stel. Gevolglik hou adolessente dikwels hul alternatiewe seksuele oriëntasie geheim of onthul hulle dit slegs aan 'n uitgesoekte paar persone. Adolessente met 'n alternatiewe seksuele oriëntasie kom op 'n wyse wat nie vir heteroseksuele individue nodig is nie, voor unieke uitdagings soos die openbaarmaking van hul oriëntasie te staan wanneer hulle dit moet erken, verken, definieer en aan die moet lig bring. Die erkenning van 'n alternatiewe seksuele oriëntasie plaas die meeste lesbiese, gay en biseksuele jeugdige voor 'n stryd vanweë die vrees vir diskriminasie, verstoting en geweld deur andere. Ten spyte van die algemene toenemende hoeveelheid wetenskaplike literatuur oor homoseksualiteit, is daar weinig kennis van die verklaringsproses en die impak daarvan op 'n adolessent. Hierdie studie poog om die ervaring van verklaring te ondersoek om die adolessent se stem te laat hoor en sodoende die kennisgaping te oorbrug. Verder poog die studie ook om insig en kennis aan professionele persone binne die gebied van die geestesgesondheid te bied, om hulle in staat te stel om adolessente kliënte met die verklaringsproses by te staan.

Die navorsingsmetodologie wat vir die studie gebruik is, kan as kwalitatiewe navorsing binne 'n interpretiewe/konstruktivistiese paradigma beskou word. Doelgerigte toetsing is ingespan om vyf manlike en vyf vroulike deelnemers vir die navorsingspoging te werf. Data is met behulp van semigestruktureerde onderhoude en reflektiewe notas ingesamel. Verder is inhoudsanalise gebruik om die data te ontleed.

Die bevindings van die studie dui daarop dat die ontwikkeling van gay en lesbiese adolessente benewens die normatiewe uitdagings wat deur hulle sowel as heteroseksuele adolessente aangespreek moet word, ook deur unieke kwessies gekenmerk word. Hierdie navorsingstudie suggereer dat verskeie mylpale kenmerkend is van die ontwikkeling van lesbiese en gay identiteit en dat die bewerkstelling daarvan ontwikkeling in ander areas kan stuit. Die manlike en vroulike deelnemers aan die studie het langs soortgelyke bane tot die verklaring van hul oriëntasie gekom en het die gewaarwording dat hulle tydens hul vroeë jeug reeds 'n gevoel dat hulle anders was konsekwent geïdentifiseer. Hierdie gevoel het tot 'n bewustheid van die aantrekking van dieselfde

geslag ontwikkel en tot self-etikettering as gay of lesbies gelei. Die bevindings van die studie stel voor dat die verklaringsproses voortdurend en opdoemend van aard is. Die reaksies van ouers wissel vanaf uiterste verontwaardiging en verdrywing vanuit die tuiste tot ondersteuning en aanvaarding van die wete dat hul kind sy/haar homoseksuele oriëntasie verklaar het. Die bevindings laat blyk ook dat die ouers van die deelnemers aanvanklik gebrekkig voorbereid was en nie in staat was om hul kind tydens die verklaring te ondersteun nie. Die deelnemers het verskeie strategieë voorgestel vir die ondersteuning van 'n adolessent wat hom/haar op die punt van hierdie verklaring aan die gesin bevind. Die studie se bevindings het ook verskeie implikasies vir professionele persone wat binne die gebied van die geestesgesondheid met lesbiese, homoseksuele en biseksuele adolessente en jeugdige te doen het.

Sleutel woorde: adolessent, jeug, homoseksueel, seksuele oriëntasie, seksuele identiteit, verklaring, lesbiese, gay, biseksueel, seksuele minderheidsjeug, alternatiewe seksuele oriëntasie

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Opsomming</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Certificate: Language Editor</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Table of contents</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>List of addenda</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>xiv</i>

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY1

1.1	BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.2	MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY	4
1.3	PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.3.1	Aim of Study	7
1.4	RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	8
1.5	ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER	8
1.6	RESEARCH PARADIGM	9
1.7	RESEARCH DESIGN	10
1.8	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	10
1.8.1	Selection of participants and selection criteria.....	11
1.8.2	Methods of collection and analysis	11
1.8.2.1	<i>Data collection</i>	11
1.8.2.2	<i>Data analysis</i>	12
1.8.2.3	<i>Data verification</i>	12
1.9	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	12
1.10	A REVIEW OF THE KEY CONCEPTS	13
1.10.1	<i>Adolescence</i>	13
1.10.2	<i>Emerging adulthood</i>	13
1.10.3	<i>Youth</i>	13
1.10.4	<i>Sexual orientation</i>	14

1.10.5	<i>Sexual identity</i>	14
1.10.6	<i>Coming out/disclosure</i>	15
1.10.7	<i>Group definitions</i>	15
1.10.8	<i>Sexual minority youth/alternative sexual orientation youth</i>	15
1.11	STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT	16
1.12	CONCLUSION	16

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW18

2.1	INTRODUCTION	18
2.2	ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL ORIENTATION IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	18
2.2.1	General models of alternative sexual orientation identity development	20
2.2.2	Lesbian identity development.....	22
2.2.3	Gay male identity development	24
2.2.4	Summary of lesbian and gay identity development models	26
2.2.5	Bisexual identity development	27
2.2.6	The use of alternative sexual orientation identity development models in practice	29
2.3	SPECIFIC CHALLENGES OF SEXUAL MINORITY YOUTH.....	30
2.3.1	Homophobia and heterosexism	30
2.3.2	Suicide ideation	33
2.3.3	Bullying and victimisation.....	35
2.3.4	Disclosure to family	37
2.3.5	The issue of acceptance.....	40
2.3.6	Adjusting to a stigmatised role.....	40
2.3.7	Concealment of sexual orientation.....	41
2.3.8	Peer relations	43
2.3.9	Contemporary findings vs those of earlier studies.....	43
2.4	CONCLUSION	45

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY46

3.1	INTRODUCTION	46
3.2	RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	46

3.3	RESEARCH PARADIGM AND RESEARCH DESIGN.....	47
3.3.1	Research paradigm	48
3.3.2	Research design	49
3.3.2.1	<i>Contexts of the research</i>	49
3.4	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	50
3.4.1	Selection of participants and selection criteria	51
3.4.2	Data collection	52
3.4.3	Data analysis	53
3.5	DATA VERIFICATION	54
3.5.1	Credibility	54
3.5.2	Transferability	55
3.5.3	Dependability	55
3.5.4	Confirmability	55
3.5.5	Data verification strategies	56
3.5.5.1	<i>Triangulation</i>	56
3.5.5.2	<i>Audit trail</i>	56
3.5.5.3	<i>Peer examination</i>	56
3.5.5.4	<i>Reflexivity</i>	57
3.6	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	57
3.7	CONCLUSION.....	59

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....60

4.1	INTRODUCTION	60
4.2	PARTICIPANTS, SETTING AND PROCEDURE	60
4.3	PRESENTATION OF THEMES.....	62
4.3.1	The process of coming out.....	63
4.3.1.1	<i>Feeling different</i>	64
4.3.1.2	<i>Awareness of same-sex attraction</i>	66
4.3.1.3	<i>Finding the label</i>	67
4.3.1.4	<i>Disclosure to self and others</i>	67
4.3.1.5	<i>Sexual orientation is not a choice</i>	68
4.3.1.6	<i>Sexual orientation as a definition of self</i>	69
4.3.2	Strategies used to preserve an outward appearance of heterosexuality	70

4.3.2.1	<i>Denial to family and friends</i>	70
4.3.2.2	<i>Hiding and monitoring behaviour of self</i>	70
4.3.2.3	<i>Trying to prove heterosexuality by dating other-sex individuals</i>	71
4.3.3	Strategies used to cope with same-sex attractions	71
4.3.3.1	<i>Rationalisation</i>	71
4.3.3.2	<i>Praying and wishing for change</i>	72
4.3.3.3	<i>Minimise, mask and banish thoughts of same-sex attractions</i>	72
4.3.4	Reasons for and against coming out	73
4.3.4.1	<i>Reasons for coming out</i>	73
4.3.4.2	<i>Reasons against coming out</i>	74
4.3.5	Making plans for survival	76
4.3.6	Parental reactions	78
4.3.7	The issue of belonging	81
4.3.8	Additional stressors.....	82
4.3.8.1	<i>Suicide ideation and attempt</i>	83
4.3.8.2	<i>Bullying and victimisation</i>	83
4.3.8.3	<i>Stunted social development</i>	84
4.3.9	Strategies to support someone in the position of coming out	85
4.3.10	Hoped for reaction from parents	87
4.3.11	Homophobia within the lesbian and gay community	89
4.3.12	Sexual exploitation	90
4.4	CONCLUSION.....	90

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH92

5.1	INTRODUCTION	92
5.2	DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	92
5.3	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	98
5.4	STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY	98
5.5	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	99
5.6	REFLECTION	100
5.7	CONCLUSION.....	100

REFERENCES102

LIST OF ADDENDA

Addendum A:	Letter granting ethical clearance for study from the Stellenbosch University	113
Addendum B:	General interview guide for semi-structured interview with participants	114
Addendum C:	Guide for reflective notes.....	116
Addendum D:	Participant information sheet as provided to research participants	117
Addendum E:	Informed consent form as provided to research participants	119
Addendum F:	Example of transcript	122
Addendum G:	Section of coded transcript	133
Addendum H:	Example of a data display table	134
Addendum I:	Permission to conduct study from the Stellenbosch University	135

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	Theories of general sexual identity development	22
Table 2.2:	Stages of family reactions to disclosure.....	39
Table 4.1:	Biographical details of research participants	61
Table 4.2:	Presentation of themes and sub-themes	62
Table 4.3:	Participants' experiences prior to self-disclosure.....	66
Table 4.4:	Participants' reasons for coming out	74
Table 4.5:	Participants' reasons against coming out	75
Table 4.6:	Parents' reactions to disclosure by sex of participant and parent	81
Table 4.7:	Strategies to support someone coming out	87
Table 4.8:	Hoped for reactions from parents	89

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Few issues have as profound an impact on the course of family life as that of an adolescent's disclosure of his/her alternative sexual orientation. Research suggests that an ever increasing number of adolescents are disclosing their sexual orientation to parents at earlier ages than their predecessors. Literature warns that this population is at an increased risk for depression, suicide, victimisation and substance abuse due to negative societal attitudes and bias (D'Augelli, 2006; Meyer, 2003). Although international research reveals that sexual minority youth are an at risk group, there exists little research about the meanings of disclosure for this distinct population within South African research. The experiences of being an adolescent who is lesbian or gay have been neglected in research and service provision in South Africa (Butler & Astbury, 2006; Butler & Astbury, 2005). This has, in part, provided the impetus for this research. The aim of this study is to investigate the experience of disclosure during the adolescent phase. Before further discussion, a brief outline of the South African context is necessary to emphasise the importance of this study and to highlight the complexities surrounding the lives of sexual minorities living within South Africa.

South Africa has a diverse history when it comes to the legal and social status of sexual minority individuals due to the influence of colonization, apartheid and the human rights movement. Before April 1994, when the interim constitution was adopted, homosexuality was illegal in apartheid South Africa. Several laws denied gay men and lesbian women legal recourse for victimisation, resulting in the invisibility of crime against people with a same-sex orientation (Cock, 2003). Through the adoption of the new constitution in May 1996, South Africa became the first jurisdiction in the world in which discrimination based on sexual orientation was prohibited (Cock, 2003). The National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE) was the primary agent in securing an equality clause which included sexual orientation in the final constitution. The coalition was formed in December 1994, at a conference of 40 lesbian and gay activists from 32 South African organisations. The mandate determined at the conference was towards ensuring that the final constitution retained sexual orientation as grounds for non-discrimination (Cock, 2003). This

groundbreaking constitutional freedom was, however, not obtained via popular consent. Although the largest mobilisation of sexual minority individuals and their allies in the history of South Africa occurred, only a small minority participated in related lobbying and advocacy processes (Cock, 2003). In December 2006, South Africa made history by becoming the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage. It was also the only country to provide homosexual individuals with exactly the same rights, such as adoption and military service (Cock, 2003). Although the constitutional and legal system in South Africa theoretically ensures equality, social acceptance is generally lacking, especially outside of urban areas. Conservative social attitudes among both black and white populations are traditionally unfavourable towards homosexuality and such attitudes have persisted to some degree within society (Hames, 2003). The vast majority of South Africans have grown up in a heterosexist society with little recognition of sexual minorities. Lesbian and gay studies are increasingly found on the back burner, a trend which Hames (2003) views as indicative of South African society's bias against homosexuality in that lesbian and gay issues are viewed as less important than the issues affecting heterosexual men and women. Hames (2003) adds that the absence of radical public discussion around sexual orientation in South Africa can be explained by deeply entrenched homophobia at different levels of society. "The state, organized religion, worker's unions and civil society have all been sites of extreme oppression: lesbians and gays have been vilified in extremely abusive ways, while the institutions and individuals who perpetrate heterosexist abuse are rarely held responsible for violating the rights and dignity of others" (Hames, 2003, p. 1).

On the African continent homosexuality is mostly considered taboo and, more importantly, a "white man's disease", "un-African" or a "bourgeois Western phenomenon" (Amnesty International, 2001, p. 4). The sexual orientation and gender clauses of the South African constitution afford sexual minority persons equal protection before the law and, through proposed anti-hate crime legislation mentioned earlier, such persons may now, in fact, be considered potential victims of prejudice (Harris, 2004). However, decriminalisation and constitutional guarantees of equality may not be enough. South African lesbian and gay activists and the organisations they represent consistently claim that the criminal justice system and civil society do not take anti-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation seriously. Several of these organisations, such as the Equality Project and Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), a community organisation from Johannesburg, have urged the recognition of hate crime as a separate category in the law and the criminalisation of hate speech and other hate motivated oppression (Hames, 2003).

In the "new" South Africa, a disproportionate amount of sexual minority persons continue to face oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and victimisation because of their sexual orientation and/or gender presentation. The term corrective rape was first used in the early 2000s by human rights non-government organisations to describe rapes committed against South African lesbians. It is a criminal practice, whereby lesbian women are raped by persons of the opposite sex, sometimes under supervision by members of their families or local communities, purportedly as a means of "curing" them of their alternative sexual orientation (Hames, 2003, p.1). Unpublished research by FEW indicates that lesbians, particularly in black townships, are increasingly targeted for rape (Hames, 2003). What future is there for lesbian and gay youth if they remain a marginalised and victimised group?

Despite South Africa's progressive constitution, deep prejudices against sexual minority persons persist in certain political parties, in organised religion, in educational institutions and within society. The impact of the social context in which lesbian and gay South Africans are living, is moderated through the distinctions across race, gender and socioeconomic status. Gay men and lesbian women cannot be considered a homogeneous group. Although some gains have been made by women, gender divisions are still clear due to the patriarchal nature of South African society. Black lesbian women are therefore exposed to marginalisation due to membership of multiple minority groups (Cock, 2003). As a result, the South African gay and lesbian population is unique regarding the social climate, the impact of apartheid and the influences of race, gender and socioeconomic status. The question of how lesbian and gay adolescents in South Africa cope with these contextual factors in negotiating their coming out process needs to be considered.

During the 1970s a major paradigm shift in how professional psychology understood and treated lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals took place. A significant change occurred in 1973 as a result of political activism and the accumulating empirical evidence that failed to link homosexuality with mental illness or emotional instability and resulted in the American Psychiatric Association removing homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. The American Psychological Association supported this change and in 1975 adopted a resolution that urged all psychologists to lead the way forward in removing the stigma of mental illness that had so long been associated with homosexual orientations. Thus emerged an affirmative perspective within psychology to guide research and practice. This model focused on helping sexual minority individuals cope adaptively with the impact of stigma, minority status and difference from the heterosexual mainstream (Matthews, 2007). Despite these advances, mental health professionals vary widely in adherence to a standard

of unbiased practice. The question thus arises: What recommendations can be made to mental health professionals to support lesbian and gay adolescents and their families, specifically in negotiating the process of disclosure?

Research warns that sexual minority youth are at increased risk for mental distress due to exposure to stressors related to negative social attitudes. While mental health professionals are of the opinion that disclosure of sexual orientation is beneficial to psychological wellness, research indicates that disclosure is no easy matter for adolescents who have realistic fears of discrimination and rejection, should they disclose their sexuality (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Taking cognizance of the history of imbalances, prejudices and victimisation and a lack of social empathy concerning homosexual issues, it is necessary to pay special attention to issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. The increasing growth of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community in recent history, both in South Africa and internationally, has transformed both culture and consciousness, creating new possibilities for adolescents to come out (Butler & Astbury, 2005). How has this transformation influenced South African adolescents' disclosure?

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Contact with the external world and observation of reality is the most evident source for research topics, and it is through engagement that personal interest develops (Fouché & De Vos, 2005). As motivation for the choice of research topic, the researcher cites personal curiosity, observation of a concrete problem in reality, and the pressing need for useful information to guide practice. While working as an educator, the researcher encountered several sexual minority youth who were struggling with disclosure. The researcher realised that such adolescents are in dire need of support and guidance. Further still there is a need for clear information in understanding and in guiding those who support these adolescents, parents, teachers and their peers. Since the researcher personally experienced the lack of guidelines for adolescents, practitioners and parents, this study is of personal relevance to the researcher. Fouché and De Vos (2005) further note that curiosity is an equally valuable impetus when searching for a research topic. Thus, according to these authors, a researcher's personal interests come into play at the very start of a research project. A topic which satisfies the researcher's own curiosity is more likely to be useful, because it addresses questions that arise in practice and also in a context of personal interest.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Our culture has privileged the heterosexual orientation of exclusively other-sex attraction and intimacy; while other orientations which differ from this norm face prejudice and discrimination (Greene, 2007). Heterosexism presents heterosexuality as normative, and either fails to acknowledge or stigmatises alternative sexual orientations, and individuals are presumed to be heterosexual until and unless they state otherwise (Matthews, 2007). Heterosexism contributes towards homophobia, defined as prejudice against same-sex behaviour and identity, and biphobia, which is prejudice against those who do not behave or identify as straight, lesbian or gay (Dworkin, 2000). Matthews (2007) explains that socially constructed negative attitudes and myths attached to the stigmatisation of alternative sexual orientations can be adopted by sexual minorities as well as heterosexual individuals. For lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, the effects of this internalisation are particularly damaging, and can cause distress, including anxiety, depression, social isolation, relationship difficulties, substance abuse or even suicide (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Meyer (2003) argues that, perhaps because of encounters with these types of oppression, people with alternative sexual orientations seem to experience mood, anxiety and substance-related disorders at a higher rate than the general population. Individuals with alternative sexual orientations seek treatment for similar concerns as the general population, but also for the unique challenges and stresses facing a minority status (Eubanks-Carter, Burckell & Goldfried, 2005). One such challenge these individuals face is that of coming out, during which individuals with alternative sexual orientations must disclose their orientations in a way that straight individuals need not (Hill, 2009). Despite a growing body of scientific literature on homosexuality, in general little is known about the coming out process and its impact on an individual (Riley, 2010; Butler & Astbury, 2005).

Models of sexual orientation identity development agree that disclosure to family and friends is a significant event; however, the models disagree on the timing and role of disclosure in the process. Early coming-out models associated disclosure with developmental maturity. However, more recent affirmative approaches to practice caution clinicians not to encourage disclosure if it would endanger the individual (Hill, 2009). Given the continued reality of rejection, and verbal and physical abuse of individuals with alternative sexual orientations, some may find it necessary to make decisions against disclosing. Matthews (2007) cautions that each setting and relationship contains a chance of rejection and/or victimisation and each requires an independent decision about disclosure. Furthermore, there is always the possibility that people to whom individuals disclose their alternative sexual orientation will "out" them to others (D'Augelli, 2006). However, unless

individuals disclose, they face potential isolation and will have to guard against inadvertently revealing aspects of their sexual orientation (Matthews, 2007).

Research has produced contradictory evidence on the psychological impact of disclosure. It has been associated with more self-acceptance and greater social support, but also with increased distress, which possibly is due to increased exposure to discrimination (Katz, Joiner & Kwon, 2002). Floyd and Stein (2002) argue that the personal and social stressors associated with coming out, including victimisation and rejection, can be overwhelming for lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents, and have been linked to problems such as high rates of school failure and suicide for this group. A significant aspect of disclosure is that it affects male and female adolescents differently, according to Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz and Smith (2001). Since both the process of coming out and the implications for personal adjustment are likely to vary due to individual circumstances, Floyd and Stein (2002) argue that there is a need for research to examine the diversity of coming-out experiences for lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents. It is important to understand how gay and lesbian adolescents overcome the impulse to hide and instead begin to disclose their sexual orientation to significant people in their lives. A key contributing factor of this study is that it brings the adolescent's voice to research, and is aimed at understanding their experiences during the coming-out process.

The act of disclosure to friends and family does not necessarily alleviate distress; rather it is the quality and subsequent response of the other relevant parties that play a more significant role (Davis, Saltzburg & Locke, 2009). Research reports that lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are disclosing their sexual orientation to parents at a much earlier age than ever before (D'Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks & Sinclair, 2005a; Saltzburg, 2005). As a result of this, family dynamics are changed and this does not necessarily reflect a positive experience for the adolescent. Therefore understanding how and to whom adolescents choose to disclose their sexual identity is critical to providing necessary emotional supports.

Research reports stress the need for information about alternative sexual orientations in order to increase understanding as well as broaden the dominant discourses on sexuality and sexual orientation (Davis, et al., 2009; Hill, 2009). Davis, et al. (2009) state that minimal information exists about the resources and services needed and available to support sexual minority youth as they move through critical stages of development. Some individuals seek psychotherapy as a source of assistance and support during the coming-out process (Dworkin, 2000). Hill (2009) argues that,

due to the likelihood that these individuals will encounter heterosexism and related biases in their daily lives, psychotherapy should be a refuge and support from sources of oppression. Thus mental health professionals should become knowledgeable with regard to practices that can aid clients throughout the coming-out process in a way that affirms the full range of sexual orientations.

Little information is available on adolescents who disclose. According to Davis et al. (2009) most research to date about gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents is based on the perspectives of adults dispensing services and research to this population. Thus the literature offers a limited understanding of adolescents' experiences. This situation needs to be redressed; as it is now an accepted principle that consideration must be given to young peoples' own perspective when developing services for them. This study seeks to help fill the gaps through giving voice to the youth by exploring their experiences of coming-out during the adolescent phase. Furthermore, this study seeks to provide insight and knowledge to clinicians to aid clients throughout the coming-out process.

1.3.1 Aim of Study

The primary aim of the study was to explore and describe the experiences related to coming out to family during adolescence. The aim is to understand the lived experience of these young people, relating directly to their disclosure and the ensuing consequences. Furthermore, it was hoped that the study could generate knowledge to aid mental health professionals in ways to support this process.

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were established:

- To review related and pertinent literature regarding disclosure and alternative sexual identity development in order to have a better understanding of the concepts on which the interview schedule should be based;
- To complete semi-structured interviews with lesbian and gay youth who have disclosed their alternative sexual orientations to at least one member of their family during adolescence;
- To analyse the data and to compare the findings with existing literature (literature control) in order to suggest recommendations for support for similar young men and women;
- To make recommendations to mental health professionals for better support of clients in disclosing to family.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the reported experiences of youth who disclosed to their family during adolescence?
- Based on the above, what can be suggested as ways to support this process?

Several sub-questions were also included in the study:

- When did participants first realise they were not heterosexual?
- When did participants first disclose and to whom did they disclose?
- What were participants' reasons for and against disclosure?
- What were parents' and siblings' reactions to disclosure?
- Have relationships with parents and sibling(s) changed since disclosure?
- What would participants like parents or sibling(s) to know or do differently?
- What would participants suggest as ways to support other homosexual youth in the position of coming out?
- What recommendations can be made to mental health professionals to support lesbian, gay or bisexual youths and their families during the process of disclosure?
- How do participants view their sexual orientation?

1.5 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The researcher is a central figure in the research process as each researcher brings his/her own personal history and worldview to the process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research process was influenced by the researcher's personal life experience which included her biography, social class, gender, race and ethnicity. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest an interactive link between the researcher and the research participant, in that there is a reciprocal influence of the one on the other. Therefore the research process in this study is interactive.

As researcher I had the responsibility to record and interpret the information gained from the individual interviews and reflective notes in an accurate manner. Merriam (2009) states that, within qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary tool for data collection and analysis. The importance of the researcher's role in data collection and analysis cannot be overemphasised. For this reason it was valuable that the researcher conducted all interviews, transcriptions and analysis. The researcher was present at every stage of the research process and in this way could ensure that meaning was maintained. Furthermore, I attempted to remain as neutral as possible during this study, especially since multiple participants and their subjective realities were involved. Patton (2002, p. 49) refers to "empathic neutrality" as the "middle ground" to prevent the researcher from becoming too involved. He states that judgement can be clouded or the researcher can remain too distant if not empathically neutral, and consequently understanding can be reduced. The researcher sought to remain empathically neutral and the researcher fulfilled the role and requirements of researcher, and not that of a practitioner. The researcher was keenly aware of her role throughout the research process.

1.6 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm provides a conceptual framework for seeing and making sense of the social world. According to Mouton (2008), the paradigm is central to the research process and design. The paradigm directs the study and guides the researcher in decision making within the research process. The research paradigm will reflect in the way the research is designed, how data is both collected and analysed and how the research results are presented. For researchers it is important to recognise their paradigm, as it allows them to identify their role in the research process; determine the course of any research project; and distinguish other perspectives (Mouton, 2008).

The research paradigm therefore is a complex, interrelated system of practice and thinking that defines the nature of the research enquiry and cannot be seen in isolation from its ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Ontology refers to how one positions oneself in terms of reality and in terms of understanding reality. Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher and what can be known. Methodology refers to how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she wants to know (Merriam, 2009).

This study makes use of an interpretive/constructivist research paradigm. This theory holds that people are actively involved in making meaning and that such knowledge is always constructed

within a particular social and cultural context. Thus, knowledge is dependent on the context in which it is constructed and the primary focus of the research must be the interpretations of reality that are held by individuals in that context (Williamson, 2006). Merriam (2009) states that, in interpretive research, the researcher studies social phenomena and learns how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them. Constructivist research is about exploring the subjective understandings of reality expressed by individuals (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). The interpretive/constructivist approach relates directly to the process of inquiry which the researcher employed during the study. Due to the nature and history of the field of enquiry it was impossible to ignore the historical narrative of alternative sexual orientations or the socially held truths regarding such orientations. The theory of constructivism offers valuable insight in understanding the development of the narrative of alternative sexual orientations. Consequently, the choice of paradigms guided my decisions regarding the choice of research design and methodology. The research paradigm will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design can be seen as the structure or plan that, along with the research paradigm, guides the research process (Mouton, 2008). The research design describes the connection between the research paradigm, research methodology and methods of data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study uses a basic qualitative design. A qualitative design is suited to investigating experiences and opinions and was therefore selected for this study because it allows participants the freedom to express the uniqueness of their own experience (Britten, 2005). For this research, qualitative methodology was thus most appropriate.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research, qualitative research methodologies were applied. Methodology refers to the different procedures used by the researcher to gather data. Qualitative methodologies aim to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life. Generally, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and seeks to produce descriptive information, thereby arriving at a genuine understanding of the participants' reality (Merriam, 2009). This section serves as a brief overview of the research methodology used in the study. The selection criteria and purposeful sampling techniques, as well as the data collection methods and content analysis will now be discussed briefly.

1.8.1 Selection of participants and selection criteria

The research participants were purposefully sampled youth from a support society for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth at a university in the Western Cape. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that certain criteria were fulfilled. The following list serves as the criteria used to facilitate the sample selection: females or males who were between the ages of 20 and 26 years, who disclosed their alternative sexual orientation to one member of their family between the ages of 13 and 18 and who live within the Western Cape area. The motivation for the choice of youth as opposed to adolescents is as follows: Youth were sought as participants, opposed to adolescents, because it was felt that they, as older and more mature individuals, were likely to be able to clearly express and reflect upon their experiences. It was also thought that, as these youth were reflecting upon their experiences, they would be more comfortable expressing their thoughts than individuals currently in the midst of this process. The Lesbigan Society assisted the researcher by informing its members of the intended research prior to the commencement of the research. This assisted the researcher because members of the society were already aware that volunteers were needed before they were asked to take part.

1.8.2 Methods of Collection and Analysis

Several methods of data collection are associated with qualitative research, including observation, interviewing and the review of artefacts or documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These methods are aimed at eliciting information that is rich in detail. The way in which the data is then analysed and interpreted fits within the research paradigm and research purpose, thus ensuring that the data analysis can answer the research question.

1.8.2.1 Data Collection

The method that was identified as being most relevant and likely to lend itself to accessing information-rich data was semi-structured individual interviews. This research study took the form of ten semi-structured individual interviews supplemented by reflective notes. Interviewing is the predominate mode of data or information collection in qualitative research (Greeff, 2005). Interviews give researchers the means to directly access the experiences of their participants and, by providing encouragement and interest, elicit responses that are far richer than those of a less personal approach (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The authors state that semi-structured interviews have the advantage of being as task oriented as structured interviews and as adaptable as unstructured interviews. Reflective notes were used to supplement the individual interviews as these

are a useful tool in reflecting on a specific event, as well as a means to stimulate thought about it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Participants were asked to answer questions regarding their thoughts and attitudes concerning the focus of the study, as well as their experience of participating in the research. The semi-structured individual interviews were used as the data collection method and then analysed. The aim of data analysis is to find an answer to the research questions while bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Durrheim, 2006). The process of data analysis will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.

1.8.2.2 Data Analysis

The form of data analysis used in this research study was qualitative content analysis. Content analysis was used as it creates codes that are specific to the responses of the participants and therefore more closely bound to the particular context of the participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The authors warn that such data analysis can possibly lead to thin descriptions of data as opposed to rich descriptions. However, if qualitative content analysis is viewed as a process during which the data is interrogated and engaged with several times, rich descriptions can be made. The first stage of the analysis process was the transcription of the interview recordings. These transcripts then underwent a process of open coding, the aim of which is to identify patterns or themes within the data. This was followed by categorisation in which relationships and themes were identified. These themes and categories were revised into a final list of themes and categories as the data analysis process progressed. These were then used as the basis of the argument for the findings of this study. The process of data analysis will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, section 3.4.3.

1.8.2.3 Data Verification

In qualitative research, the various approaches used to improve the quality of a study are placed under the heading of trustworthiness (Given, 2008). Trustworthiness, in turn, is made up of four other issues: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These aspects will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, section 3.5.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics can be defined as a set of widely accepted moral principles, which offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most appropriate behaviour towards research participants (Strydom, 2005). All research must operate within clearly defined ethical guidelines in order to

ensure the protection of both the participants and the researchers (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). A number of important principles have to be observed for research to be ethical. Firstly, the participants' right to make informed decisions for themselves must be respected (Allan, 2008). This includes information about the nature of the study itself, the participants' rights and other relevant issues. Secondly, any potential risks for the research participants due to the research must be recognised and reduced. This includes the protection of the participants' physical and emotional well-being, their right to privacy and confidentiality (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008). To ensure that ethical guidelines were adhered to, clearance for the research was sought from the Ethical Committee of the Division of Research Development of Stellenbosch University. Ethical clearance was obtained and this study was given the clearance number 481/2010. A copy of the clearance form is included as Addendum A. The ethical principles are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, section 3.6.

1.10 A REVIEW OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

Before the structure of this research report is outlined, a review of the key concepts is necessary.

1.10.1 Adolescence

Adolescence is viewed as the developmental phase between childhood and adulthood that is characterised by major physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes and takes place between the ages of 13 and 18 years (Carr, 2006). Participants came out to their parents between the ages of 13 and 18 years, thus their disclosure took place during the adolescent developmental phase.

1.10.2 Emerging adulthood

Emerging adulthood describes the unique period of development between the ages of 18 and the late 20s when an individual is no longer an adolescent but cannot be accurately classified as an adult (Arnett, 2000). Individuals in this age group undergo a great deal of change as they explore relational love, employment and different world views in the formation of their identities (Arnett, 2000). The participants are currently negotiating this phase of development although they first disclosed their sexual orientation during adolescence.

1.10.3 Youth

The term "youth" refers to those who are between the ages of 15 and 26 years. Very few research studies make a distinction between the age ranges of adolescence and young adult, instead the majority of studies are conducted with participants ranging in ages from 15 to 26 years of age. Most studies make use of the term youth to refer to the research participants who are between the ages of 15 and 26 years (D'Augelli, 2006; Butler & Astbury, 2005). For the purpose of this research study, the term youth refers to a young person who is between the ages of 15 and 26 years of age. Furthermore, when the term youth is italicised, i.e. *youth*, this refers to the actual participants of this research study who disclosed during adolescence and are between the ages of 20 and 26 years.

1.10.4 Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is the way that one understands oneself as a sexually and/or romantically relational being. It is generally understood as an individual's essential predisposition to experience sexual attractions for persons of the same sex, the other sex or both sexes (Diamond, 2000). Each individual's sexual orientation is a unique combination of sexual and romantic attraction, behaviour and fantasy. Sexual orientation can be directed toward people of the same sex, opposite sex, or both, or toward characteristics other than biological sex, such as gender expression or participation in a fetish (Hill, 2009). It is assumed to be present from birth, either because of genetics or prenatal hormones (Mustanski, Chivers & Bailey, 2002) and is discernible through verbal and nonverbal indicators of sexual and romantic attractions, erotic fantasies, sexual behaviours, romantic relationships and sexual identity labels. The term sexual orientation as used in this study refers to the constellation of affective, cognitive and behavioural characteristics that constitute an individual's sense of self as a sexual and intimate being. These include such factors as self-labelling, beliefs and schemas, feelings and preferences, behavioural expression and societal and sexual minority community expectations and roles (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

1.10.5 Sexual identity

Sexual identity refers to the self-concept that an individual organises around their sexual orientation or predisposition, typically labelled gay, lesbian or bisexual within a Western society. Whereas sexual orientation is presumed to develop early and be stable (Herdt & McClintock, 2000), sexual identity is presumed to develop in adolescence or adulthood and to vary as a result of social, historical and cultural factors. It is noteworthy that these labels need never be disclosed to others (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996).

1.10.6 Coming out/disclosure

Coming out, also termed disclosure, is regarded as two distinct, though related, processes: coming out to self and coming out to others. The former is a process during which a number of milestone events occur whereby an individual moves from non-recognition of his/her same-sex attraction, to self-recognition that he/she is indeed lesbian, gay or bisexual (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996). The latter refers to the self-disclosure of an alternative sexual orientation to others, including peers, family and society at large. In this study coming out/disclosure is regarded as coming out to self and coming out to others.

1.10.7 Group definitions

Lesbians: Women whose primary emotional, erotic and relational preferences are same-sex and for whom some aspects of their self-labelling acknowledge these same-sex attractions. Designation as lesbian refers to the sex of one's actual or imagined intimate partner choices and not to gender expression, which may take on a variety of forms (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

Gay men: Men whose primary emotional, erotic and relational preferences are same-sex and for whom some aspect of their self-labelling acknowledges these same-sex attractions. Designation as gay refers to the sex of one's actual or imagined intimate partner choices and not to gender expression, which may take on a variety of forms (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

Bisexual women and men: Individuals whose emotional, erotic and relational preferences are toward both same-sex and other-sex individuals, either serially or simultaneously, and for whom some aspect of their self-labelling acknowledges the same-sex attractions. Designation as bisexual refers to the sex(es) of one's actual or imagined intimate partner choices and not to gender expression, which may take on a variety of forms (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

1.10.8 Sexual minority youth/alternative sexual orientation youth

There is no consistent use of the term "sexual minority youth" or "alternative sexual orientation youth" in the literature. One single term has not yet been chosen and used consistently, but for the purposes of this study sexual minority youth and alternative sexual orientation youth is defined as youth who identify their sexual orientation and/or gender expression as gay, lesbian or bisexual and are between the ages of 15 and 26. Many other terms exist for alternative sexual orientation,

however, for the purposes of this study, transgender, pansexual, fluid, queer and questioning orientations have not been included.

1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This research report has been structured in the following way:

Chapter 1: Context and Rationale of the Study

This chapter serves to introduce the study and contextualise the research. It also includes an outline of the research process which was implemented in order to conduct the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the existing literature. A theoretical and empirical overview of the topic is presented and this provides background information as well as a basis for the semi-structured interview schedule.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the research process, including research paradigm, design and methodology, as well as the ethical considerations taken into account during the research.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion

Chapter four provides the presentation of the research findings which are then discussed and interpreted.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The final chapter contains the conclusions based on the findings of the research. It contains limitations to the study and recommendations for future research on this topic.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the research problem and thereby orientated the reader to the research conducted. The chapter also served to contextualise the research and motivate its importance.

Lastly, it provided an overview of the research process that was followed, as well as placing it in a theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a review of the relevant, most recent literature around the topic of adolescent disclosure. The literature review is a central aspect to any study as it serves to contextualise the research and allows the researcher the opportunity to engage with existing literature on his/her topic of choice. The study of literature provides a basis from which to discuss the research findings and position them within the already existing body of knowledge (Henning, 2004). This literature review aims to build upon the argument set out in Chapter 1. Furthermore, it will provide a foundation of knowledge from which meaning can be made during the interpretation of the collected data. This study aimed to gain insight into the experience of adolescent disclosure. It is hoped that, in answering the research questions, the study may serve to normalise the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents as well as provide recommendations to mental health professionals to support adolescents in coming out. This chapter follows an overview of lesbian, gay and bisexual identity development and the unique challenges that sexual minority adolescents face.

Identity development among adolescents and young adults is one of the most widely addressed issues in lesbian, gay and bisexual literature to date (D'Augelli, 2006; Savin-Williams, 2005; Saltzburg, 2005). This literature review focuses primarily on the processes by which an individual acquires a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity and the additional lifelong efforts required to establish and maintain an identity that is positive (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). The next section will focus on the development of an alternative sexual orientation identity.

2.2 ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL ORIENTATION IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1970s there have been many empirical studies and theoretical writings that focused on the process by which an individual developed a lesbian or gay identity, and an examination of the developmental tasks necessary to form and maintain a positive lesbian or gay identity (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Initial investigators of gay identity development consisted of descriptive studies

that sought to examine the identity developmental process of gay men. Exploration of the developmental process and unique issues for lesbians and bisexuals did not occur until later. The typical methods used by early researchers consisted of asking participants to recall the conditions or events they considered important in their development of a gay identity. Many early researchers tended to ignore the process of disclosure and instead identified disclosure with a single event i.e. publicly identify oneself as gay (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). The subsequent models of the 1980s attempted to extend early theory by organising the participants' accounts of coming out into developmental stages, otherwise known as sexual identity models (Troiden, 1989; Cass, 1979). Research in the 1990s increasingly investigated the process of positive lesbian, gay and bisexual identity development and a wide range of models of lesbian, gay and bisexual identity development has been proposed (Cass, 1996; Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). According to Fox (1995)

the emergence of lesbian and gay identity theory represented an important shift in emphasis in developmental theory, away from the concern of aetiology and psychopathology characteristic of the illness model toward articulation of the factors involved in the formation of positive gay and lesbian identities (p. 53).

These models shifted the focus from trying to understand why individuals are lesbian and gay toward comprehending how one develops a positive lesbian, gay or bisexual identity in a homophobic culture (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). The authors mention that although understanding the fluidity of sexual behaviour, attraction and identity is vital to working with all clients, it is also important to fully explore the unique developmental issues of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals as separate groups. Furthermore, understanding the unique issues of these groups is important but challenging, as previous writings and research have not always been consistent about whether these models address generic lesbian, gay or bisexual experience or one that is unique to one or more of those groups. Diamond (2006; 2003) highlights that unique issues do exist for each group that warrant separate attention; however, there are also core issues that have to do with adopting and managing a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity in a homophobic and heterosexist culture (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000).

The contemporary view of lesbian, gay and bisexual identity development is that identity formation represents a continuous and emergent life process (Savin-Williams, 2005). Although the developmental stages of typical lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals are largely similar across models, it is important to note that many developmental pathways lead to the same sexual

orientation (Savin-Williams, 2005). Erikson's (1968) formulation of ego identity development provided a basis for this belief by emphasising that identity development is an ongoing, interactive process that is highly influenced by the norms and values of one's individual family, culture and society.

The process through which individuals first recognise their alternative sexual orientation is often referred to as coming out. The coming out process consists of a series of complex cognitive, affective and behavioural changes (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). According to these authors an awareness of difference and same-sex sexual feelings; initial same-sex sexual encounters; participation in lesbian, gay and bisexual culture; labelling self as lesbian, gay or bisexual and disclosing one's alternative sexual orientation are all part of coming out. Forming a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity is a challenging process because it means "adopting a non-traditional identity, restructuring one's self concept and altering one's relations with others and with society" (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000, p. 37). Coming out typically occurs on two levels, coming out to self and coming out to others. The process can occur quickly or over an extended period of time; it is the beginning of establishing a life-long process of identity development. The literature below focuses on various developmental stage models because of their importance in assisting members of the counselling profession in supporting their lesbian, gay or bisexual clients to understand and accept who they are (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

2.2.1 General models of alternative sexual orientation identity development

Some of the earliest models of identity development made assumptions about gay men and lesbians having identical or nearly identical developmental trajectories. One of the earliest and most widely recognised models is Cass's (1979) six-stage model which proposes a common path of development for both gay men and lesbian women. According to this model, sexual identity is a universal developmental process that proceeds in a predetermined temporal sequence of six stages. Cass's (1996) model consists of the following stages:

1. Identity confusion (Who am I?): This stage begins when an individual recognises that his or her sexual feelings, actions or thoughts could be labelled as homosexual and ends either in identity foreclosure or identity exploration. Identity foreclosure is to be avoided, while testing out one's identity and advancing toward identity synthesis is to be encouraged.

2. Identity comparison (I am different): At this stage an individual compares his or her sexual feelings with those of others and tentatively accepts them. This stage ends with an acknowledgment of identity. Through self-examination and feedback from others, the individual evaluates this possibility as desirable (true self), too costly (alienation from family and friends) or temporary aberration (bisexual).
3. Identity tolerance (I am probably gay): This stage begins with a tentative belief of an alternative orientation and ends with certainty thereof, albeit without full acceptance. The individual gains greater clarity about how this identity affects other domains of self. Initial contacts with other homosexuals are made and well-trusted heterosexuals are informed. These experiences lead the individual to either minimise contact with other homosexuals or to deepen acceptance and commitment to a homosexual orientation.
4. Identity acceptance (I am gay): During this stage individuals have a clearer and more positive image of themselves as homosexuals. The individual is now comfortable among other homosexuals and begins to make selective disclosures to others. Discrepancies between positive reactions when among homosexuals and negative reactions when among heterosexuals lead to the next stage.
5. Identity pride (Gay is good, heterosexual is bad): Incongruity between the homosexual and heterosexual worlds propels this stage. Loyalty to homosexuals inspires a preference for associations with like-minded people.
6. Identity synthesis (My gayness is one part of me): At this stage the individual achieves an integrated sense of self as homosexual, a balanced opinion of heterosexuals and disclosure to all audiences is possible.

Troiden (1979) originally surveyed gay males and discussed gay identity formation. Later Troiden (1989) reported a broader model of committed gay and lesbian identity development, drawing on Cass's (1979) model. Troiden (1989) states that identity development is a process that begins with first awareness of same-sex attractions and continues until the individual develops an integrated sense of self as a person with a gay, lesbian or bisexual orientation. Troiden's (1989) four-stage model for the attainment of a healthy gay/lesbian identity consists of the following stages:

1. Sensitisation: This stage usually occurs during childhood or early adolescence when the individual first becomes aware of same-sex attractions. It is characterised by generalised

feelings of marginality and perceptions of being different from same-sex peers. This is the period when the individual begins to learn the social identity of a homosexual.

2. **Identity confusion:** This stage consists of inner turmoil and confusion about sexual orientation that usually begins during early to mid-adolescence. At this time, the adolescent also begins to have sexual experiences with same-sex partners. The initial same-sex sexual contact is a critical event that is usually experienced as a revelation, or a confirmation of sexual identity. Homosexuality is personalised during this stage. There are many sources of identity confusion ranging from social condemnation to misinformation regarding homosexuality. During this period same-sex attractions become apparent.
3. **Identity assumption:** At this stage the homosexual identity is established and shared with others. Initial disclosure marks the beginning of sharing one's true self with others, which usually occurs with a friend. The gay/lesbian adolescent achieves self-definition as a homosexual and begins associating with other homosexuals and experiments sexually.
4. **Commitment:** In the homosexual context, commitment means adopting a way of life that is indicated by same-sex love relationships and stigma management. The two critical events that propel the individual into this stage are involvement in a first same-sex romantic relationship and disclosure to a wider range of heterosexual individuals.

A comparison of the models of Cass and Troiden is provided in Table 2.1

Table 2.1: Theories of general sexual identity development

Cass (1996)		Troiden (1989)	
Stage 1	Identity confusion	Stage 1	Sensitisation
Stage 2	Identity comparison	Stage 2	Identity confusion
Stage 3	Identity tolerance	Stage 3	Identity assumption
Stage 4	Identity acceptance		
Stage 5	Identity pride		
Stage 6	Identity synthesis	Stage 4	Commitment

2.2.2 Lesbian identity development

Romantic and intimate relationships between women have been documented throughout history and across cultures (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). These relationships were not necessarily sexual in nature and it is not known how these women perceived themselves or their relationships. Brown (1995) states that affection and intimacy between women was not seen by society as a sexual relationship. In fact, such relationships were able to exist without a lesbian identity being assumed. Lesbian identity is a relatively new construct which came into existence when lesbians were identified as a unique group, different from gay men. Brown (1995) emphasises that, because sexuality is viewed differently across cultures, lesbian identity, as a psychological construct, is bound in culture. Feminism was a major influence and many models are focused on the effects of societal oppression on the identity development process for lesbian women (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000).

The following model serves as an example of lesbian identity development. Sophie (1986) developed and sought empirical support for a four-stage general model of lesbian sexual identity development. This theory was based on a review of six prior theories of identity development. Fourteen women were interviewed and general consensus was found with respect to the stages, particularly the earlier stages. Interestingly, at later stages, the fluidity of lesbian sexual identity is noted, for three of the participants later changed their preference to heterosexuality. Sophie (1986) noted that "we are mistaken if we interpret the notion of stability to mean that individuals who have become lesbian cannot subsequently change" (p. 49). Other studies have found that some individuals (particularly women) revisit the process of sexual questioning many years after first adopting their alternative sexual identity, as the identity initially adopted no longer is in accordance with their current attractions or relationships (Diamond, 2006; 2003). Sophie (1986) noted further that the order and timing of stages vary, that identity integration is not a final stage for some women and that social and historical contexts are likely to affect the identity development process for women. Sophie's (1986) model distinguished four essential stages of identity development:

1. First awareness: During this stage an initial cognitive and emotional realisation occurs that one is different and that one may be homosexual. There is no disclosure to others and an individual feels alienated from self and others.
2. Testing and exploration: Testing may precede an individual's acceptance of homosexuality and there is limited contact with homosexual individuals or communities. During this stage an individual feels alienated from heterosexual society.

3. Identity acceptance: At this stage there is a preference for social interactions with other lesbians; negative identity gives way to a more positive one; and initial disclosure to heterosexuals takes place.
4. Identity integration: The individual views herself with accompanying anger and pride, publicly coming out to others and identity stability resumes when the individual is unwilling to change.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) proposed an alternative model that incorporated important insights from racial-ethnic and gender identity models. They presented a model that addresses identity development in a manner that incorporates both individual identity and membership in a minority group. In positing disclosure as a sign of maturity, early models do not take into account the many risks associated with disclosure, depending on geographic location, religious tradition, racial/ethnic background, gender and attitudes of family and friends (Greene, 2007). McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) model proposes a dual process that allows lesbians to incorporate the reality of important factors, i.e. work environment, and racial or ethnic group membership, that affect whether disclosure is a reasonable reality. Rather than stating that a political consciousness is needed to be fully developed as a lesbian, they propose such consciousness to be only part of the process. Disclosure is intentionally not made use of as an indicator of development on either trajectory because the viability of disclosure is so dependent on context. The model intentionally makes use of the word "phases" rather than "stages" to describe the components of the model, as the word "stages" is suggestive of a linear movement that is not reflective of the process as it occurs in the lives of individuals. Their model addresses four phases each for individual and group identity development: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment and internalisation/synthesis. This model has been validated separately with lesbian women (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996) and gay men (Fassinger & Miller, 1996) and, through its complexity and its ability to embrace multiple realities, offers an important advancement in the understanding of lesbian and gay identity.

2.2.3 Gay male identity development

Various gay identity theories exist and offer important information for counselling gay men. Like many developmental theories, gay identity theories initially focused on men and their identity development. However, they were often used to describe the coming out process for all. As a result few gay identity models focus on the issues that are unique to gay men and how such issues affect their identity formation (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Similar to the findings among women,

same-sex sexual behaviour and relationships between men have been documented throughout history, long before the term gay existed. Male homosexuality was not stigmatised or repressed as long as it conformed to the norms regarding gender and the relative ages and statuses of the partners (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000).

According to Reynolds and Hanjorgiris (2000) a large amount of studies examining gay male identity development have been published over the years. Troiden (1989) elaborated on earlier findings by adding that, even though a stage-sequential progression was assumed in gay identity development, the data from his study suggested that the process resembled more of a repeating spiral pattern. He interviewed 150 gay men through use of the "snowball" technique of contacting gay men he knew and having them identify others. The results of his interviews led him to organise gay male identity development in the following four stages:

1. Sensitisation: This stage refers to a sense of feeling different from one's peers in childhood (prior to age 13) and later in adolescence.
2. Dissociation and signification: This stage is marked by suspicion that one may be homosexual and desires for same-sex relationships become increasingly apparent.
3. Coming out: This stage begins with labelling sexual attractions as homosexual, initial involvement in the homosexual subculture and redefinition of homosexuality as a positive and viable lifestyle.
4. Commitment: At this stage the individual adopts a homosexual way of life and sees no reason to change, or believes nothing is to be gained by choosing bisexuality or heterosexuality. Disclosure to others is possible.

A more recent model of development has emerged that provides some conceptual clarity to the gay identity construct by separating the identity development process into two dual processes of development: (a) an internal individual sexual identity development process and (b) a contextual group-membership identity process (Fassinger & Miller, 1996). These authors' inclusive model, which is an extension of the previously cited work of McCarn and Fassinger (1996), includes the effects of societal homophobia and heterosexism on the development of an individual gay male identity (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). This model addresses the many forms of difference and diversity that exist within the gay male community that influence the identity development process i.e. race, class, age, religion, geographic area, occupation and community support. As noted

previously, this model, unlike previous ones, does not emphasise public disclosure as an indication of identity achievement. Fassinger and Miller (1996) state that:

disclosure is so profoundly influenced by environment and external oppression that to use it as an index of identity development ... ignores the harsh realities that race, religion, socioeconomic status, geographic location and other sources of demographic diversity often impose on the identity development process (p. 6).

In addition to disclosure, it is important to address how gay men deal with same-sex attraction and how their mode of coping relates to their relationship patterns, as well as how gender socialisation affects their identity process (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Men appear to be more likely to stress the sexual nature of their relationships (Brown, 2002). Thus, homosexual identity development may occur sooner for men than for women as a result of apprehending and acting upon same-sex attractions. Brown (2002) contends that some men are more likely to be sexually active with members of the same sex at an earlier age than are women. Research concludes that most gay males engage in sexual behaviour with other males following awareness of their sexual orientation, however, identification of a gay orientation often follows from same-sex physical contact. Most female youths also reported same-sex behaviour. However, females initiated same-sex sexual activities later than males (D'Augelli, 2006).

2.2.4 Summary of lesbian and gay identity development models

Sexual identity development is complex, convoluted and somewhat individualistic. It would appear that individuals progress along their own path, at their own pace and find their own meaning. However, in all of the models of sexual identity development reviewed here, two themes consistently emerged which appear to apply to most individuals. According to Brown (2002) the first theme was that of processing one's inner experience. This process includes becoming aware of feeling different, self-acknowledging one's same-sex attraction, and applying meaning to one's feelings or experiences. Brown states that "once the individual acquires knowledge of homosexuality, he or she gives that knowledge meaning consistent with his or her self-concept, feelings, fantasies or behaviour" (2002, p. 74).

The second theme that emerged among the various identity development models was that of seeking interpersonal opportunities. Interpersonal opportunities included group affiliation or identification, sexual contact and romantic relationships (Brown, 2002). Social contact or the development of relationship appears to be more important to women. Studies revealed that women

entertain suspicions of a lesbian orientation and experience same-sex feelings before engaging in physical behaviour while the order is generally the opposite for males (D'Augelli, 2006). Furthermore, seeking affiliation with a like-minded community can provide information, social support and opportunity for relationships to develop and is of vital importance to both lesbian and gay individuals.

Brown (2002) concludes that sexual identity development appears to be a complex and individual process that involves interconnecting themes which, when positively resolved, result in the integration of an individual's sexuality with his/her whole identity. Although various models argue that disclosure of sexual orientation may not be as important to identity development as once thought, the process of disclosure to significant others is still an important aspect of identity development (Matthew, 2007; D'Augelli, 2006; Saltzburg, 2005; Cass, 1996).

2.2.5 Bisexual identity development

Historically, human sexual activity has included much diversity, yet, according to Reynolds and Hanjorgiris (2000), the notion of a fluid sexual nature is difficult for most individuals to accept. Even though research has documented the existence of bisexuality, Western society continues to promote heterosexuality as the norm. There has been far less research on the experience of individuals who identify as bisexual compared to those who identify as lesbian or gay (Langdrige, 2008; Matthews, 2007).

There has been a tendency in literature, in practice and in society, to discount bisexuality either as a transitional period between heterosexuality and homosexuality or as a homophobic reluctance on the part of some individuals to accept a lesbian or gay identity (Langdrige, 2008; Dworkin, 2000). As a result, youth who identify as bisexual can experience prejudice and animosity from both the heterosexual community and the lesbian and gay community (Matthews, 2007). This can make development of a bisexual identity more difficult than development of a lesbian or gay identity (Firestein, 2007; Potoczniak, 2007). However, recent discussions have turned to a possible developmental pathway toward a bisexual identity. According to a series of studies conducted by Weinberg, Williams and Pryor (1994), most of the bisexuals interviewed described their bisexuality as an evolving process that began with heterosexual identity. After forming and establishing a heterosexual identity, most participants experienced subsequent same-sex attractions and encounters. Several years after experiencing both heterosexual and homosexual attractions, many participants began to self-label as bisexual (Weinberg et al., 1994). These researchers found that

gender differences in the interpersonal process were also apparent. For men, having sex was easier than falling in love and for women, falling in love was easier than having sex.

Brown (2002) argues that many people report same-sex and other-sex attractions at some point in their lives. However, bisexual individuals give these attractions an erotic meaning and attribute them to their identity, which may lead to the adoption of a bisexual identity. Weinberg et al. (1994) proposed that bisexual individuals may develop an open gender schema "that disconnects gender and sexual preference, making the direction of sexual desire (toward the same or opposite sex) independent of own gender (whether a man or a woman)" (p. 288). Further findings from the study noted that an important step in developing a bisexual identity is having pleasurable sexual experiences with both women and men. Weinberg et al. (1994) proposed a model with four stages:

1. Initial confusion: This stage can last for years as some individuals feel confused because their attractions for members of both sexes are strong and anxiety provoking, while some assume that their same-sex attractions will end their attractions for the other sex. Another source of confusion may be found in an individual's option to self-label only including "heterosexual" or "homosexual" and no "bisexual" label. A final source of confusion that was identified was difficulty in acknowledging one's same-sex attraction, a phenomenon more common in men than women.
2. Finding and applying the label: During this stage individuals begin to find and apply the label of "bisexuality", one way in which individuals are able to find and apply the label is by having enjoyable sex with members of both sexes after becoming aware of the "bisexual" label. However, others may experience such strong attractions to both sexes that they are compelled to acknowledge their bisexuality. Others also arrived at the bisexual self-label through the encouragement of others.
3. Settling into the identity: At this stage the individual begins to experience greater comfort with his/her sexuality through frequent social support and questions about the permanent or transitional nature of bisexuality arise.
4. Continued uncertainty: At this stage, an individual self-labels as bisexual, yet, despite comfort with one's own bisexuality, questioning and confusion about this sexual identity continue.

Brown (2002) proposed a further model of bisexual identity development which is based largely on that of the Weinberg et al. (1994) model. Brown's (2002) model varies in that it prepossesses gender

differences for each stage in the model and for the bisexual identity development process as a whole. Moreover the final stage proposed by Weinberg et al. (1994) 'Continued uncertainty', is relabelled as 'Identity maintenance'. Once an individual has reached the Identity maintenance stage, according to Brown (2002),

it is assumed she/he will be engaged in a process-orientated stage, rather than a goal oriented stage ... no task exists to complete, rather the individual is assumed to engage in certain behaviours that will allow her or him to maintain the 'bisexual' label. Thus, the individual could theoretically remain at this last stage indefinitely (p. 81).

The development of a bisexual identity is an understudied and misunderstood construct that needs more exploration (Bradford, 2004; Brown, 2002). Multiple barriers to the development of a healthy bisexual identity exist and need to be addressed within the bisexual identity development literature. Although the various bisexuality identity models (Bradford, 2004; Brown, 2002; Weinberg et al. 1994) have proposed different approaches to the coming-out process, all have described the process as complex and multifaceted, which is complicated by a lack of social validation and support from lesbian, gay and heterosexual communities (Potoczniak, 2007). As this is not the only focus of this study, bisexuality will not be covered in depth.

2.2.6 The use of alternative sexual orientation identity development models in practice

Models of sexual orientation identity development are useful as they provide insight into the unique issues and challenges of developing a positive sexual identity (Matthews, 2007). Knowledge of identity development is essential as it is a process that can influence a therapist's interaction with his/her clients. As with racial and ethnic identity development, clients may respond differently to counselling interventions and to the therapist, depending on where they are developmentally (Matthews, 2007). It is important for therapists to understand the process of sexual orientation identity development because clients, especially those who are in the early phases of development, may be reluctant to raise the issue. Furthermore, both heterosexual and homosexual therapists are at varying places with respect to their own sexual identity development and this is likely to influence their interactions with both heterosexual and homosexual clients (Mohr, 2002). Matthews (2007) warns that it is crucial to remember that identity development models are meant to be descriptive and "useful as mechanisms for understanding a client's frame of reference, but not as a basis for judging health or pathology" (p. 210). In addition to knowledge of models of sexual identity development, it is important for therapists to understand the developmental and contextual factors that are present in the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents.

Many factors contribute to the mental health problems of lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents. Lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents experience the challenge of adolescence as all youths do. In addition to the stressors associated with normative adolescent development, lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents face specific homosexual-related stressors (D'Augelli, 2002). The next section reviews research on the specific developmental challenges present in the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents.

2.3 SPECIFIC CHALLENGES OF SEXUAL MINORITY YOUTH

Developmental psychologists maintain that, for a person to lead a psychologically healthy life, certain developmental tasks must be mastered during adolescence. These tasks include adjusting to the physical and emotional changes of puberty; establishing effective and working relationships with peers; achieving independence from one's parents; preparing for a vocation; and moving toward a sense of values and definable identity (Erikson, 1968). Like all adolescents, lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents must achieve the tasks of their age group. However, achievement of these tasks can be complicated by conflicts that arise when these adolescents become aware of their sexual orientation and the implication this orientation will have on their lives (Rosario et al., 2001).

Professional interest in lesbian, gay and bisexual youth results primarily from evidence that they are a high risk group for a range of health and mental health problems (D'Augelli, 2006; 2002). Past research indicates that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are at greater risk than their heterosexual counterparts for stress-related mental health disorders, such as depression, substance use and abuse, victimization and suicide, as a result of the daily stigma and prejudice that they face during a critical phase of development (D'Augelli, 2006; Meyer, 2003). Some of the specific challenges which sexual minority youth face will be discussed below.

2.3.1 Homophobia and heterosexism

Visibility of alternative sexual orientations in society continues to increase. However, the portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual lives as a normative variation of human experience is often overshadowed by the disparaging imagery that is historically attached to being lesbian, gay or bisexual (Davis et al., 2009). Despite the prevalence of societal homophobia and heterosexism, it is important to acknowledge that same-sex sexual behaviour has been present across cultures throughout recorded history (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000) and that reactions to this have always been influenced by the social structures in place within each culture (Broido, 2000).

It is important to understand that biases towards individuals with alternative sexual orientations can operate in both obvious and subtle ways within society. The fields of psychology and psychiatry have long contributed to the belief that homosexuality is a pathology. Although homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1973, heterosexism and related biases still exist within the mental health professions (Eubanks-Carter et al., 2005; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Consider for a moment that the removal of the term took place less than 37 years ago, and that many parents of today's youths were raised during the years when homosexuality was still thought of as a mental disorder. Butler and Astbury (2005) argue that South Africa, the broader context of this study, is now one of the most progressive countries in terms of recognition of lesbian and gay rights. However, the background to the emergence of these rights was one of patriarchal authority; overt religious beliefs that frown upon homosexuality; and the repression of human rights. Although the legislation has changed, habits and societal attitudes are somewhat more difficult to reorganise in favour of lesbian and gay rights (Butler & Astbury, 2005). Furthermore, it is important to consider that the parents and families of the *youth* involved in this study have spent the majority of their lives under a repressive system, which did not support alternative sexual orientations.

Homophobia has many roots. The term is defined as an irrational fear or intolerance of homosexuality or an irrational, persistent fear or dread of homosexuals (Morin & Garfinkle in Matthews, 2007). However, it is often used more generally to describe anti-gay feelings and behaviours. Homophobia is the term typically used to describe prejudice and hostility toward homosexual individuals and their behaviour (Dworkin, 2000). Homophobia refers to an "extreme, negative reaction on the part of both heterosexual and homosexual persons to homosexual individuals and homosexual behaviour" (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004, p. 228). The negative stance of most major organised religions toward homosexuality has also greatly contributed to anti-gay bias in society (Beckstead & Israel, 2007).

Anti-gay prejudice or bias helps individuals to define who they are by directing hostility toward sexual minorities as a symbol of what they are not (Herek, 1996). The term heteronormative culture refers to the fact that society is structured to reflect the unquestioned and largely unconscious assumption that everyone living in the culture is heterosexual (Firestein, 2007). Heterosexism portrays heterosexuality as normative, and either fails to acknowledge or stigmatises alternative sexual orientations (Matthews, 2007). Any individual who is not heterosexual is perceived as abnormal, unnatural and, in some cases, as sinful and morally corrupt (Herek, 2003). This bias is

often not intentional, but rather due to oversights on the part of mainstream society in consideration of alternative sexual orientations. Heterosexism manifests itself in subtler ways than homophobia. Herek (2003) states that heterosexual beliefs are manifested at cultural and individual levels. At the cultural level, it is evident in the laws and lack of recognition of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals that serve to restrict their rights and opportunities. It is evident at an individual level when an individual internalises the hostility and disdain with which society views alternative sexual orientations and behaviours. According to Pachankis and Goldfried (2004), heterosexism is conveyed by the systematic attitudes and assumptions that operate in a society that understands itself as purely heterosexual. To a large extent, homophobic beliefs were and still are codified into our society's religious beliefs, laws and social policies, thus anti-gay bias is an intrinsic aspect of the socialisation process for all youth (Matthews, 2007). Therefore everyone is affected by heterosexism and related biases, regardless of sexual orientation.

Children are exposed to these societal notions at an early age (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). These authors state that, upon recognition of a possible lesbian, gay or bisexual identity, such individuals may feel ashamed and compelled to hide. This manifestation of shame is referred to as internalised homophobia. Such feelings may manifest themselves in anxiety and depression, relationship difficulties, substance abuse, suicide and the devaluation of lesbian, gay and bisexual activities (Green & Mitchell, 2002; Hughes & Eliason, 2002). However, most lesbian, gay or bisexual youth are able to establish a positive identity despite the various challenges posed by internalised homophobia and heterosexism (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Pachankis and Goldfried (2004) argue that psychological adjustment in the face of heterosexism and internalised homophobia is

probably mediated by the degree to which a lesbian, gay or bisexual individual is committed to his or her lesbian, gay or bisexual identity; the level of his or her contact with other lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals; the amount of family support that he or she receives; and the extent to which a lesbian, gay or bisexual individual is open about his or her sexual identity. (p. 228.)

However, they add that even with such support, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth cannot entirely escape the effects of internalised homophobia.

It is important for mental health professionals to recognise that difficulties experienced by lesbian, gay or bisexual clients are not necessarily intrinsic to sexual orientation. Instead, their difficulties may arise as the result of society's negative reaction(s) to alternative sexual orientations (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). The question arises: What recommendations can be made to mental health

professionals in order to better support their lesbian, gay or bisexual clients? It is critical to be aware of the effects that societal factors can have on lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents' psychological wellbeing and identity development. It is also important that mental health professionals take cognizance of the factors that contribute towards increasing an adolescent's resiliency in the face of negative reactions to his/her alternative sexual orientation.

2.3.2 Suicide ideation

One of the most important and contentious findings related to sexual minority youth is that of suicidality (D'Augelli, 2002; McDaniels, Purcell & D'Augelli, 2001). Until recently, this conclusion was controversial as some continue to argue against the accumulated evidence of suicide risk among sexual minority youth (Savin-Williams, 2001b). Although no empirical evidence has found lesbian, gay and bisexual youths to be overrepresented among completed suicides, studies based on convenience samples have consistently found higher suicide attempt rates among lesbian, gay and bisexual youths (Russel & Joyner, 2001; D'Augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington, 2001; Herberger, Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1997). A new generation of studies on sexual minority status and the risk of suicide began in the late 1990s with the publication of research based on large-scale, representative and generalisable samples of adolescents. These studies broadened the field of inquiry and raised new questions about the nature of adolescent same-sex sexuality and its link to mental health and suicide (D'Augelli, 2006).

D'Augelli et al. (2001) documented high levels of suicidality in a sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual youths aged 21 years and younger. Evidence was seen across the following domains: thoughts of suicide; reports of past suicide attempts; and current risk for suicide. The study found that both suicide thoughts and feelings were reported as being related to youths' sexual orientation, although not all suicidal episodes, whether ideational or behavioural were linked to sexual orientation. Suicide attempts often occurred after the youths' awareness of their sexual feelings and before youths disclosed to their parents. Parental reactions to disclosures were associated with suicide attempts, for those youths whose parents were felt to be intolerant or rejecting reported more attempts. Further associations were found between youths' suicidality and suicide attempts in their families and their friendship networks. Many youths knew of other lesbian, gay and bisexual youths who had committed suicide. Compared with youths in general, more lesbian, gay and bisexual youths knew of the suicide attempts or suicide of peers. The study's indicators of

suicidality in lesbian, gay and bisexual youths were substantially higher than has been found in studies of heterosexual youth.

Savin-Williams (2001b) challenged the accumulated evidence linking adolescent sexual minority status to indicators of suicidality, by arguing that past studies were inaccurate as the severity of suicide was not taken into account. His approach was to investigate the severity of self-reported suicide attempts among sexual minority women (Study 1) and among a group of 266 college students (Study 2). Savin-Williams (2001b) categorised "true attempts" as those that resulted in injury, "false attempts" were categorised by ideation, a suicide plan or having a method but not carrying it out and "life-threatening attempts" were true attempts with injury that required medical attention. Study 1, which included 83 women ranging in age from 18 to 25, indicated that 23% of the sexual minority women reported suicide attempts, 17% reported true attempts and five percent reported life-threatening attempts. Study 2, which compared 126 homosexual students to 140 exclusively heterosexual students ranging in age from 17 to 25, revealed that male and female sexual minorities reported significantly more suicide attempts than heterosexual males and females, although significant differences were not found for true and life-threatening attempts. Savin-Williams (2001b) concluded that sexual minority youth were not at a greater risk for suicide, but rather that they consistently over reported suicide attempts compared to heterosexual youth, or simply did not understand the research questions as well as the heterosexual youth involved in the research. There is no support for the first conclusion in prior research (Russel, 2003). Rather, there are validity concerns regarding self-report of suicide attempts by all young people (Centers for Disease Control in Russel, 2003). There is limited support for the second conclusion as one study by Udry and Chantala (2002) reported that adolescent boys who reported same-sex romantic relationships had lower verbal intelligence quotients than adolescent boys who reported other-sex relationships. Finally, Savin-Williams (2001b) suggests that there may be a "suffering suicidal script" that leads youth to believe that, in order for one to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, one must be suicidal; however, no empirical evidence for this conclusion is offered (p. 7).

Numerous studies support the conclusion that sexual minority youth are a group at risk for suicide. Past studies of sexual minority youth indicate that such youth report conflict and rejection within family relationships (D'Augelli et al., 2001) and hostile school and peer environments (D'Augelli, 2002). Sexual minority adolescents who experience a lack of support during this critical developmental phase may suffer emotionally and turn to suicide in response to a hostile environment and culture. Risk factors for suicide among sexual minority adolescents may be

normative, as experienced by all adolescents, or unique to sexual minority adolescents (Russel, 2003). Normative risk factors for suicide among all adolescents include depression; substance abuse; the recent suicide or attempted suicide of a family member or friend; and problems or conflict with parents (D'Augelli et al., 2001). Studies have found that many of these stress factors are intensified in the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents, for example conflicts with parents and romantic rejections (Russel & Joyner, 2001).

In what way do these factors account for the elevated rates of suicide among sexual minority youth? Research into the risk factors for suicide that may be unique to sexual minority youth provide important explanations for the elevated levels of normative suicide risks experienced by sexual minorities (Russel, 2003). Gender nonconformity or gender atypicality has been identified as a risk factor for suicide among lesbian, gay and bisexual youth (D'Augelli, Pilkington & Hershberger, 2002). Although gender nonconformity is not exclusive to sexual minority youth, the strict gender expectations of the adolescent period may be particularly problematic for lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescents as they come of age (Olson & King in Russel, 2003). A study by D'Augelli (2002) found that parents' reactions and victimisation based on sexual orientation were all related to mental health problems and suicidality. In conclusion, victimisation based on sexual orientation influences mental health and is associated with suicidal ideation and symptoms.

2.3.3 Bullying and victimization

A study of 350 lesbian, gay and bisexual youths aged 21 and younger found that these youths were at considerable risk for victimisation in high school settings (D'Augelli et al., 2002). The study concluded that more than half had been verbally abused in high school, while nearly one quarter were threatened with violence and over ten percent had been physically attacked. Twenty percent had been threatened with the disclosure of their sexual orientation, a serious threat given the victimisation that may follow disclosure. It was also found that youths who came to terms with their sexual orientation by early disclosure to others, were more widely victimised in high school.

D'Augelli et al. (2002) found that those youths who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual during their high school years and who were gender atypical were targets for sexual orientation victimisation. Furthermore, male youth consistently tended to be victimised more often, leading to the conclusion that gender is another factor related to youth's victimisation by others. In addition to experiencing direct personal victimisation, many of these youths observed the victimisation of others like themselves. Such knowledge can have a powerful effect, such as increasing fears and

inhibiting youths from expressing themselves. The youths' fears of victimisation at school may have a negative impact upon their experience of school. It is also likely that such fears can interfere with the ability to learn and achieve, although this was not explored in the research. A study by Butler and Astbury (2005) found that lesbian and gay adolescents are witnesses to cruel comments, jokes and name-calling directed toward sexual minority individuals by their peers, religious settings and families, as well as in the media. This finding was well supported by the results of their study, especially with regard to homophobic remarks passed by family members. Research consistently stresses that homophobic remarks or victimisation has a negative impact on the self-esteem of the lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescent (D'Augelli et al. 2002).

D'Augelli et al. (2002) also found that the results indicated an association between past victimisation based on sexual orientation in high school and current mental health problems. The study showed that high school victimisation was correlated with mental health symptoms in general and with post-traumatic stress symptoms in particular. Verbal attacks that had occurred in high school were related to participants' current post-traumatic stress symptoms. Over half of the sample had experienced three or more instances of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation in high school. This study suggests that sexual orientation victimisation can have an impact on a youth's adjustment. The effects of prejudice and ridicule of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities may be particularly stressful for youth who are beginning to suspect that they may possess a non-heterosexual identity. (D'Augelli et al., 2002).

Research on adult victims of sexual orientation based hate crimes (Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 2000) show that attacks directed at people because of their sexual orientation have a more negative effect than crimes in general. It would seem reasonable to hypothesise that sexual orientation victimisation that occurs in adolescence would have a more negative effect on mental health compared to similar experiences occurring in adulthood. D'Augelli et al. (2002) state that there are several reasons to presume a greater effect on adolescents. Firstly, sexual orientation is still developing in adolescence and this developmental process can cause considerable conflict which can be exacerbated by victimisation. Secondly, lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents have less support than adults who have access to more sources of assistance during times of stress. Thirdly, adolescents may have a greater fear of exposure of their sexual orientation to others as a result of victimisation than would adults who likely have disclosed their orientation to more people because of their age. Finally, adolescents cannot completely escape the school context unless they drop out and adolescents in general have less control over their environments than adults do (D'Augelli et al.,

2002). The study concluded by stating that much remains to be learned about the developmental experiences of youths who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual during their adolescent years (D'Augelli, 2006; D'Augelli et al., 2002). There is little doubt that there are lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents in South African schools and that schools are settings in which considerable victimisation occurs. One wonders how South African lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are treated in schools.

2.3.4 Disclosure to family

The prospect of disclosing one's alternative sexual orientation to family is among the most stress-related life events noted by homosexual youths (Davis et al., 2009; D'Augelli, et al., 2006). Parental reactions to disclosure are often followed by emotional responses such as panic, shock, disappointment, fear and sadness (Davis et al., 2009; Saltzburg, 2004). As a result of coming out, sexual minority youth may experience parental distancing; ejection from the home; and/or familial emotional and physical abuse (Saltzburg, 2004). Fear of negative parental reactions to the disclosure of sexual orientation has been found to be the major reason that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth do not tell their families (D'Augelli et al., 2006).

Rejection by parents is a major concern as the maintenance of a positive parent-adolescent bond facilitates the achievement of normative developmental tasks (Savin-Williams, 1998). Knowing their family's expectations of heterosexual dating, marriage and grandchildren, the contradiction posed for such expectations by the adolescent's sexuality is problematic for adolescents. Frequent problems for lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are feelings of estrangement from their families; fear of discovery; loss of financial support; and possible violence and expulsion (Butler & Astbury, 2005; D'Augelli et al., 2005b).

Sexual minority adolescents make use of strategies to defend against fears of rejection should their sexual orientation become known (Anderson, 1987). The adolescent may withdraw from family interactions in order to minimise the likelihood of discovery while at the same-time withdrawing emotional investment in the family in order to minimise the significance of possible rejection. When the adolescent's peer group begins to include other sexual minority adolescents, he or she may feel the need to lie to family members, for fear of arousing suspicion (Anderson, 1987). Often the deceit and distancing results in feelings of guilt and sadness that may be displaced onto the adolescent's self-concept. The stress of hiding an alternative sexual orientation can produce a great deal of anger.

Instinctively, the gay teenager senses that his mother and father are not parenting him as he really is, but as a heterosexual son. Implicitly, they demand that he be someone he is not. Such a relationship generates great psychic tension and discomfort that neither parents nor child understand. (Borhek in Radkowsky & Siegal, 1997.)

Research offers contradictory evidence regarding the psychological benefits of coming out to the family. It is currently unclear whether disclosure to one's parents, for instance, leads to poorer mental health, better mental health, or is irrelevant to mental health (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Research reveals that the main issues of concern for adolescents who are influenced by family of origin are: (a) the family's values concerning sexual orientation, (b) the effect of those values on the relationship between the disclosing adolescent and the family member who receives the news, and (c) the conflict resolution mechanisms available to family members. Furthermore, it is noted that the religious values of family members are most important in deciding whether to tell or not (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004).

Sexual minority adolescents should be prepared to accept their families' own coming out process. As the coming out process for lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescents can often be a long, difficult journey, so too can be the coming out process for family members (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Upon learning of an adolescent's alternative sexual orientation families must often re-negotiate their relationship with the individual and his or her embodiment of the family's often negative perception of homosexuality. Parental reactions usually proceed through a series of stages similar to those of the grieving process identified by Kubler-Ross (1969): denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

During the initial phase of disclosure, parents may experience fear, guilt and actively deny the disclosure (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Saltzburg, 2005; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Parents may even pressure their child to continue closeting. This stage follows Kubler-Ross's (1969) denial stage during which the issue is ignored or denied. During the anger stage, parents tend to seek someone to blame and may threaten or abuse the adolescent or coerce them to change. Parents may be openly hostile to their child(ren) for placing them in such an unwanted position. In the bargaining phase, parents may ask God to convert their child. Parents may bargain with the child to remain closeted or renounce their homosexuality in order to remain in the family (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Saltzburg, 2005; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Parents may also experience the stage of depression, in which they develop feelings of guilt or shame. During this stage, parents tend to react as though they have suffered a loss, a loss of the child they thought they knew and a loss of the future they

envisioned for their child (Saltzburg, 2005). In the last stage, that of acceptance, research states that parents become sensitised to homosexual issues (Saltzburg, 2005; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). During this period of adjustment, the adolescent and family learn to cope with the disclosure and enter the process of integration (Saltzburg, 2005). Parents often follow these stages after disclosure, but while many may acknowledge the child's alternative orientation, few ever fully accept it (Butler & Astbury, 2005). The stages of family reactions to an adolescent child's disclosure is provided in Table 2.2 in view of the theoretical model of Kubler-Ross (1969).

Table 2.2: Stages of family reactions to disclosure

Stage	Possible reactions
Denial of homosexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear, guilt, denial, ignores the issue • Pressures adolescent to continue closeting • Dismisses homosexuality as an experimental stage
Anger at self and others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blames others or self for the homosexuality • Threatens/abuses adolescent • Coerces adolescent to change to heterosexual • Hostile to adolescent • Angry at society for non-acceptance as a 'normal' family
Bargaining with God and adolescent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks God to convert adolescent • Asks adolescent to continue closeting or renounce homosexuality • Asks adolescent not to tell other family members in order to remain in the family
Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt, shame • Some not able to see beyond their own needs; requires adolescent to support the family member's emotional needs instead • Self-ostracises from society • Mourns loss of heterosexual family member • Mourns loss of being grandparent/aunt/uncle
Acceptance of adolescent's homosexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitisation to homosexual issues • Adolescent and family learn to cope and integrate homosexuality into family identity

Although the initial disclosure is likely to create tension, the literature on coming out to family stresses the importance of taking a long-term perspective (Matthews, 2007). Literature states that

while coming out can create permanent breaks in family relationships, in most cases the families are able to work through the initial turmoil and find ways to retain or even strengthen the family bond (D'Augelli et al., 2005b; Savin-Willaims & Ream, 2003). The individual and family are likely to have reciprocal effects on each other. It has been observed that the more supportive the youth's family and peer network is, the more likely he or she is to negotiate rejection and develop a more self-accepting identity (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). In what way can mental health professionals provide support so as to enable the adolescents and their parents to negotiate this oftentimes emotionally turbulent journey? In the case of ethnic minority families, there are likely to be additional stresses that are related to the different cultural systems (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000).

Matthews (2007) states that the family is only one place where lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents have to face the issue of disclosure of sexual orientation. Indeed, the author argues that "coming out is a life long process that must occur every time a gay, lesbian or bisexual individual wants to be truly him or herself in an interpersonal relationship" (p. 212). Overall, it is important to assess the varied contexts in which the decision to come out is made.

2.3.5 The issue of acceptance

The search for a feeling of belonging or acceptance is basic to the human state. Ryan and Deci (2001) argue that so much of human behaviour concerns attempts to achieve a sense of belonging in a group, in a society, in a family, in a partnership or in the world. A sense of belonging and interpersonal connectedness is fundamental to psychological well-being. Positive belonging is to be perceived and approved of by others in the same way as one perceives and approves of oneself. The experience of not belonging is painful and can give rise to self-denial, self-contempt and, in the worst cases, to suicidal thoughts and actions (*Ibid*). Many individuals with alternative sexual orientations have experienced a lack of affirmation and thus a lack of positive belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This void, for many, is their main source of pain and suffering. Their struggle with themselves is experienced as a struggle induced by their surroundings.

2.3.6 Adjusting to a stigmatised role

The family typically serves as a focus of validation and teaching about what it is like to be a member of a certain group. Such is not the case for most lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescents, because most parents are heterosexual and they cannot teach their lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescent what it is like to be a member of the gay and lesbian culture; they are unable to provide

role models of a positive lesbian, gay or bisexual identity for their child (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Furthermore, most lesbian, gay and bisexual adults in youths' lives (e.g. educators, coaches, youth group leaders) are discouraged from revealing their sexual orientations to young people, thus sexual minority youth commonly discover their differences in isolation (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). It has been suggested that this isolation often leads to feelings of being sick, sinful, deviant or invisible. Such feelings could possibly lead to anxiety and depression. D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) found that 63% of their sexual minority adolescent sample were so worried or nervous in the past year that they could not function and 73% mentioned that they were depressed at the time of the study.

During adolescence, childhood feelings of difference may become associated with perceptions of oneself as sexually different. Because of socialisation in a heterosexual society and the subsequent isolation and accompaniment of negative feelings it is likely that lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents experience such difference as unacceptable, often resulting in psychological and behavioural difficulties (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Such manifestations may include one or more defensive strategies, such as seeking reparative therapy to eliminate homosexual feelings; assuming an anti-homosexual stance; controlling information about oneself; escaping through substance abuse; indicating that one is just passing through a phase; immersing oneself in a heterosexual identity; defining situations rather than sexual orientation as the cause of homosexual feelings or activities; compensating for perceived defectiveness by devoting enormous energy to career or academic success; or crusading against sexual minority causes and individuals (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002).

A South African study by Butler and Astbury (2006) that comprised a three-year phenomenological study (1997 to 2000) of gay and lesbian youth between the ages of 18 and 21 years found that youth consistently made use of defence mechanisms, such as denial, avoidance, compartmentalisation, suppression, compensation, sublimation, displacement, rationalisation and intellectualisation as a precursor to their coming out. In coming out, individuals can display any range of negative psychological symptoms, especially if there is a lack of support during the process (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004).

2.3.7 Concealment of sexual orientation

The disclosure of an alternative sexual orientation is a struggle for most lesbian, gay and bisexual youth due to fears of discrimination, ostracism and violence from others. In order to cope with

stress and escape the stigmatisation associated with being lesbian, gay or bisexual, youths learn to hide their sexual orientation from family and friends (Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman & Armistead, 2002). However, hiding means that relationships are based on deceit and fear of discovery, which can cause insecurity, social withdrawal and demoralisation for these youths (D'Augelli et al., 2006; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003; Maguen et al., 2002).

Adolescents who hide their lesbian, gay or bisexual identity may experience a discrepancy between their true selves and the selves that they present to others (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Martin (in Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004) argued that a lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescent who is able to hide and who has witnessed the victimisation of another openly identified lesbian or gay adolescent spends an enormous amount of energy and time constantly monitoring his/her social behaviour, repressing any personal mannerisms or traits and avoiding individuals or areas that may result in suspicion. According to Radkowsky and Siegal (1997), sexual minority youth employ a variety of strategies to preserve the outward appearance of heterosexuality. The authors suggest that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth who utilise such strategies live with an ever-present fear that their clothing, speech, postures, interests, friends and demeanour may reveal a gay or lesbian identity. These individuals may feel inauthentic, as if they are living a lie. In hiding their identities, they deprive themselves and others of positive role models and are often prevented from assuming other affirming social identities, such as being a valued family member (Spurlock, 2002). At a time when other adolescents are discovering how to express themselves socially, those youth who identify as lesbian or gay but wish to remain hidden are learning to conceal large parts of themselves from family and friends (Rivers & Carragher, 2004).

Pilkington and D'Augelli's (1995) study provided an insight into the methods that sexual minority adolescents use to hide their sexual orientation from others. The following strategies were identified: (a) attempting to act straight in public; (b) avoiding certain places and situations; (c) avoiding gay people, including previous gay friends; and (d) developing some form of self-defence, for instance carrying a knife or beating someone up. Many sexual minority youth believe that changing their behaviour will stave off criticism and such youth make concerted efforts to become heterosexual by identifying with the dominant group in the hope of fitting in (Rivers & Carragher, 2004). However, various studies have shown that, as a result, youths' expectations of themselves were lowered in response to their negative view of their true sexual identity and these lowered expectations have an effect upon educational and occupational choices and whether or not youth engage in unsafe sexual practices (*ibid*). Being a hidden minority in a culture that assumes

heterosexuality means that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth must constantly face the question of when, to whom and under what circumstances to disclose their sexual orientation (Matthews, 2007). It is imperative that research within South Africa makes a concerted effort to protect and safeguard all youth and furthermore to gain understanding of previously neglected and hidden lesbian, gay and bisexual youth.

2.3.8 Peer relations

Many lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents lag behind their peers with respect to social development for reasons attributed to societal constraints on sexual minorities and the extra time often required to establish an alternative sexual identity (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Peer group interactions and acceptance are crucial in this developmental period; the pressure to conform and belong is the norm and being different can be stressful (McMahan, 2009). During adolescence, dealing with emerging sexuality becomes a critical developmental task. While one's peers discuss the world of heterosexual relationships and exploration, gay and lesbian adolescents may either isolate themselves for fear of rejection or deny their sexual orientation (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002).

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth often do not have the opportunity to establish dating relationships until later ages than their heterosexual peers (Diamond, 2003). As a result, they may lack the appropriate skills necessary to succeed in many of their relationships. While the general adolescent population remains at risk for infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), gay youth in particular are at an even greater risk (Lam, Naar-King & Wright, 2007). Often, gay adolescents do not feel comfortable socialising in an open manner and are therefore unable to develop appropriate sexual relationships with their peers, and may be more likely to seek out secretive and high-risk sexual contacts. Furthermore, in the process of negotiating their sexual identity and the social stigma of being gay, many deny the risks associated with sexual experimentation or exploitative sexual relationships (D'Augelli, 2006). Because of the difficulty in developing a healthy identity in a less accepting social world, gay and lesbian adolescents are an at-risk population.

2.3.9 Contemporary findings versus those of earlier studies

As mentioned in section 2.2, one of the most widely addressed issues in lesbian, gay and bisexual psychological literature is that of identity formation among adolescents and young adults (D'Augelli, 2006). As discussed throughout section 2.3, many youths encounter difficulties in coming out to themselves and others. Considering contemporary findings, it is possible to note the

effect of societies' growing tolerance towards sexual minorities as the average age of awareness and coming out is somewhat earlier to what it was at the time of older studies (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007; D'Augelli, 2006; Carver, Egan & Perry, 2004).

Contemporary youth report being aware of their same-sex feelings at about age 10, with males noting the awareness slightly earlier than females (10 vs 11) as opposed to data from the 1980s when youth suspected homosexual feelings between the ages of 12 and 13 for males and 14 to 16 for girls. For contemporary youth self-labelling occurred about five years after the initial awareness, with males once again reaching the milestone sooner (15 vs 16). First disclosure of sexual orientation for both female and male contemporary youth occurred at about 17, although some reported this occurring as young as age 10 and as old as 21 (D'Augelli, 2006). The apparent earlier timing of contemporary lesbian, gay and bisexual youths' self-identification highlights the importance of historical and social contexts influence on their development (D'Augelli, 2006). These are adolescents whose cognitive, emotional and social development is still occurring when they confront the challenge of a stigmatised identity, in primary social contexts (homes and schools) that are often hostile (D'Augelli, 2006). It is therefore imperative to understand to whom and why adolescents are disclosing, so as to support this process.

Savin-Williams (2005) postulates that, as adolescents with same-sex attractions become increasingly more visible to themselves and to others, their desire to name their sexual orientation is waning. He states that they might use "the gay word" as a shorthand form for describing their attractions, but "implicit in this usage is a rejection of gay as an identity" (p. 16). However, according to the liberated adults of generations gone by, homosexual adolescents should loyally follow their hard-won script and actively fight for homosexual rights and denounce heterosexism and homophobia. The author argues that, despite appearances, the increasing failure to embrace activism is a sign of the times, that "gay activism" has indeed succeeded (p. 16) - succeeded so well that young people with same-sex attractions are now freer than ever before to be themselves, comfortable with their sexuality because they live in a youth culture that is increasingly accepting of diverse sexual orientations. Savin-Williams (2005) has found that young homosexual adults object to the label of sexual minority because they do not want their sexuality to define them. Instead, they want to be accepted simply for who they are and not as a stereotype. This failure of "gay" to fit the lives of young people is reflected in the experience of numerous youth (Savin-Williams, 2005, p.16).

In order to understand the ways in which sexual minority youth develop their identities in any kind of normative sense one is required to recognize the social, historical and cultural context of their life course (Beckstead & Israel, 2007). The narrative of struggle and success is still evident in present day literature, with reports of sexual minority youth struggling with victimisation (D'Augelli, 2006); feelings of difference and alienation (Beckstead & Israel, 2007; Matthews, 2007); suicidal ideation and behaviour (D'Augelli, 2006); and general mental health problems (D'Augelli, 2006). Yet, this narrative fails to capture the normal development of sexual minority youth in a changing historical context in which homosexual life is less stigmatised and more readily accepted as a legitimate social identity (Beckstead & Israel, 2007).

For sexual minority youth in contemporary society there are two competing narratives of sexual orientation identity development that they must negotiate: the narrative of struggle and success and the narrative of emancipation. These seemingly divergent narratives coexist, thereby reflecting the tension of a shifting historical context for sexual orientation identity development (Beckstead & Israel, 2007). Today's youth are confronted with both of these narratives simultaneously, and their identities and experiences are naturally influenced by both. There clearly is greater complexity surrounding sexual minority youth than what has been mentioned in this chapter. Unique issues arise for religious youth, ethnic minorities and bisexual youth that were not elaborated upon.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Adolescence is defined by multiple developmental transitions. The normal difficulties associated with this developmental period are heightened for sexual minority adolescents. Managing the transition to awareness of an alternative sexual orientation is stressful because it potentially involves fundamental changes in the significant relationships that structure adolescents' lives: family, friends and peers, teachers and other caring adults (Russel, 2003). The studies reviewed indicate that sexual minority youth are at risk for social stigmatisation, isolation, depression, suicide, abuse and rejection by their families. The decision to share one's sexual orientation is a complex issue that nearly all sexual minority individuals face. There are generally two different aspects to coming out. The first involves recognition and eventual acceptance of one's alternative sexual identity. This is the process generally described in the sexual orientation identity models. The second aspect of coming out involves disclosing one's identity to others. Social progress is changing the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. It is important to remember that what was true for sexual minorities at one point in time will not necessarily be true at another point in time.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the research process as it was presented in Chapter 1. It serves as a more detailed description of the research paradigm, the research design and the research methodology used in this study. Firstly, the research questions of this study are reviewed and discussed. Next, the theoretical paradigm that guided this study as well as the research design are explored. Lastly, there follows a section on the exact research methodology that was used in this study. This section includes the data production techniques, participant selection, the verification and analysis of data, as well as the ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As was discussed in Chapter 1, research reveals that an ever increasing amount of adolescents are disclosing their sexual orientation to parents at earlier ages than their predecessors (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007; D'Augelli, 2006). Unfortunately there is very little research on the process of disclosure among South African adolescents (Butler & Astbury, 2006; 2005). This study intended to explore this important but under-researched area. Before engaging in further discussion, it is necessary to revisit the research questions which were posed in Chapter 1.

The research questions were as follows:

- What are the reported experiences of youth who disclosed, during adolescence, to their family?
- Based on the above, what can be suggested as ways to support this process?

There are multiple smaller issues which affect these questions. The first and most fundamental of these is the recognition of attraction to same-sex individuals and identification with a lesbian, gay or bisexual sexual orientation. Since the task of identity formation is of such vital importance during this phase of development, the research would be remiss without investigating the impact of disclosure upon the developing sense of identity. Since the sense of self and sexuality is situated

within a social context and affected by social narratives concerning homosexuality, it was important to explore the reasons for and against disclosure. Disclosure is described as a process that unfolds over time, therefore it was pertinent to explore how this affected relationships, both with family and friends (Davis et al., 2009). Disclosure is also described as a challenging process, which places the adolescent at risk for depression, suicide, victimisation and substance use and abuse (D'Augelli, 2006). Investigating how local *youth* have experienced these phenomena also formed an important part of this study. Lastly, a final insight into what the *youth* have learnt from their experience of disclosure during adolescence was sought. It was felt that it was important to include these broader questions as the participants' experiences of disclosure might be quite different from what international research revealed.

- With these issues in mind the following sub-questions were also included in the study:
- When did participants first realise they were not heterosexual?
- When did participants first disclose and to whom did they disclose?
- What were participants' reasons for and against disclosure?
- What were parents and sibling(s) reactions to disclosure?
- Have relationships with parents and sibling(s) changed since disclosure?
- What would participants like parents or sibling(s) to know or do differently?
- What would participants suggest as ways to support homosexual youth in the position of coming-out?
- What recommendations can be made to mental health professionals to support lesbian, gay or bisexual youth and their families during the process of disclosure.
- How do participants view their sexual orientation?

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This section presents a discussion of the theoretical paradigm that underpins this study and the nature of the qualitative research design that was used.

3.3.1 Research Paradigm

The design of a research study begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm. A paradigm is essentially a framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place. The paradigm provides the framework and guides the research. It also guides the researcher in deciding which research methods and methodology are most appropriate for the research (Mouton, 2008). This study made use of an interpretive/constructivist research paradigm.

Interpretive ontology assumes that reality is constructed through meaning and understanding attached to experience and social interactions (Merriam, 2009). Constructivist ontology assumes that reality is created by the actions of individuals, particularly through contact with other (*ibid*). Interpretive epistemology assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. Constructivist epistemology presumes that people are actively involved in constructing knowledge. From the interpretive/constructivist perspective, knowledge is dependent on the participants' subjective experience within a specific context in relation to others. As an interpretive/constructivist researcher, the researcher did not seek to discover absolute truths but instead sought to understand the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Merriam, 2009).

According to the interpretive research paradigm it is assumed that we can understand others' experiences by interacting with them and that people's subjective experiences are real (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Emphasis is also placed on the importance of determining the nature of experiences within the context in which they occur. A constructivist paradigm aids understanding as it helps focus on the influence of social realities on the meaning of individuals lives (White, 2007). Constructivism views the experience of self as existing in an ongoing interchange with others and that it is through this continual narrative with others that the self continually creates itself. Hence Broido's (2000) argument that sexual orientation is socially constructed as people make meaning of sexual/romantic experiences and place them in a social, cultural, political and historical context. It was impossible to ignore the historical narrative of alternative sexual orientations as well as the socially held truths regarding such an orientation. The constructivist paradigm offers useful ideas about how power, knowledge and truth are negotiated in families and societies. This paradigm provides several important ways of understanding the meaning of sexual orientation. Most significant of these are the ideas that categories such as homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual are socially constructed and that some people may have experiences that do not fit within the ways that society defines these labels (Broido, 2000).

Constructivist theory alerts therapists to this reality and calls on them to present other options to clients.

Merriam (2009) states that an interpretive research paradigm studies social phenomena and learns how the individual experiences and interacts with their social world and the meaning it has for the individual. A constructivist research paradigm explains that every person's social, and interpersonal reality has been constructed through interaction with other human beings and human institutions. Denzin and Lincoln also (2011) suggest an interactive link between the researcher and the researched, and that there is a reciprocal influence of the one on the other. It is important to study feelings, experiences, social situations and phenomena in their natural settings for interpretivist researchers to make sense of them as they occur in the real world (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The interpretive/constructivist theories are valuable for understanding that human behaviour and meaning making is a function of ongoing interactions between individuals and the many contexts within which they function. The research aims to understand the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind the participants' experiences. Understanding at the level of ordinary language and action is inherent in the inquiry, as is discovering the meanings and beliefs underlying the actions of others (Merriam, 2009). With this in mind, it was decided that qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this study. The following section explains this decision in more detail.

3.3.2 Research Design

The research design is the structure or plan that, along with the research paradigm, informs the research process. The research design is implemented by employing methods, techniques and procedures and is the actual plan that directs the researcher's actions and decisions throughout the research process (Mouton, 2008). Durrheim (2006) identifies four principles which contribute towards design coherence and assist in answering the research questions. In developing a research design, the researcher must attend to these four dimensions: (1) the purpose of the research; (2) the theoretical paradigm informing the research; (3) the context within which the research takes place; and (4) the techniques/research methods used to collect and analyse the data. Considering that the research purpose, paradigm and techniques/methods of this study are discussed elsewhere, the context of the research is discussed below.

3.3.2.1 Contexts of the research

The context of the research refers to the physical, cultural and social space in which research occurs (Durrheim, 2006). The author adds that the context of the research plays a role in the decisions made regarding the research design. These decisions are also influenced by the purpose and paradigm of the research as these affect the researcher's control over the context. In the case of this study, this took place in the form of individual interviews conducted within the participants' homes. Therefore, the researcher's control was limited to the structure of the interview guide and the questions used to elicit the information during the interviews (Durrheim, 2006). The research took place at ten different sites, namely the homes of the participants. The researcher felt that it was important that the setting be comfortable for the participants and one in which their privacy would be respected. The participants were all reached via the Lesbigay Society, a support society for sexual minority students at Stellenbosch University (see section 3.4.2 for further details).

The second context of the research study can be broadly described as Stellenbosch University in the Western Cape, South Africa. The university is an internationally recognised institution with more than 24 000 students, 800 lecturers and some 50 research and service departments. It is further described as a "vibrant melting pot of different cultures" (Stellenbosch University, 2010). A variety of student organisations exist and cater for a wide range of interests such as culture, politics, religion, spiritual concerns and leisure.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Merriam (2009), a study's research methodology consists of the actions that are taken and the reasons why those actions are taken. Each paradigm is associated with its own research methodology and methods. The interpretive/constructivist approach to methodology is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research arose as an attempt to deal with the shortcomings of quantitative methodology, which was perceived as being rigid and dehumanising (Given, 2008). Qualitative research is an umbrella term covering several forms of inquiry that help researchers to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena.

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is best defined by its four main characteristics, as well as several other qualities that are distinct to this type of methodology. The four main characteristics include an interest in understanding the meaning that people have constructed; the researcher as primary instrument for data collection and analysis; the use of an inductive research strategy; and it aims to provide a rich description of the findings. In addition, the researcher needs

to be flexible and responsive as circumstances concerning the research may change, the sample selection also is usually non-random, purposeful and small, as opposed to the larger more random sampling of quantitative research. The researcher is expected to spend more time in contact with the participants or conducting fieldwork. Merriam (2009) mentions the importance of language in this process, as it is often the medium used to communicate and to facilitate the research process. The following section serves to explain the methods used in the selection of participants, and collection and analysis of data.

3.4.1 Selection of participants and selection criteria

Sampling refers to the actions taken by the researcher to identify a population of interest that becomes the focus of the study. It also refers to decisions which the researcher makes about what aspect of behaviour or a phenomenon needs to be observed (Merriam, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the population of interest were lesbian, gay or bisexual youth who disclosed their sexual orientation to a family member during adolescence. Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research as information-rich participants can be identified, thereby providing the researcher with an opportunity to elicit detailed and rich descriptions (Durrheim, 2006). This is confirmed by Merriam (2009) who states that purposeful sampling concerns itself with the identification and selection of information-rich sources in order to collect relevant and valuable data to answer the research questions. It is usually based on theoretical reasons with the intent that the sources will provide the researcher with new information and knowledge.

Criteria were set to assist in selecting such a sample. This process refers to criterion-based selection, and, as the term suggests, it is a list of criteria according to which the sample is selected (Merriam, 2009). The following selection criteria were used to facilitate the sample selection: females and males who were between the ages of 20 and 26 years, who disclosed their alternative sexual orientation to one member of their family between the ages of 13 and 18 and who live within the Western Cape area. It was also seen as an important criterion that participants be volunteers. The reasons for this were as follows: It was hypothesised that willing participants would be more likely to offer rich descriptions, while participants who were willing to volunteer would be more likely to be confident to tell their story to a stranger (Basit, 2003). It was also important to access a broad sample of participants in an attempt to reflect the diverse cultures and contexts of South African society. Thus no discrimination was made in terms of race, religion, socio-economic status or

culture. The methods that were identified as being most relevant and likely to lend themselves to accessing information-rich data were semi-structured individual interviews and reflective notes. These methods of data collection are discussed next.

3.4.2 Data Collection

Interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research (Greeff, 2005). Be it with individuals or a group, it is a dynamic and active process in which both interviewer and interviewee play an important role. The semi-structured individual interview approach refers to open-ended questions prepared prior to the interview and are aimed at accessing quality data. The use of a general interview guide allows the interviewer the opportunity to ask all interviewees similar questions, while facilitating a meaningful conversation that can potentially benefit both interviewer and interviewee (Patton, 2002). It provides guidelines as to what topics and issues need to be explored, while allowing the researcher to deviate, if necessary, or to clarify any uncertainties. The semi-structured approach was chosen because it is an effective method for allowing the participants to lead the discussion into issues they feel are important, as well as being able to direct the discussion to cover the issues that are raised by the literature review (Greeff, 2005). The general interview guide for the semi-structured interviews can be found in Addendum B.

Reflective notes can be used to elicit written accounts of someone's perceptions and meaning-making process surrounding a specific event, as well as to stimulate thought about it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Reflective notes were chosen as a means for participants to answer questions regarding their thoughts and feelings about the focus of the study, as well as to reflect upon their experiences of participating in the research. These were a particularly valuable means of assisting the participants in the debriefing process. The reflective note questions can be found in Addendum C. Reflective notes were used as a means to supplement the individual interviews and not as a separate method of data collection.

After permission was granted by the relevant authorities (see section 3.6 for further details) the researcher contacted the chairperson of the Lesbigay Society in order to source research participants. Communication between the researcher and other society members was facilitated by the chairperson who communicated the study's details as well as the researcher's contact details via electronic format to all society members on behalf of the researcher (see addendum D). Thereafter potential research participants contacted the researcher in order to volunteer for the study. Once it was established, via either electronic or telephonic communication, that the volunteers complied

with the selection criteria they were selected as participants and arrangements were made to interview them in the privacy of their homes (see addendum E). After the semi-structured interview, the participants were invited to reflect upon the interview process as a form of debriefing and this constituted the reflective notes. Participants were asked to answer questions regarding their thoughts and attitudes about the focus of the study, as well as their experience of participating in the research. During the debriefing valuable and rich information surfaced spontaneously and the researcher decided to include this rich information as reflective notes. The procedures implemented in accessing the research participants are discussed in section 3.6.

The semi-structured individual interviews were used as a data collection method, supplemented by the reflective notes, and then analysed. The aim of data analysis is to find an answer to the research question (Durrheim, 2006). The process of data analysis serves to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (De Vos, 2005).

3.4.3 Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) states that, within qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary tool for data collection and analysis. Thus the importance of the researcher's role in data analysis cannot be overemphasised. One issue that relates directly to the analysis of the data in this study concerns the many non-verbal responses used by the research participants as a means of communication. Intonation, volume and emotional content had to be considered for the participants' responses to be understood as they had intended (Silverman, 2010). These had a role to play in the communication and therefore had a role to play in the analysis. For this reason, it was valuable that the researcher conducted all interviews, transcriptions and analysis. The researcher was present at every stage of the research process and in this way could ensure that meaning was maintained.

The form of data analysis used in this research study was qualitative content analysis. In this process, data is grouped into units of meaning in order to identify patterns or themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The first step of analysis applied in this study involved transcribing the interviews (see Addendum F). These transcriptions were then coded. Open coding was used. In this approach, codes are derived directly from the text itself. This is quite different from other approaches to coding which often use codes that have been developed from a review of the relevant literature. Open coding was used as it creates codes that are specific to the responses of the participants and therefore more closely bound to the particular context of the participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The coding process began by initially reading through the available data and beginning to locate

units of meaning and attempting to name them. A second reading was then performed with the aim of starting the formal coding process. Several readings of the transcripts were required before the coding process was completed. During the coding process, units of meaning were identified and coded, using one to three word phrases. Certain codes occurred so rarely that their relevance was questionable. These codes were not used. However, other codes occurred repeatedly. These codes were seen as most representative of the participants' experience and were used as the basis for the categories or themes of the study. An example of a section of coded transcript can be found as Addendum G. A data base was created where these codes were tracked. Codes were adjusted when necessary due to increased insight and information. An example of a data display table which was used to manage some of the data is presented in Addendum H. The reflective notes made by the researcher after the interview were added to the data. The next step in the data analysis process was to categorise the codes identified during the open coding phase. Categorisation refers to the grouping of codes that seem to be connected. Subcategorisation helps to form a more holistic view of the data which can then be used during the interpretation and discussion of the data. As the process of data analysis progressed, the themes and categories were revised, which led to a final list of themes and categories. These were then used as the basis of the argument for the findings of this study from which conclusions were drawn.

3.5 DATA VERIFICATION

The authors Given and Saumure (2008) state that all research must respond to canons that stand as criteria against which the trustworthiness of a study can be evaluated. In order to allow for trustworthiness, certain constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability must be adhered to. Merriam (2009) further identifies several strategies which can be used to do so, namely triangulation, peer examination, an audit trail, thorough engagement with the data, reflexivity and the use of rich descriptions. Before engaging in a discussion on how the above-mentioned strategies were applied in this study, it is first necessary to describe the constructs of trustworthiness.

3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility is qualitative research's equivalent to quantitative research's term of internal validity. Credibility refers to the degree to which a study has accurately described the phenomenon being investigated. Credibility is the agreement between the way in which the researcher interprets and

presents the research findings and the meanings and perspectives of the research participant. Credibility acknowledges that reality is subjective and that there are many perspectives which influence it. Strategies which can be implemented to promote credibility include triangulation, adequate engagement in data collection, discrepant case analysis, reflexivity and peer review (Merriam, 2009).

3.5.2 Transferability

Transferability is similar to the concept of external validity in quantitative research. If a study is generalisable it means that its results can be applied across a wide range of environments. When one considers the nature of qualitative research and the sample sizes involved, the issue of generalising research findings becomes difficult (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (*ibid.*) suggests that one think of generalisability in ways that are appropriate to the philosophy underpinning qualitative research, namely that research findings can be transferred to other contexts if the contextual influences are documented in the research in question and are applicable to these situations. Given and Saumure (2008) agree that transferability is the degree to which the context of a study has been described so that other researchers may know the extent to which the study can be applied to other contexts. Strategies which can be implemented to promote the transferability of findings include rich descriptions of data and the use of maximum variation in the sample (Merriam, 2009).

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability is considered to be the alternative to reliability as used in quantitative research. Because of the basic assumptions of qualitative research, that the social world is always being constructed, the concept of reliability is inappropriate due to its focus on being able to replicate a study's findings in later research (Merriam, 2009). Dependability in qualitative research aims to see whether a study's research design can be used in other studies, as well as what procedures have been followed. This allows one to assess whether a study has made use of best practices and whether its findings can be considered 'reliable' within this context (Merriam, 2009). Strategies which can be implemented to aid dependability are triangulation, peer review, reflexivity and the use of an audit trail (Merriam, 2009).

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability captures the traditional concept of objectivity and refers to the degree to which the research findings reflect the meaning intended by the participants, rather than the preconceptions of

the researcher (Jensen, 2008). Confirmability refers to the process of providing evidence to support the notion that the researcher's understanding of the participant's experience is an accurate one. Strategies which can promote the confirmability of research include triangulation, an audit trail and reflexivity.

3.5.5 Data Verification Strategies

Data verification strategies play a significant role in the research process. The strategies that were applied and taken into consideration in this study are discussed below.

3.5.5.1 *Triangulation*

Triangulation is a commonly used strategy to increase the credibility of a study in qualitative and quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). As the name implies, triangulation involves using three or more separate methods of data gathering which are then compared to ensure that the results of the study are consistent across all three. Such agreement validates the results of the study. However, more recently the definition of triangulation has shifted to signify any approach that combines two or more techniques in order to increase validity (Rothbauer, 2008). In this study, triangulation was performed by gathering data with the use of two separate methods, namely thorough literature review and individual interviews. The data from these different methods were then compared in order to validate themes and in this way triangulation was achieved.

3.5.5.2 *Audit Trail*

The audit trail provides documentation of the decisions and descriptions of the research process, with particular attention paid to the collection and analysis of data (Merriam, 2009). The audit trail is a "running record of your interactions with the data as you engage in analysis and interpretation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). Chapters 3 and 4 serve as an audit trail for this study, as the research process, data collection and analysis is described in detail. Furthermore, evidence of the data is documented in the form of tables and quotations and is supported by the attached addenda which further explain the actions taken during the research process.

3.5.5.3 *Peer Examination*

Merriam (2009) states that peer review and examination serve as a data verification strategy as it provides the researcher with the opportunity to receive feedback from others in the form of different perspectives, as well as suggestions on areas of strength or weakness. This research study was

conducted and completed with supervision, as it is a component of a Masters' degree. Furthermore, the final product will be reviewed by an external examiner. Therefore peer review and examination form part of this study's verification process.

3.5.5.4 Reflexivity

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that the researcher is a central figure in the research process, as each researcher brings his or her own personal history and worldview to the process, thereby influencing it. The researcher needs to reflect on his or her own beliefs and assumptions and consider how these may influence the research process, as well as his or her interpretation of the findings. In order to show reflexivity, the researcher has discussed her position and beliefs where relevant in this research report (see chapter five, section 5.6).

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical research principles form a crucial part of social science research. Ethics can be defined as a set of moral principles which offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most appropriate behaviour towards research participants (Strydom, 2005). It is important that research operates within clearly defined ethical guidelines in order to ensure the protection of both the participants and the researchers. The ethical principles applicable to the present research study are discussed below.

One of the fundamental guidelines when conducting research is that of institutional approval. This entails gaining the consent of the institutions involved (Department of Health, 2006). Obtaining institutional approval was one of the first steps taken in this study. The researcher applied for permission to conduct research at Stellenbosch University from the director of Institutional Research and Planning at Stellenbosch University (see Addendum I). Permission was granted by Professor Jan Botha with the condition that the researcher contact the Dean of Students, Dr Llewellyn MacMaster. The researcher contacted the Dean of Students telephonically to secure approval from him. Thereafter the researcher contacted the chairperson of the Lesbigay Society, to secure approval and participation from its members. Clearance for the research study was also sought from the Ethical Committee of the Division of Research Development of Stellenbosch University to ensure that ethical guidelines were adhered to. Ethical clearance was obtained and this study was given the clearance number 481/2010. The ethical clearance form is attached as Addendum A.

The second issue taken into consideration was that of informed consent. Informed consent is based upon the ethical principle of autonomy. Autonomy refers to a person's ability to make his/her own decisions provided that these do not harm others (Allan, 2008). Thus, the research participant has the right to any information which is necessary to make a decision about his or her involvement in the research. For this to be achieved, the participants must be informed as to the extent and nature of both the research and their involvement in the research and this must be explained to them in an accurate and understandable manner. The principle of informed consent was achieved in three ways. Firstly, all of the participants volunteered to take part in the research and none were forced or coerced to do so. Secondly, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Thirdly, all of the participants were fully informed of the nature of the research, the possible risks and benefits, the time constraints and what their rights were. This was done on two separate occasions, once via electronic correspondence (see Addendum D) that explained the research to all potential participants and a second time before each interview. At that point each participant was given a form to sign to indicate that they had been informed of their rights and that their participation was completely voluntary (see Addendum E).

The third ethical consideration, which is based on the principle of autonomy, is that of confidentiality (Allan, 2008). Confidentiality rests on the participant's right to privacy. This means that care must be taken to protect the participant's or organisation's identity. Efforts were made to protect the identities of the individual participants involved by allocating a numbered code to each, i.e. P1. In this way the researcher ensured that the participants remained anonymous. Furthermore, the names of anyone else who was mentioned was changed into a descriptive form, so as not to identify the person, i.e. the name of one participant's girlfriend was changed to "girlfriend". It is also the researcher's responsibility to explain to the participants if disclosure of information will take place and how this will happen. Confidentiality and disclosure were explained to the participants both verbally, in the letter of information, and in the informed consent form. Furthermore, the raw data was only handled by the researcher and checked by her supervisor, thus further safeguarding the identity of those involved.

For the purpose of this study, opportunity for debriefing sessions followed immediately after the interview session in every case. This allowed the participants to discuss their feelings about the interview; and also allowed the researcher to rectify any misperceptions that may have arisen in their minds. Since this study involved a sensitive investigation, the researcher was constantly aware of her ethical responsibility towards her participants. However, the researcher must acknowledge

that one cannot foresee all consequences. Issues raised in the study, might prove to be emotionally sensitive to the participants in a way that the researcher could not anticipate. Care was taken to monitor the emotional state of the participants for any discomfort or negative reactions that might require attention. The researcher did this by paying particular attention to the non-verbal body language of the participants and by verbally checking whether they were content to continue. Discomfort did occur upon one occasion; however, the participant was already in private therapy and able to receive the necessary support. The researcher was prepared to refer participants for individual counselling with a professional experienced in this area, should the need have arisen.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a detailed discussion of the research paradigm, design and methodology of this study. In addition to this, the data verification and ethical considerations made in this study were discussed. The following chapter presents the findings of this study with direct reference to the data itself.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of disclosure during adolescence. In this chapter the findings of this study are presented and discussed according to the main themes and subthemes that emerged during the study. These findings were interpreted in terms of existing literature in answer to the research questions.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS, SETTING AND PROCEDURE

It is important to note that, for the purpose of this research study, the term youth refers to a young person who is between 15 and 26 years of age. When the term youth is italicised, i.e. *youth*, this refers to the actual participants of this research study who were between the ages of 20 and 26 years and had disclosed during adolescence (see section 1.10.8). As discussed in sections 1.8.2 and 3.4.1, the participants were purposefully sampled youth from a support society for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth at a university in the Western Cape. The participants were selected in order to fulfil certain criteria: females or males who were no older than 26 years of age, who disclosed their alternative sexual orientation to at least one member of their family between the ages of 13 and 18 who live within the Western Cape. The biographical details of the participants can be viewed in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Biographical details of research participants

	Age	Sex	Sexual Identification	Race	Religion	First Language	Social class	Community size
P1	22	Male	Gay	White	Spiritual	Afrikaans	Upper middle	Small city/suburbs
P2	24	Male	Gay	White	Christian	English/Afrikaans	Upper middle	Farm/small town
P3	26	Female	Lesbian	White	Raised Christian but now spiritual	English	Middle	Large city/urban
P4	21	Female	Lesbian	Asian	No religion	English	Middle	Small city/suburbs
P5	25	Female	Lesbian	White	Christian	Afrikaans	Lower middle	Small city/suburbs
P6	23	Female	Lesbian	White	Christian/difficult	Afrikaans	Lower middle	Small city/suburbs
P7	26	Female	Lesbian	White	Christian	Afrikaans	Middle	Farm/small town
P8	20	Male	Gay	White	No religion	English	Middle	Small city/suburbs
P9	26	Male	Gay	White	Christian/clash	English	Upper middle	Large city/urban
P10	26	Male	Gay	Black	Raised Christian but now spiritual	Sotho/English	Middle	Large city/urban

Data gathering took the form of 10 semi-structured individual interviews, as well as reflective notes. These interviews took place within the participants' homes so as to ensure their privacy. As discussed in section 3.6, the names of the participants have been replaced by a numbered code to protect their right to privacy and anonymity. The codes for the participants in the interviews are composed of a 'P' for participant, followed by the number of the interview in which they took part. For example, when referring to the participant in the first individual interview, the code 'P1' is used. In each transcript the interviewer is always referred to as 'I'. When the interviewer is quoted, she is referred to according to the interview she is quoted from. For example, if the interviewer is quoted from the second interview she is referred to as 'I2'. In addition any information that could possibly threaten a participant's anonymity, such as the names of his/her friends or family, has been deleted

from the transcripts and replaced with a descriptive term encased in round brackets. This can be seen in the example transcript that has been included as Addendum F.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THEMES

The data generated from this study are presented through the themes that emerged from the study. These are the aspects that the participants were found to express most frequently during the analysis of the coded transcripts of the individual interviews and reflective notes. These themes demonstrate how the meaning of disclosure was constructed by the participants. Of particular interest were the themes pertaining to the process of coming out; strategies used to preserve an outward appearance of heterosexuality; strategies used to cope with same-sex attractions; reasons for and against disclosure; parental reactions; the issue of belonging; additional stressors; strategies to support someone coming out; issues to be aware of within the "gay" community. In this section, each of these themes is discussed in depth with particular reference to how the themes were expressed by the participants themselves. Quotations from the individual interview and reflective note transcripts are used throughout this section to illustrate and support this study's findings. A summary of the themes and sub-themes which emerged during the data analysis is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Presentation of themes and subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. The process of coming out	Feeling different Awareness of same-sex attraction Finding the label Disclosure to self and others Sexual orientation is not a choice Sexual orientation as a definition of self
2. Strategies used to preserve an outward appearance of heterosexuality	Denial to family and friends Hiding and monitoring behaviour of self Trying to prove heterosexuality by dating other-sex individuals
3. Strategies used to cope with same-sex attractions	Rationalisation Praying and wishing for change Minimise, mask and banish thoughts of same-sex attractions

Themes	Sub-themes
4. Reasons for and against coming out	Reasons for coming out Reasons against coming out
5. Making plans for survival	
6. Parental reactions	Parental reactions Hoped for reactions
7. The issue of belonging	
8. Additional stressors	Suicide ideation and attempt Bullying and victimisation Stunted social development
9. Strategies to support someone coming out	
10. Issues to be aware of within the "gay" community	Homophobia within the gay community Sexual exploitation

4.3.1 The process of coming out

According to the literature reviewed in section 2.3, there appears to be a process through which individuals recognise their alternative sexual orientation. Early lesbian and gay identity development models, namely Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989), proposed a fairly standard sequence of events, typically moving from lack of awareness of sexual orientation to a dawning awareness (often accompanied by negative feelings) to self-affirmation, immersion in the lesbian or gay community and disclosure of sexual orientation. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) pointed out that membership in a minority community may not occur at predictable times with reference to the self-awareness tasks of identity development. They proposed two distinct processes: one related to individual discovery and self-labelling (individual identity) and the other involving affiliation within a minority community (group membership). Rosario et al. (2001) went a step further, suggesting that identity development is a multidimensional process that encompasses sexual identity; attitudes toward homosexuality; comfort with homosexuality; self-disclosure; and involvement in lesbian and gay communities. This study's findings confirmed that coming out is viewed as a process, somewhat similar to the identity development models of Cass (1996) and Troiden (1989), however, it would appear that lesbian and gay identity development is also a continuous and emergent life process that is context dependent.

One aspect that was continuously referred to by the participants was that disclosure is viewed as a process. P3 felt that "coming out is the first step. There are lots of processes that happen before and after that with regards to finding your own identity and being ok with yourself in this new space." She mentioned further that "I have to 'come out' at some point during the process of getting to know anyone I wish to know as more than a mere acquaintance". Another participant said that "coming out is a process and there are different challenges as you go along" (P10). Another participant distinguished between the process of coming out and the continuous process of living a homosexual life, "coming out is filled with steps, its the easy part, continuing to be gay, living your life as a gay woman that is the difficult part ... to be gay is actually much more difficult" (P4).

This study's findings revealed that all participants experienced an inner processing of their homosexuality. This process, which is congruent with Brown's (2002) findings, included becoming aware of feeling different, self-labelling their same-sex attraction and applying meaning to their feelings or experiences. What follows is a brief summary of the coming out process as told by the participants.

4.3.1.1 Feeling different

The majority, eight of the ten participants, described a keen awareness of feeling different during early childhood and throughout. P2 felt "I had an awareness of doing things differently, certainly in the way I dressed and the kind of games that I enjoyed playing, these were atypical for a girl. I didn't want to play the part of the mommy, I wanted to be out exploring or looking for berries and I always resented that we had to play with the dolls. I always wanted to play cowboy, these parts were more fun than playing with dolls." She described a further scene that made an impact on her early development: "I remember one time wanting to play some game with a boy at nursery school, it was a rough game and the teacher picked me up by the arm and scolded me for playing like that, I should be playing with the girls and she moved me to play with the girls and I remember feeling so humiliated and acknowledging to myself that if I don't want that to happen again, I better not behave like that." This experience was unpleasant for her and remained a vivid memory that shaped her conduct throughout her life: "I was reminded that is how I should be playing and throughout my school career, I remember people saying things, when I did things or said things. I remember being told that I would make such a great guy and I absolutely reeled from that comment thinking no, how could he say that, I am a girl and whatever it was that I did I must never do that again."

The female participants on the whole expressed similar thoughts, and four described themselves as "tomboys". P5 felt that she was different from other girls: "I just felt like I am not like all the other girls, sometimes I wished I was boy, not because I wanted to be a boy it was because then I could have acted on my feelings." P4 remembered that she had a continuous struggle in clothing choice: "[T]hey tried to make me wear girls' clothes." While her parents thought of her as a tomboy and even made the odd remark, overall she felt they thought nothing of it: "[M]y mom did sometimes insult me by calling me a lesbian but I didn't know what that was at the time but they didn't really make much of it." P3 expressed a similar sentiment in that her parents were not alerted to her impending "gaydom": "[T]here was an actual photo I found of the three of us and my sisters were dressed as little bo-peep and a fairy and I wanted to be a pirate and I look at that photo now and I think it is funny but how did my parents not know." Other participants felt that their parents, or more often their mother, had a suspicion. P8 said he felt that his mother had always known: "I've always known she has known ...". He mentioned that, since grade one, he had been called 'gay' by other children: "[F]rom grade one even before I knew it, I was already being called gay, I didn't even know what it meant. I know it wasn't every boy, it was me and another boy and he also turned out to be gay so I don't know if children know if someone is different from a young age. I was different, I was softer." P10 stated that he also felt different from a very young age: "[T]here was a difference, everyone always said that I was momma's boy and I was. When we moved to the suburbs everyone said 'oh you think you are white so you act differently', so nobody could pick up exactly how I was different." He remembers how he preferred "playing with the girls", or doing things with his mother in the house as opposed to in the garden with his father and this caused his father some alarm, "I think that is the first time my dad started suspecting, um, pushing me away or being harder on me ... so my dad was a little hostile towards me at times because of my softer traits." The findings of this study resonate with that of the literature reviewed in section 2.3 as sexual identity development models propose that individuals begin to experience themselves as different from same-sex others before puberty, however, they do not yet attribute this difference to sexuality (Cass, 1996). Table 4.3 contains the participants' responses regarding their experiences of early childhood.

Table 4.3: Participants experiences prior to self-disclosure

	Subtheme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Participant experience	Feeling different	*	*	*	*	*		*	*		*
	Attracted to other-sex roles or games in childhood	*		*	*	*		*	*		*
	Parent(s) noticed child was different to other same-sex children	*	*	*		*			*	*	*
	Parent(s) had suspicion of homosexuality in their child	*				*			*	*	*

4.3.1.2 Awareness of same-sex attraction

The majority of the participants (eight of ten) could vividly remember an awareness of same-sex attraction and desire. The literature reviewed in section 2.3 mentions that awareness is often a precursor to self-identifying as lesbian or gay. Over time, one begins to tentatively identify sexuality as the source of the perceived difference, which leads to a recognition that different sexual orientations/identities exist. (Cass, 1996; Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Troiden, 1989; Sophie, 1986).

"Looking back I can remember as far back as eight years old, I remember an attraction to girls, it was not a sexual attraction but I guess looking back on it now maybe the beginning of my 'gaydom'" (P3). Another participant said that she felt her first attraction to a girl at the age of ten: "I was ten and I started feeling an attraction to this one specific girl who I thought I was in love with. When I realized that I had feelings for a girl it came to me as a shock and I really didn't know what it meant" (P5). P8 could remember feeling this attraction in preschool, "when we were allowed free time I would always choose to draw and I used to draw boys, blonde hair, blue eyes, rosy cheeks every single time and I used to bring the picture home to my mom of the boy with blonde hair, blue eyes and rosy cheeks. I tried to push those feelings aside but they started bubbling up again at the age of 13". The participant attributed his drawings to an attraction to blonde boys with blue eyes. P9 could not clearly remember his first awareness of same-sex attraction; however, he remembered that he was keenly attracted to men from the age of ten: "[F]rom when I was ten, I looked at guys more than girls, I appreciated a beautiful woman, if she was nicely dressed, her appearance, but I found men attractive." P10 can remember feeling attracted to boys from the age of eight years: "We would

play 'house house' and I was the mommy and I remember being very comfortable with that. Every-time we played that game I would end up playing that role and having that feeling when I was pretending to sleep, lying next to a boy, I felt an attraction."

4.3.1.3 Finding the label

P4: "I grew up thinking, I am attracted to girls, I always prefer playing boys' games, when we were small and played 'bride and groom', I was always the groom and I preferred boys' games than playing Barbie and I dressed like a boy. I really thought I was a boy and that maybe I was trapped inside a girl's body, I didn't know that it was called being 'gay'." P5 mentioned that, after her initial realisation and confusion over her attraction to girls at the age of ten, that "later on when I heard the word lesbian or gay, when I could put a word to it by that stage I knew". The majority of the participants described initial confusion regarding their same-sex attractions and desires as identified within the stage models and trajectories of sexual identity development discussed in section 2.3. The participants in this study also described how joyous they felt upon finally identifying as homosexual: "I was excited by the fact that I had discovered who I really was and made peace with it. I was filled with this overwhelming sense of joy" (P1). P4 mentioned that it brought greater clarity to her: "[I]t was like 'oh my gosh' now I realize why I thought I was a guy, why I pretended I was a guy, things started to make sense, it was like an epiphany, I am not really a guy, now I don't need to go for sex surgery. I am a woman, a woman and being lesbian is perfectly ok." These findings are congruent with the literature reviewed in section 2.3.

4.3.1.4 Disclosure to self and others

From the literature reviewed in sections 2.3.3 and 2.4.7 it appears that the average age of awareness and coming out is somewhat different to what it was at the time of earlier studies (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007; D'Augelli, 2006). Firstly, the age at which individuals become aware of same-sex feelings and first identify as homosexual appears to be considerably younger among contemporary adolescents than among previous cohorts. Studies reveal that youth report being aware of their same-sex feelings at about age ten (Savin-Williams, 2005). The average age of self-labelling for a contemporary adolescent cohort is 16 for females and 15.5 for males. First disclosure of sexual orientation for both female and male youths is 17 years, although some report this occurring as young as age ten and as old as age 21 (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005).

In this study, the age of awareness of same-sex attraction fell between the ages of six and ten years, with two participants noting awareness at the age of six years, two noting awareness at the age of eight years, four participants at the age of ten years and two could not recall their age. The age of disclosure to self or self-labelling falls between 15 and 17 years of age for the majority of the participants, with one participant self-labelling at the very young age of 11 years, two at the age of 15 years, four at the age of 16 years and two at the age of 17 years. The age of first disclosure occurred between 14 and 18 years of age, one participant disclosed at the age of 14, three participants disclosed at the age of 16, three at the age of 17 and three at the age of 18. As discussed above, this study's findings are similar to those of previous studies reviewed in sections 2.3.3 and 2.4.7. However, the findings in this study suggest that the adolescents were aware of same-sex attractions at an earlier age than those within the literature review.

4.3.1.5 Sexual orientation is not a choice

All of the participants felt strongly that their sexual orientation was not a choice. They all stated that they did not choose to be this way as they were keenly aware that this was not the norm. They made convincing arguments towards this point. P3 had this to say in answer to the question: "What would you have liked your parents to have done differently or known?" (I3). "Don't think that I woke up this morning and thought ok I will be gay today, its not like that and don't make it seem like it is, its not a choice because there are so many easier things to do" (P3). She believed very strongly that gay people who are out should talk about their experiences. She said: "There are misconceptions about being gay that need to be cleared up and that can only happen if gay people are out and there is more information available to help people understand that being gay is not a choice." P5 felt that "a lot of people think that it is a choice that you make, that one day you just decide that you are going to be gay, that it is a switch but it is not, it is not like that. I believe that you are born gay. What ten year old do you know who would make that choice?" P6 echoed her feelings: "I don't think it is a sin, like God planned your path, he planned my path, He knew that this was going to happen to me and that people get born this way, why would I choose this?" P8 mentioned that "I became resentful because I thought if he (father) doesn't accept me, that is fine but now when you come out and they try to change you, and you feel well, this is difficult enough as it is and you are now trying to change me and obviously it is not a choice". The finding that many of the participants' parents believed that homosexuality is a choice begs the question how the majority of society views homosexuality? What might this view mean to an adolescent who is questioning his/her sexual orientation?

4.3.1.6 *Sexual orientation as a definition of self*

A theme that consistently emerged from this research is that the *youth* do not view their sexual orientation as the single defining factor of their identity. The participants of this study expressed sentiments such as "I do not want to be defined by my sexuality" (P2); "It is a huge part of me but not all of me" (P4); "It is a part of me but it is not me as a whole" (P8). The latter participant felt that there is no one thing that makes a person who they are but rather a "whole collection of things". P10 mentioned that "I am not a one dimensional being. I don't think of people in terms of straight or gay as there is more to you as there is to me. I felt as if I had to tell people after I came out and during my coming out, I wanted to tell people. I wanted them to know but there is more to me than my sexuality". P1 elaborated further, "I would not say being gay defines who I am because to a large extent I am just a normal guy who does normal guy things and sometimes I am queer and sometimes I am a puffer and sometimes I am gay but generally I am myself, I am just normal". (P1) The specific issue of identity development amongst contemporary adolescents was discussed in section 2.3.8. The literature suggested that, as adolescents with same sex attractions become increasingly more visible to themselves and to others, their desire to name their sexual orientation is waning. Studies reveal that adolescents might use "the gay word" as a shorthand form for describing their attractions, but "implicit in this usage is a rejection of gay as an identity" (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 16). The argument put forth by Savin-Williams (2005) resonates with this study's findings.

The participants also expressed the sentiment that they did not like the terms "lesbian", "gay" or "homosexual", however, several have come to embrace these terms and own them. P5 mentioned that, in the beginning, she hated the word 'lesbian' as to her it sounded like such an ugly word "but I don't mind it now. I think that it was the way that people used it, what it stood for that bothered me". P3 echoed this sentiment: "I don't mind the term lesbian any more. I actually embrace it. I used to hate the term. This was a process which happened after I came out. There was a time just after I came out when I believed that people must think 'Oh that's (name) the lesbian' and I felt strange about that. This feeling has faded though. Our society categorizes interactions on a daily basis. You're either single or seeing someone, married or not married or divorced. Relationships define us. I have to 'come out' at some point during the process of getting to know anyone I wish to know as more than a mere acquaintance. Once you come out, it categorizes you. I don't think being a lesbian defines me but being a lesbian defines how I am placed in society". The participants' opinions remind clinicians that it is important to recognise that lesbian, gay and bisexual clients' difficulties

are not necessarily intrinsic to their sexual orientation. Instead, their difficulties may arise as a result of society's negative reactions to alternative sexual orientations (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004).

4.3.2 Strategies used to preserve an outward appearance of heterosexuality

Sexual minority youth employ a variety of strategies to preserve the outward appearance of heterosexuality. The literature reviewed in section 2.3.6 suggests that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth who utilise such strategies live with an ever-present fear that their clothing, speech, postures, interests, friends and demeanour may reveal a gay or lesbian identity. The strategies adopted to preserve an outward appearance of heterosexuality by participants in this study are discussed below.

4.3.2.1 Denial to family and friends

Several of the participants made use of denial as a strategy to preserve the appearance of heterosexuality with their family members. The participants mentioned that they frequently made use of this strategy by saying it is just a phase or lying about their orientation when confronted by family. P1 told his parents that it was just a phase after they found incriminating evidence in his bedroom, as did P9. P5 mentioned that she felt as if her mother had always had a suspicion and, when asked, she "had always denied it until she found a letter that I wrote to a girl". This experience was echoed by P6 and P7 who frequently denied their attraction to same-sex individuals until letters and same-sex sexual activity were witnessed by their mothers.

4.3.2.2 Hiding and monitoring behaviour of self

Many of the participants expressed a need to conceal their sexual identities by hiding and monitoring their behaviour. P2: "I think that a lot of gay boys are watchful of young boys and young girls from a young age, they are so busy watching everybody else so as to be aware of what traits they need to hide in themselves." He elaborated further: "I remember doing voice control, you know you train your voice to sound deeper because naturally I have a nasal twang in my voice, I was always aware of my voice and I tried to, to pass as heterosexual, I had voice control, there was a way to stand, I remember watching the way straight boys stood. In retrospect I have been doing that for years, I have been watching people ... the thought process I had all the time of quickly you need to make this change, when you realize something is amiss, quickly change or quickly do this". P3 felt similarly: "I remember just reeling from that comment and thinking no, how could he say that ... and whatever it was I did I must never do that again and making a concise decision to act differently so that people would say '(Name) is such a lady, (Name) is such a lady'."

4.3.2.3 *Trying to prove heterosexuality by dating other-sex individuals*

Dating other-sex individuals was cited by several participants as a strategy used, not only to prove their heterosexuality but to simultaneously please their parents and to "make sure" of their same-sex attractions (P2). P10 remembers that, when he tried to get a girlfriend, "it was with the premise that now I need to get a girlfriend so that nobody will suspect that I am gay". P6 mentioned that "I tried to be the daughter that she wanted me to be. I tried to date guys but I found that I couldn't because I was constantly thinking about this one girl ... I could not force myself to like a guy". P8 remembers making the concise decision "to act as straight as possible, be as straight as possible, have girlfriends just to make others happy ... it is almost like hiding but it is more hiding from the truth ...". P5 said, "when I was ten I felt that first attraction to a girl and I was 16 when I kissed a girl for the first time but then I had never really kissed a guy or anything so I didn't know, I couldn't really say for sure".

4.3.3 *Strategies used to cope with same-sex attractions*

Due to socialisation in a heterosexual society and the subsequent isolation and accompaniment of negative feelings, it is likely that sexual minority adolescents experience such difference as unacceptable, which often results in psychological and behavioural difficulties (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002), as discussed in section 2.3.5. In addition to the use of strategies to preserve an outward appearance of heterosexuality, it is evident that several of the participants made use of other strategies to cope with their same-sex attractions. These findings, as are those expressed in section 4.3.2, are in accordance with those discussed in the literature reviewed in section 2.3.

4.3.3.1 *Rationalisation*

P3 mentioned that, in order to cope with her same-sex attraction, she "actively created a twin brother" and "whenever I liked a girl or admired a girl, I would think to myself if I had a twin brother he would like her". She explains that she did this as a way to "accept" her thoughts and feelings towards women as "I was so aware that I shouldn't have these feelings because those people do that, people who come from bad homes do that, it doesn't happen in my neighbourhood". P4 remembers thinking "when I first realized that I liked girls that is when I thought maybe I am a guy trapped inside a woman's body and I am attracted to girls. That was my way to explain it, in order to be with a girl I had to become a boy. So that is why I started dressing up like a boy and behaving like one". She further mentioned that she had an elaborate fantasy about growing a penis

each time her period arrived: "I thought I was a heterosexual guy trapped inside a girls body until I hit puberty, my boobs started growing and my period came ... I would go to sleep praying that my penis would grow out of my vagina, and when there was blood then I would think its coming and the blood is because of my penis growing out of my vagina and I am actually going to be a full grown man and I can start dating women and this is when I realized that I was. Well, I had never met a lesbian before, my parents spoke badly about lesbians and gays and the lesbians I saw were all manly and butch, short hair and they didn't look after themselves and that wasn't me. When you are raised up in a family where they tell you that it is not ok to be anything else, you know, you try to create." P2 struggled to accept himself even after his disclosure: "I thought at least you (sister) wake up everyday knowing that there is a possibility for love. I wake up every morning knowing that a) chances of me finding love are slim and b) even if it presents itself I am going to turn it away. Its soul destroying." It is evident from these participants' accounts that there exists a level of internalised homophobia. In what way can those in the mental health profession serve to normalise the experience of alternative sexual orientation identity development?

4.3.3.2 *Praying and wishing for change*

It would appear from the *youths'* account that they struggled to accept themselves and several turned to prayer in their hopes for change. P2 described a process of praying every night that his same-sex attraction would change: "[E]very night when I said my prayers, I would start ... please help me not to think bad thoughts and please help me not to be gay" After six years he was able to establish that this would never change. P3 described herself as religious in high school and "that feeling attractions for women was something I often challenged God on in prayer before I eventually told my parents, because if this is it, please can You change it. So when people tell me its a choice I really get upset because I feel as if I have explored all avenues regarding trying to change it".

4.3.3.3 *Minimize, mask and banish thoughts of same-sex attractions*

The participants in this study said that they often attempted to minimise, mask or banish thoughts about same-sex individuals. P3 stated, "I was analyzing why I thought about this girl so much and for a flash I thought, maybe I am a lesbian and then I argued it away, no I can't be a lesbian, minimized those thoughts ...". P2 mentioned that, in order "to fool myself when masturbating I would always include a woman in my fantasies, even though she wouldn't really have any role, she didn't have any role to play in it but just to make it ok". P7 said that "when I admired a woman and

realized, immediately I would banish it". P8 mentioned that he "tried to push those feelings aside and they started bubbling up again at the age of 13".

4.3.4 Reasons for and against coming out

Reasons for and against coming out are not well understood, although fear of negative reactions is often speculated as a reason to delay coming out to parents (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

4.3.4.1 Reasons for coming out

Research reports that the most common reasons for disclosure were desires to share one's life, to end concealment, to gain more freedom and to increase intimacy with parents; other common reasons include "being honest, not to hide, not to live a lie," sharing happiness and standing up as a person (Ben-Ari, 1995, p. 104). The findings in this study are consistent with those in the literature reviewed in section 2.3.4. Participants in this study most often cited, as reasons for disclosing, a desire to share their lives, to be honest to self and others, to share their happiness, catalyst event/end concealment, and because a family member asked.

P1 said, "I was excited by the fact that I had discovered who I really was and made peace with it. I was filled with this overwhelming sense of joy and I wanted to share my excitement and my joy with them (friends)." He described the same feeling of joy upon discovering who he was as did P4. However, he attributed disclosing to his friends as a way to share his joy and happiness at discovering who he was while she disclosed her lesbian status to her friendship group in an attempt to attract a girlfriend. P1 and P4's reasons for disclosing to their family were similar and yet distinctly different. P1's reasons for disclosing to his family were due to a catalyst event, "that day I knew, no ways, no ways am I going to continue like this. The next day I told her. Another big contributing factor was that I wanted my parents to know me, in a way I did it to save my relationship with my parents as well". P3 stated that, among her reasons for coming out, was to legitimise her relationship: "[I]t was my relationship, the relationship with my first girlfriend, as much as I was still scared I wanted them to know because it just felt so right and so normal. I decided that I would tell them, it also made the relationship legitimate in the eyes of the family and I always wanted my family to know and be involved in my life and I didn't want to hide things from them."

For the majority of the participants the decision to disclose was made after a confrontation by a family member. P5: "[S]he found a letter that I wrote to a girl and after she found it I couldn't deny

it anymore." P6: "[M]y mother often found letters that I had written to (girlfriend) or she had written to me and I kept on denying it but that day at the hospital my mother asked me 'are you gay or aren't you?'" P7 said, "she caught me kissing a girl", P9: "[M]y mother found incriminating evidence on my laptop and she asked 'why do you have these pictures?'" These participants also attributed their disclosure to reasons other than direct questioning by a family member, such as "I wanted my parents to know me" (P5), "to stop the lying" (P6), "to legitimise my relationship" (P9). The responses summarising the participants' reasons for coming out can be viewed in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: Participants' reasons for coming out

Reason for coming out	Sub-theme	P1 (m)	P2 (m)	P3 (f)	P4 (f)	P5 (f)	P6 (f)	P7 (f)	P8 (m)	P9 (m)	P10 (m)
To parents	There was a catalyst/end concealment	*	*	*	*		*		*		
	To be honest to self and others			*		*	*			*	*
	I wanted my parents to know me	*	*	*	*	*				*	*
	Family member asked after finding evidence of or witnessing same-sex activity					*	*	*		*	*
	Parent asked a sibling		*					*			
	To release the pressure	*		*			*			*	
	Legitimise my relationship			*	*					*	
	I felt confused and sought advice			*					*	*	*
	Being angry/I just had to	*	*								
Other reasons	Share my excitement and joy at discovering who I really was	*			*					*	
	Stop living a lie						*				
	I needed to tell someone								*	*	

4.3.4.2 Reasons against coming out

Reason against coming out	Subtheme	P1 (m)	P2 (m)	P3 (f)	P4 (f)	P5 (f)	P6 (f)	P7 (f)	P8 (m)	P9 (m)	P10 (m)
To parents	Religious values of family members	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*
	Fear of being cut off financially	*	*	*	*		*			*	
	Fear of being thrown out	*		*	*					*	
	Fear of verbal and/or physical abuse				*		*			*	
	Not wanting to hurt or disappoint parents		*	*		*	*		*	*	*
Other reasons	Fear of public ridicule and scorn		*				*	*		*	*

4.3.5 Making plans for your survival

As mentioned in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.4, frequent problems for lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are feelings of estrangement from their families, fear of discovery, loss of financial support and possible violence and expulsion (D'Augelli et al., 2005b). In this study it was found that the impact of these possibilities, as well as witnessing homophobia and/or hearing homophobic remarks caused the *youth* to begin to plan for his or her survival. P1 mentioned that financial implications were something that he considered before disclosing, however, "that was not going to stop me". P2 had a specific plan and date set for when he would disclose to his family, "I am going to wait until I am financially independent. I am going to wait until I have a degree behind my back and I know that I can survive but I ended up doing it earlier."

P3 mentioned "you are worried that you will be thrown out of your house which they (parents) seem to think is so ridiculous when you tell them afterwards, you know, how could you think we would possibly do something like that, but it seems like a reality when you listen to the things that people say because they are just thoughtless, it would make you think that. I literally started saving up money in case they did chuck me out ... you start to plan, I thought what must I do, must I move out first then they can't chuck me out, must I have this much money, must I go study but then it didn't work out that way." As mentioned in the literature reviewed in section 2.3.2, previous studies report that homosexual youth are exposed to erosive and derogatory comments made by their parents and family members before they disclose and these remarks, apart from damaging their self-

esteem, often lead to further concealment of their sexual orientation, and fear of rejection should family members find out, as experienced by P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 and P9. P3 described how leading up to her disclosure her mother had repeatedly made derogatory remarks about homosexual people and "how gay men deserved AIDS or something to that effect but my mother had never been anti-gay so I think that she started saying these things as a build-up, I suspect it was something she was aware of in me and by saying those things she was trying to avoid it in me". She also mentioned having an argument with her sister and her sister shouted at her, "go away you lesbian bitch". She expressed feeling pain at the remarks passed by her family regarding homosexuality in general and her homosexuality.

Even after the *youth* had disclosed their orientation to their family, homophobic remarks appeared to continue, as P2 remarked, "my mother still says 'you are going to be one of them' and I say what does that mean, what is one of them? She will ask me if I have made a friend and not say boyfriend or significant other while my father will ask if I have met someone special, which is enough for me, that makes me happy." P9 experiences similar difficulties with his mother, as she is unable to come to terms with his orientation and refused to acknowledge his orientation for several years, as well as his partner. He also reported that, as his father is very homophobic, he has made the decision not to disclose to him. "My dad is extremely homophobic, my dad would disown me and murder me if he were to find out. He made it clear to me once as he suspected it and he said to me, 'no son of mine will be gay, I would rather have him suffer on the streets than be part of my family'." He further recounted an event which transpired between him and his father: "[T]here was this story I remember once, we (family) were sitting at dinner with some family friends and I was present. One of his friends was telling a story about a guy in Greece at a village who found out his son was gay and because he was so ashamed he committed suicide. My dad turned and looked at me and said 'if I ever was to find out that my son was gay I would make sure that he dies, I would not die'." He disclosed that this and other experiences caused him to feel ashamed of his orientation, envious of others whose parents accept and support them and immense sadness. This study found that many of the participants' parents made disparaging remarks about homosexual orientations, which caused the participants to view their parents as non-supportive and to anticipate the probability that their parents would reject them, cease to support them financially and possibly expel them from the family home should their orientation be revealed.

P2 mentioned a gratifying experience when his father commented on how his perception of homosexuality had changed now that his son was gay: "[H]is friends would make a lot of

homophobic remarks and I remember once, after I had told him, they (parents) had come back from a holiday and they hadn't told any of their friends yet and he said 'it stings a little bit now when you are sitting on the other side of the table knowing that your own child is gay when they make those jokes!.' The following section discusses the findings regarding the parents' reactions to their child's disclosure. The information contained in this section differs from that in 4.3.6 as the *youth* mentioned that the planning stage was a preliminary process which they engaged in prior to disclosing to their parents.

4.3.6 Parental reactions

The literature discussed in section 2.3.4 shows that parental reactions to disclosure are often followed by emotional responses such as panic, shock, disappointment, anger and sadness. Earlier research demonstrated, to varying degrees, that reactions of parents were more likely to be negative than positive (Savin-Williams, 1998). The most common reactions ranged from extreme disruption to expulsion from the home. Recent studies report that youth may still experience rejection, expulsion from their home and/or verbal and physical abuse as a result of coming out to their parents. However, in most cases, the families are able to work through the initial turmoil and find ways to retain or even strengthen the family bond (Davis et al., 2009; D'Augelli et al., 2005b; Saltzburg, 2004). The reactions of parents as reported by the participants are discussed in this next section.

The first of these reactions is anger, shock and disappointment. Some of the participants stated that their parents reacted to their disclosure in anger with emotional outbursts, which were often followed by denial. P1 stated: "[M]y mom freaked out, that night she threw rocks (small pebbles) at me, she literally tried to attack me. She kicked me out of the house, she screamed and shouted." He stayed at his uncle's house for a few days while the family received counselling from a priest. He remembers that his mother increasingly denied his orientation while simultaneously attempting to persuade him to change his orientation. His mother's argument to the family priest during a counselling session was, "[W]ell, why didn't he just decide to keep this to himself, get married and have children and move on with his life." P1 was particularly displeased and hurt by her lack of understanding and support. He felt that she behaved in this manner because, "that one dream that she had for her only son has gone completely haywire and she doesn't know what to do, and that is scary to her".

P1 said that his stepfather was "the diplomatic one, he immediately dealt with the situation. If it wasn't for him she (mother) would have lost it because I couldn't stay there, he calmed her down and consoled her." After some time he moved back home and his mother behaved as if nothing had happened, "like this whole week had just been a blank". This period was short-lived as a few days later, upon discovering that he was with his homosexual friends, his mother once more "freaked out" and contacted his grandparents and biological father, who up until then were unaware of the situation. P1 said: "She basically told them that I was a queer and that I had run away from home and that in six months time I will be a drug addict and in a year's time I will die of AIDS."

P3 experienced a similar situation to P1 when she told her mother. Her mother did not attack her physically, instead she attacked her verbally and refused to accept her daughter's disclosure, "'[W]hat do you mean? You were normal at school, I used to be so proud of you' and she went on with a barrage of remarks like that for some time and I don't know how the conversation ended, I must have blocked it out but I had to leave the house because it wasn't possible for us to speak about it, there was no kind of effective communication." This continued for months, "there was this cold silence between my mother and I", until she decided to tell her father and "he looked at me and told me that he wished I had told them sooner as I could have saved myself a lot of heartache ... my dad's reaction was much more positive than my mom's. She was textbook bad and he was textbook good." Both these participants reported that, although their mothers reacted with anger and denial, their relationships are greatly improved. Over time their mothers have come to accept their sexual orientations and partners. P1 had this to say: "It was a 'morse' process, it was hectic and difficult. My mom has definitely, well, she has come to joke about it now, and she has realized that it is not the end of the world. I have chatted to her about my boyfriend and she calls him if I don't answer my phone because she usually knows that we will be together. She has met my boyfriends and my current partner spent Christmas with us." From the participants' accounts it appears that their parents go through a process of coming to terms with their child's disclosure.

As for other participants, they were made to suffer for their homosexual orientation, having financial allowances withheld, being denied access to lesbian and gay friends and coerced to change. P6 said that her mother forbade her from seeing other lesbian friends or girlfriends. P8 described how his father and step-mother decided that, in order to help him, he should visit a brothel at the age of 17, "they were sort of listening at the beginning and then I just remember my stepmom saying 'we are going to get a prostitute for you' ... I didn't think she was being serious. Then I was grounded, and I had to work in the garden and I wasn't allowed to see any of my friends

and my phone was taken away." He did not realise that his father and stepmother intended to follow through with their plan to arrange a prostitute. However, while waiting at an establishment he realised that his father had taken him to a brothel under false pretences. Once there, the manager of the establishment refused service to his father as P1 was under age. "I just sat there and pretended like I didn't know what was going on and my dad came back and said 'we have to leave, you are not allowed to be here'." P8 disclosed that this experience was humiliating, shaming and hurtful. This and the other narratives recounted below and in section 4.3.5 serve to illustrate the painful impact that parental homophobia has had on the lives of the participants.

Many participants said that either their mother or father, or both parents, were in complete denial and refused to accept their alternative sexual orientation. P4's mother threatened to disown her if she was a lesbian and has refused to accept her daughter's sexual orientation. P9 came out twice to his mother as she denied his orientation for several years. He first came out at the age of 16 and then again at the age of 21. P9 said: "When I told my mom it was very horrible because she never spoke about it, she wouldn't speak to me after that for two weeks, she was very cold and dismissive of me. I didn't know what she was thinking but she hurt me a lot. It was horrible, really really horrible and I regret telling her at that time. Then she lived in denial for many many years and when I was 21 I told her again." He described how he lived a separate life from his family during that time. He pretended to be something he was not; "[T]hat is when I had to make the decision to keep my life split between family, friends and who I am, who I really am, I had to do that the whole whole time."

Another reaction was disappointment, shock or grief followed by acceptance and support. Many of the participants said that their parents reacted with shock and disappointment, however, they were able to accept and be supportive of their sexual orientation. P5 said: "When I told her, she started crying and I said she mustn't cry because I am happy. She didn't really act differently towards me, she tried her best to accept me. I think that it was very difficult for her but she tried her best to accept it." P10 expressed a similar experience, "[S]he asked me if I was sure that I was gay, had I been involved, was I still thinking about it? I told her that I was sure that I was sexually attracted to guys and that I see myself as gay. And she said to me that I owe it to myself to find and discover a gay life. My mom was amazing, she was just amazing." Shortly afterwards, his mother mentioned that, although she did support him, she was disappointed thinking that she would never see his children. P10 could understand her feelings and was glad that their relationship enabled them to communicate so openly.

From the participants' accounts it would appear that some of their parents followed a process similar to that described in section 2.3.4. Parents often follow stages similar to those described by Kubler-Ross (1969): denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance after an adolescent's disclosure. While many may acknowledge their child's alternative orientation, few ever fully accept it (D'Augelli, 2006; Saltzburg, 2005). It appears that participants' mothers mostly react in negative ways, compared to fathers. This, at least, was the case for P1, P2, P3. However, for P8 and P10 this was not true as their fathers reacted extremely negatively compared to their mothers. For some participants, both father and mother revealed negative reactions. This was true for participants P4, P6, P7 and P9. It would appear from these accounts that the families do struggle to acknowledge, as well as accept, their child's alternative sexuality. The findings from this study reveal that parental responses to the fact that their child reveals an alternative sexual orientation cover the full range from negative to positive reactions. The responses summarising parents' reactions to disclosure can be viewed in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Parents' reactions to disclosure by sex of participant and parent

Reaction	Mother's reaction		Father's reaction	
	Gay	Lesbian	Gay	Lesbian
Anger, rejection, screaming	P1, P9	P4, P7		
Shock, grief and/or disappointment	P1, P2, P10	P5		
Guilt and/or self-blame	P2	P4, P6		
Denial, couldn't deal with it	P1, P2, P9		P8, P10	P6
Refusal to accept	P9	P3, P4, P6, P7		P4
Verbal and/or physical abuse	P1	P4, P6		
Kicked out of home/threatened to kick out	P1		P8, P9	
Accepting and supportive	P8, P10		P1, P2	P5, P3

4.3.7 The issue of belonging

Many with alternative sexual orientations have experienced a lack of affirmation and thus a lack of positive belonging, as mentioned in section 2.3.5. This void, for many, is their main source of pain and suffering. As told by the participants in this study, sources of pain issued from perceived and

actual experiences of rejection. As quoted earlier, P2 stated: "I thought at least you wake up everyday knowing that there is a possibility for love, for acceptance, I wake up every morning knowing that a) chances of me finding love are slim and b) even if it presents itself I am going to turn it away. It's soul destroying." He went on further to describe how he felt when he disclosed to one of his sisters: "[E]ven though I was telling my sister, I remember thinking, come on (name), you think about things a lot but there is so much accumulated fear that you can't even control your own body, I had no composure. We were in the car and there was no physical threat to me, there was no financial threat, she threatened me in no way whatsoever and yet that accumulative effect of fear of how people will respond or what the consequences will be still took over me. My jaw was quivering, I was on the verge of crying."

P3 said: "[I]t was only after meeting my first girlfriend that I was able to tell my parents and it is not that I even said the words, it took me a long time to say those words to feel comfortable saying 'I am gay', it took me years to feel comfortable saying 'I am a lesbian'. I think its those words. It was a struggle and I especially felt that it was compounded by religious views." P7 mentioned "my mother, along with my family and the bible confronted me". She said: "Everybody could say what they thought about the idea of me being gay, that it was wrong, a sin and I could say nothing. I felt worthless, humiliated. I will never tell them anything about it." She was not seen or heard by her family members and this has led her to conceal her lesbian identity even further. P8 experienced a similar confrontation with members of his family: "I felt like an outcast, I became very withdrawn and I felt excluded from the family." His father and stepmother have been unable to come to terms with his orientation, "at the end of matric my dad kicked me out, he said that he didn't want to see me or anything. I went to live with my mom and I came back here in 2010 to study but that also didn't work, my dad just ... asked me to leave a second time". It is important to consider how experiences such as these might influence the lives of adolescents. In what way is resiliency a factor in determining the positive development of alternative sexual orientation identity development and how can mental health practitioners facilitate this process?

4.3.8 Additional stressors

Past research indicates that sexual minority youth are at greater risk than their heterosexual counterparts for stress-related mental health disorders, such as depression, substance use and abuse, victimisation and suicide as a result of the stigma and prejudice that they face daily during a critical

phase of development (D'Augelli, 2006; Meyer, 2003). Some of the specific challenges which the participants voiced are discussed below.

4.3.8.1 *Suicide ideation and attempt*

Numerous studies support the view that sexual minority youth are an at risk group for suicide (D'Augelli, 2006). Past studies have found that these youth report conflict and rejection within family relationships and hostile school and peer environments. Among this study's participants, the majority reported undergoing suicide ideation more than once. These participants felt at one point that it would be easier to die than to continue living. "Maybe it is better to just die, it would be so much easier" (P9). P4 mentioned that she at one point "... didn't care if I died because if I did then I wouldn't be living with this pain". These participants attributed their suicide ideation to the fact that their "school community were not supportive and I did come up against prejudice, teachers and other kids teasing me and talking about my being gay. They didn't throw condoms in my face like they did to another guy but things like that and other little things can propel someone into becoming suicidal" (P4). She, P3 and P9 also felt that lack of support or someone to talk to can increase the risk of suicide.

Two participants in this study had attempted suicide; P8 mentioned that he did contemplate suicide many times and "even tried it one night. It was a scary experience but at the time I just thought that there was no point in living". Both these participants have difficult family relationships characterised by conflict and tension. While P8 has a healthy relationship with his mother, his alternative orientation has never been accepted by his father and he was "kicked out" of his father's home. P6 described her relationship with her mother as one that was conflict filled and often came to physical blows; "we never really had a mother and daughter bond as we were always fighting". One night she took an entire bottle of pain tablets "and another bottle of pills because I just couldn't handle it anymore, I couldn't handle this pain anymore". She, with the support of a psychologist, reasoned that her suicide attempt was her way of telling her mother "listen here, you are hurting me, just stop hurting me".

4.3.8.2 *Bullying and victimization*

A study by D'Augelli (2002) found that youths who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual during high school and who were gender atypical were targets for sexual orientation victimisation. Furthermore, male youth consistently tended to be victimised more often, leading to the conclusion

that gender is another factor related to youth's victimisation by others. The experience and impact of victimisation on the participants are discussed in this section.

Several of the participants mentioned that due to their sexual orientation they had experienced bullying or teasing at some point in their childhood and/or adolescent lives. P4 stated that she felt quite lucky: "I didn't have it as bad as other people who came out in high school ... people did speak badly about me to my friends behind my back but they stuck up for me. I was called 'dyke', 'lesbian' and 'rug muncher'." She added further that the teachers at her school made fun of her regularly; "they made fun of me all the time. I know they knew because I fell asleep in biology class and my teacher kicked my table and said to me 'have you been rug munching too much?'" P4 felt that it is experiences like this that can increase an adolescent's motivation to commit suicide. P8 was teased from his early childhood days by his peers; they would call him derogatory names. P10 experienced similar difficulties and was constantly persecuted because of being different. "People have had their say, they have called me mamma's boy or sissy boy, whatever else they could say, it hurt."

In addition to experiencing direct personal victimisation, many of the participants observed the victimisation of others like themselves. Such knowledge can have a powerful effect, such as increasing fear and inhibiting youths from expressing themselves (D'Augelli, 2002). Many of the participants directly witnessed other lesbian, gay or bisexual peers being victimised. P2 said, "I have watched other prejudice first hand. watching it makes you feel like a coward a) for not sticking up for that person and b) it lowers your sense of self-esteem because you know what other people think of that person and c) it makes your level of fear greater because you are worried they will respond to you in that way, it makes you want to hide it more. You have the feeling that you should be helping that person but you don't." The participants in this study experienced little support from important social institutions en route to their disclosure. It is important that those who work with youth do not assume that all young people in their care are heterosexual and begin to include messages that are uplifting and respectful towards sexual minority youth.

4.3.8.3 *Stunted social development*

The literature discussed in section 2.3.7 states that many lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents lag behind their peers with respect to social development for reasons attributed to societal constraints on sexual minorities and the extra time often required to establish an alternative sexual identity (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). While one's peers discuss the world of heterosexual relationships, lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents may either isolate themselves for fear of rejection or deny

their sexual orientation (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). The participants in this study voiced similar feelings to those presented in the findings discussed in section 2.3.7. P3 said, "[W]hen you have spent most of your adolescence actively surprising your identity instead of exploring it as teenagers usually do then it takes a while to find out who you are and what you want." P6 mentioned that, "it was difficult for me because during high school all of my friends were sleeping with their boyfriends and talking about relationships and sex and I didn't know how to do any of it". Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth often do not have the opportunity to establish dating relationships until a later age, compared to their heterosexual peers (Diamond, 2003). As a result, they may lack the appropriate skills necessary to succeed in many of their relationships. The participants experienced difficulties similar to those expressed in Diamond's (2003) study. P2 had this to say regarding his relationship skills: "I am super confident in every other area in my life but in this one, I was like a child, I wasn't any good at it, I made a lot of mistakes. The first guy I dated was long after I came out, and all this was new. At that stage I was a ball of emotions, angry, sad, a ball of emotions."

4.3.9 Strategies to support someone in the position of coming out

The participants suggested many strategies of support to others in the position of coming out. The majority of participants mentioned that it was helpful to have a good support network; to identify a positive role model; to accept yourself before disclosing to others; to be honest to self and others if you are not in danger; to do research about the topic of homosexuality as this will prepare you for questions; to thoroughly assess your situation and context before disclosing; to be aware that family members will need time to process your disclosure; to find a positive outlet for frustrations; to reflect upon your journey as you are bound to have shifted along your path and this knowledge will renew your hope.

The views expressed by many of the participants are summarised in this statement from P8: "[I]t is really difficult to say, I have given a lot of advice to different people, it depends entirely on the circumstances. I have one friend who doesn't want to come out because his dad is very homophobic, I have another friend who doesn't want to come out because his mom is very homophobic and I have another friend who doesn't want to come out because he is very close to his grandpa and he doesn't want to disappoint his grandpa, it really is different to each situation. I think if there were any advice, I would not necessarily say come out because it is not always the right thing to do in certain circumstances it may just make your life a lot harder than it already is and in others it might free things up more. I think assess your situation correctly, I think don't overlook things." The need

to access one's circumstances and make individual decisions based on context is echoed by the more contemporary sexual identity development trajectories of Fassinger and Miller (1996) and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) mentioned in section 2.3. This is in line with the contemporary view held by clinicians who caution sexual minority youth to appraise their situations before disclosing (Matthews, 2007).

Finally, P9 urged all adolescents to be aware that "you are not going to find the acceptance and love you are wanting from your family in a brief sexual encounter. I am cautioning adolescents to think it through because you might need your support base to return to if a relationship does not work. So don't destroy that family support base at age 16". The strategies offered by the participants as support to someone in the position of coming out are summarised in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7: Strategies to support someone coming out

Theme	Sub-theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Strategies to support one when disclosing	Support networks	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
	Good role models	*	*	*		*					*
	Individual, religious and/or family counselling	*			*		*			*	
	Believe in who you are	*		*	*						*
	Stand your ground	*			*		*	*			
	Accept yourself before disclosing	*	*	*						*	*
	Do not tell everyone in your school			*	*						
	Do not let your family find out via the grapevine	*	*					*			
	Do research or read up about this topic then you will be prepared to answer questions	*		*		*	*				*
	It helps to be understanding of your parents' issues - you can see they love you	*		*					*		
	Do not postpone telling if you are not in danger - be honest if you can	*		*		*	*		*		*
	Assess your situation and context	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
	Find a safe and healthy outlet for your emotions - Vent	*	*								
	Do not pretend to be fine; this will confuse your parents -share your feelings		*	*		*	*				
Reflect on your journey: you are bound to have shifted	*		*			*		*		*	

4.3.10 Hoped for reaction from parents

P9 felt strongly regarding this point, "I hoped that she would be accepting and understanding as a mother should be and want to protect me and my feelings." He further expressed a need to "know where I stand in their lives." He felt that it was vitally important for family members to stop pretending that "it doesn't exist" and to "acknowledge it, acknowledge me." He, as did several of the other participants, expressed a need to feel accepted and supported by family members. This support could be shown by way of curious and respectful questions about one's journey and significant others; by way of listening and treating one as a valued member of the family, "as an equal". P7. P2 wanted his mother to "ask me if I had a boyfriend or if I missed (Boyfriend)". He would have liked his mother to acknowledge his relationship and to offer emotional support once the relationship ended. Other participants mentioned that they hoped for open communication, and respect. P5 had hoped that her mother would be more respectful of her needs and not share her secret with her wider family. P3 would have liked her parents to show an interest and a willingness to engage in the topic: "I find there is a general lack of interest about homosexuality as a whole, you won't find my parents reading books about it but then again my friend's mother did, she read every book on the subject and talked to her about it." P2, P3, P4, P6 and P9 would have liked their parents to be more emotionally supportive of them. These participants reported that their parents' emotional unavailability was a hindrance in their journey of disclosure. Butler and Astbury (2005) offer an explanation for parents' lack of emotional support, indicating that this may not be an intentional homophobic act, but rather due to their inability to understand what it means for their child to be homosexual. The majority of the participants reported that they desired emotional support from their parents during their disclosure. P9 explained it this way: "If your parents could understand, then they would be in a better position to support their children, they play such an important role in your life and have an effect and influence on how you feel about yourself. Parents can have so much power over their children, they can destroy them so easily without even realizing that they are doing so." He revealed the pain that he had experienced when he further said, "it is so hard to be punished for something that you didn't choose, it is hard to hear them say you are going to hell or that is where AIDS comes from, from two men kissing, its hard". For a summary of all the participants' responses, please see Table 4.8

Table 4.8: Hoped for reactions from parents

Theme	Sub-theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Hoped for reaction from parent	To do some research about the topic	*	*								
	Keep communication open										
	Acceptance	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Sympathetic ear		*	*			*		*	*	
	To be treated as equal	*	*	*	*				*	*	
	To not be treated any differently					*		*			
	To have your relationships acknowledged			*	*						
	Ask questions and acknowledge my journey	*	*	*							
	Do not tell other family members	*					*		*		

4.3.11 Homophobia within the lesbian and gay community

A theme which seemed to be emerging from this research is that the gay and lesbian community houses a form of homophobia towards some members of its own community. P1, P2, P3, P8, P9 and P10 mentioned that homophobia is present within the gay and lesbian community. This sentiment is explained by P1: "I have a high pitched voice and I like wearing pink and sometimes I like painting my toenails and putting on mascara and (Gay Friend) will look at me and say 'look at you, look at you, you puffer fag, you are giving the gay community a bad name, just because you dress like a woman, just because you act like a woman, other people who are not gay look at us as a community and they classify me and you as being the same but actually you are much worse than I am!'" This statement led the researcher to question whether sentiments like these are not the cause of internalised homophobia as well as societal homophobia and a lack of social understanding. P8 had this to say: "[I]t classifies me as one particular person or stereotype and I won't go to gay pride because everyone dresses up and it is so stereotypical gay, in dresses, so I don't like this association because that is the way that people see you, they associate you with those dresses, and heels and drag queens, that stereotype." He further qualified his view with "I don't think that people

understand that gay is not just one set of people". The researcher tends to agree with his view and begs the question of how societies' idea of "gay" can change?

4.3.12 Sexual exploitation

A further, more alarming, theme that emerged from the male participants only in this study was that of sexual exploitation of younger, vulnerable and naive gay adolescents or youth by older more experienced gay men. P1, P2, P8 and P9 felt the need to offer a warning to adolescents about the dangers of sexual exploitation within the gay community. P9 said, "[I]t happens everyday, that is the reality. I have seen it countless times with the younger boys identifying themselves and coming out and most of them have problems with their parents and they try to escape that by going with someone else and they think that they will love them and it turns out wrong. A lot of them are prowled upon by the older guys. They are predators who prey upon the younger boys, who are unsure, and this is very concerning as they manipulate them and use them sexually and this is dangerous for a young person. You get these 40 or 50 year old men who are like 'oh fresh meat, what are we going to do, come here and I will look after you' and they want sexual favors and that can mess a young boy up psychologically as then it can become a way of life and they believe that this is the way that it is." The researcher was unable to find literature to support this. However, as it was mentioned consistently by the participants, the researcher deemed that it was necessary to report this and to encourage further research on this aspect.

4.4 CONCLUSION

It would appear that the youth follow a somewhat similar developmental trajectory in coming out; while certain milestones were systematically mentioned, these milestones do not always proceed in a linear fashion following definite stages. The *youth's* sexual identity development is dependent upon the individual's characteristics, the family's values and belief systems and the wider social context. Coming out to parents is a significant event in the life of both the homosexual *youth* and the family. Findings from this study indicate that most relationships between participants and their parents were strained immediately following the disclosure, and that a period of turmoil usually followed for most families. However, the relationship with both mother and father tended to improve over time and, in a few cases, these relationships became better than they had been prior to the disclosure. The *youth* offered strategies to support someone else in the position of coming out

and the majority felt that no advice could fit all. It was imperative that youth thoroughly assess the context in which they find themselves before disclosing.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a discussion on the findings of the study. The limitations and strengths of the study are discussed and possible future research is suggested. In addition, practice guidelines are suggested in terms of how mental health professionals can support lesbian and gay youth in coping with their coming out process. Throughout this chapter the term *youth* refers to the actual participants of this research study who disclosed during adolescence and who were between the ages of 20 and 26 years.

5.2 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study aimed to gain insight into the adolescents' experience of disclosure to members of his/her family. The primary research questions that this study sought to answer were:

- What are the reported experiences of youth who disclosed, during adolescence, to their family?
- Based on the above, what can be suggested as ways to support this process?

Several sub-questions were also included in the study:

- When did participants first realise they were not heterosexual?
- When did participants first disclose and to whom did they disclose?
- What were participants' reasons for and against disclosure?
- What were parents and sibling(s) reactions to disclosure?
- Have relationships with parents and sibling(s) changed since disclosure?
- What would participants like parents or sibling(s) to know or do differently?

- What would participants suggest as ways to support other homosexual youth in the position of coming out?
- What recommendations can be made to mental health professionals to support lesbian, gay or bisexual youth and their families during the process of disclosure?
- How do participants view their sexual orientation?

The results of this study provide evidence that unique issues characterise lesbian and gay identity development. In addition to the normative challenges that lesbian and gay adolescents share with heterosexual adolescents, there are many unique issues that characterise their development. The study suggests that there are several milestones that are characteristic of lesbian and gay identity development, the negotiation of which may hinder development in other areas. The male and female participants described a similar trajectory to coming out, consistently identifying a feeling of being different during early childhood which resolved into an awareness of same-sex attraction. Afterwards there followed a state of initial confusion and extreme interpersonal difficulty in accepting oneself and one's same-sex desires. This was followed by a phase of sexual exploration and increasing immersion in the "gay" community. A period of acceptance and integration followed, during which a lesbian or gay identity was established. The male participants described a phase of intense anger during their closeted adolescent years, which they attributed to frustration due to not being accepted. For many this anger dissipated after their disclosure to their parents. The female participants did not describe themselves as angry; instead, they internalised their anger and exhibited symptoms of depression. The female participants also described far more sexual experiences with other-sex individuals than did the males, even after clear awareness of their same-sex attractions.

The participants had been aware of their same-sex feelings for many years. Several more years passed before self-labelling when the feelings became clear. The participants' first disclosures tended to be near the end of their high school years. Participants voiced a need to share their sexual orientation with a close and trusted confidant. This need arose for a number of reasons, such as their need to share their confusion over same-sex attraction, to seek advice, and to share their joy and true selves with others. This disclosure often took place after entering into a same-sex relationship or sexual activity. Disclosure to their parents seldom occurred until an adolescent had first come out to supportive friends, had integrated a sexual identity and had established a same-sex sexual or romantic relationship. Among those who had both parents, the participants were more likely to

disclose to their mothers than their fathers and most did so in a face-to-face encounter. Mothers were told before fathers, largely because mothers asked and because the participants had closer or more invested maternal than paternal relationships. Among those whose parents were divorced, the fathers were not necessarily told because many were not close to their fathers, and it mattered less whether their fathers knew. The participants made similar decisions about whether to disclose their same-sex attractions, and when and how to do this. The participants told their parents because they wanted to share their life with them, to be honest, because it was time, and to legitimise their relationships or choice of partner. The more positive the relationship between the participant and their parents, the more positive the parents were about the participant's sexual orientation. It would seem that the participants were able to share their personal issues more easily with parents to whom they felt closer. However, it is also possible that the disclosure of sexual orientation increases closeness between *youths* and their parents. The participants cared more about the reactions of parents with whom they were close. Parental reactions to the disclosure of sexual orientation seem to relate to the participants' mental health. Participants who met with rejection from both parents reported significantly more issues and difficulties with regard to suicide ideation, feelings of worthlessness and shame than participants whose parents were accepting, or when one parent was accepting. Living with rejecting parents was associated with considerable distress. This confirms what is said in the literature as, in such situations, little support is available at home and *youths* are unable to share their concerns with their families as their identity develops (D'Augelli, 2002).

The participants all expected negative reactions from their parents, and the thought of telling their parents caused them considerable distress. Being fearful of parents finding out could be very distressing if the participants assumed (rightly or wrongly) that one or both parents would be rejecting, would resort to verbal or physical violence, or would force the *youth* from the home. While participants were most fearful of parental rejection, they listed fear of ejection from the family home; loss of financial support; fear of verbal and/or physical abuse; and the disappointment of their parents as reasons against disclosing to their family. Parents' negative comments about homosexual individuals were also powerful forms of victimisation experienced by many of the participants. The participants also experienced frequent victimisation in the form of verbal insults by peers and teachers alike. These findings are confirmed by the literature reviewed in section 2.3.3. The *youth* also witnessed verbal and physical victimisation of other sexual minority youth. This experience increased their desire to conceal their sexual orientation and instilled fear similar to that of victimisation.

The reactions of parents ranged from extreme outrage and expulsion from the home to support and acceptance of the fact that their child had disclosed his/her homosexual orientation. The majority of participants experienced negative reactions from their parents. The participants reported that an emotional outburst, usually in the form of crying, was a common response that was often followed by a state of denial on the part of parents. Two participants reported physical violence and many reported some form of verbal or emotional abuse, while two were kicked out of their homes and another chose to leave due to extreme conflict surrounding her sexual orientation. The majority of parents also insisted that their child attempt to change their homosexual orientation. While the initial reaction of the majority of parents was negative, many were able to accept their child's sexual orientation. The participants described this as a gradual process and often referred to the fact that it seemed as if their parents were going through a process of coming to terms with their disclosure. These findings resonate with the literature reviewed in section 2.3.4, which indicates that parents proceed through a series of stages akin to those of the grieving process identified by Kubler-Ross (1969). A further finding in this study concerned the lack of emotional support from family. In most cases, the participants reported that the emotional unavailability of parents was a significant hindrance in their coming to terms with their orientation. This finding is confirmed by a study with South African youth that was conducted from 1997 to 2000 by Butler and Astbury (2005). Because of the importance of the family and the centrality of school in the lives of adolescents, chronic tensions at home and anxieties associated with school can have far-reaching consequences for developmental difficulties (D'Augelli, 2006). As increasing numbers of adolescents disclose at earlier ages, families and schools become increasingly important in insuring a successful transition to adulthood (D'Augelli, 2002). From the findings of this study it would appear that the participants' parents initially were ill prepared and unable to support their child during his/her coming out.

There are several implications of these findings for mental health professionals working with lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents and youth. Most generally, professionals need to acknowledge the existence of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and to understand that the development of alternative sexual orientation accelerates around puberty (D'Augelli, 2006). Mental health practitioners should empower themselves with knowledge regarding the process of disclosure, as well as knowledge of the topic of adolescent disclosure with regard to family reactions and processes preceding disclosure; available community support services; and online support communities. Mental health practitioners should also be aware of their own biases against alternative sexual orientations and, if they cannot come to terms with these, it is vital that they refer.

Many of the *youths* who disclosed their alternative sexual orientation had known about their desires for many years before they confided in anyone and these years of secrecy appear to be very difficult ones. The years of concealment may be marked with times of considerable distress, worry and fear, social withdrawal and problems around academic performance. Mental health professionals working with sexual minority youth should be aware that some of their clients are lesbian, gay and bisexual and at various stages of the developmental processes associated with the emergence of their sexual orientation. Over half of the *youth* participating in the study had thought about committing suicide and three had attempted suicide due to difficulties associated with their sexual orientation. Other studies of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth document a higher suicide attempt rate among lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents than is found among adolescents in general (D'Augelli, 2006). This finding suggests that mental health professionals need to devote attention to the concerns of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and to realise that particular areas of their lives are likely to be associated with increased distress. Youths who do disclose their sexual orientation during adolescence should be considered as at some risk for stress; support should be available for them as well as for their families.

Another important issue for mental health professionals concerns the relationship between the youth and his/her family. The *youth* reported experiencing conflict with their parents and siblings as a result of the conflicts around their sexual identity. Counselling sessions with parents could provide support and constructive guidance to the parents and the youth. In families, the process of adapting to the newly revealed sexual orientation is generally difficult at first; younger adolescents who tell their families or who are found out still have to deal with potentially stressful situations at home for many years, especially if one of their parents rejects them (D'Augelli, 2002). Counselling families about current research on sexual orientation is crucial and connecting parents to support groups for parents has been found to be extremely helpful as well (D'Augelli, 2002). From this study it would appear that the process of adjusting to a child who is lesbian or gay can take a considerable time for some parents. The *youth* cautioned that it is vitally important, when taking the decision to disclose to parents, to conduct a realistic appraisal of the costs and benefits to self, to parents and to relationships, as it may be more beneficial to remain closeted within the family. These are important findings for a mental health professional to take into consideration. Because of these issues, it is imperative that professionals carry out a careful assessment of the youths' families in terms of likely reactions to their child's sexual orientation. Unless the mental health professional is assured of at

least one parent's acceptance (preferably both), advice to youths to disclose to their families should not be given, as this may put the youth at risk for harm for a number of years to come.

Support from parents and peers may mitigate the development of mental health problems among lesbian and gay youth; however, other experiences of victimisation put youths at risk. There is a definite need for the employment of school counsellors at high schools. Sexual minority youth are often in need of adult support to face some of the developmental challenges that an alternative sexual orientation presents as well. Those who work with sexual minority youth should be knowledgeable about lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and how to help them. Of particular importance in this context is an appreciation of the psychological consequences resulting from stigmatisation and victimisation of youths (Rivers & Carragher, 2004). Considering the impact of self-esteem on vulnerability to depression, it is important that mental health professionals, teachers and parents of sexual minority youth be aware of the significance of building self-esteem. Increased visibility of positive lesbian and gay role models in the media may also aid in enhancing self-esteem and reducing internalised homophobia. Lesbian and gay activists and organisations could also implement strategies to increase self-esteem through the positive portrayal of lesbian and gay issues. Furthermore, the *youth* mentioned that a visible support society within the school or community would serve as a valuable source of support for sexual minority youth, especially in the face of family or peer rejection. Teachers, furthermore, should be educated to be tolerant of and respectful towards same-sex attraction. School counsellors can encourage the development of school policies that identify victimisation, harassment or discrimination based on sexual orientation as unacceptable forms of behaviour. Policies should be in place in schools that prohibit victimisation based on sexual orientation and supportive programs should be developed (D'Augelli, 2006). Finally, it is crucial that mental health professionals and/or school counsellors create non-judgmental and welcoming contexts for lesbian, gay or bisexual youth and youth who question their sexual identities. Such settings can also provide opportunities for the youth to address their difficulties.

From the findings of this study it would seem that developing a positive identity requires additional developmental effort from lesbian and gay *youth*. Lesbian and gay youth must have support for their development needs to be normalised. The participants in this study demonstrated resilience despite the prejudice and inner turmoil that they experienced. Openness about their sexual orientation during adolescence puts adolescence at risk. However, it also provides them with the

opportunity to obtain the social resources that are required to integrate sexual orientation into other aspects of their lives at an age-appropriate time (D'Augelli, 2006).

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher recognises that the sample size is small. However, the intention was to obtain detailed qualitative information and, as such, the sample size was appropriate for the methodology at hand. Although qualitative research studies are often characterised by a small sample size, the researcher acknowledges that the relatively small size of the sample (10) prevents the generalisation of the data to encompass the experiences of all South African lesbian and gay youth. The researcher was able to obtain an equal distribution of male and female participants for the study, as well as a distribution of three South African language groups. However, the researcher would have preferred to obtain a more diverse distribution of language and/or culture, but participants of different cultures were not forthcoming. It is possible that the experience of other South African language or culture groups is quite different and the researcher acknowledges that this is an issue that the study was unable to address.

A further limitation of this study concerns the time that has lapsed between disclosure and the *youths'* involvement in the study. For most participants, however, only a few years had transpired between their disclosure and their involvement in the study. The participants were able to recall their experiences in vivid detail, often citing that the memories were of such intensity that they were easily recalled.

5.4 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

This study can be considered highly successful with respect to a number of areas. The study gained in-depth insight into the perceptions and experiences of disclosure during adolescence and the support needs of the participants. Such insight is important as it can provide professionals, parents and other youth with an alternative sexual orientation with information that can be used to better support adolescents during the process of coming out. This would not have been possible without the open and honest reflections of the participants. A strength of the study lay in the openness of the participants. All of the participants who took part in this study were able to freely express their ideas and to share intimate and often distressing experiences. The researcher is of the opinion that this study would not have been as successful without the openness of the participants.

Furthermore, several of the participants mentioned that participating in the research had been beneficial to them as it provided them with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and notice shifts in their relationships and their view of self. Some participants likened the experience to that of a therapeutic conversation which was a valuable and pleasant experience that allowed them to grow. Many of the participants have since followed up their contact with the researcher to once more communicate that the process had been beneficial and to offer further assistance should it be necessary.

A final strength of the study is that it has provided valuable information that can guide mental health professionals in their work and service delivery to lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and their families.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations for future research in the field of sexual minority youth can be made:

- Research that focuses on the positive aspects of the lives of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals is vital. Such research could provide a view on resiliency and highlight the many positive ways in which sexual minority individuals overcome certain issues and biases.
- Research into the parents' experience and support needs would be beneficial and should be a research priority.
- Bisexuals and transgender persons are a part of the larger sexual minority community and each group has unique circumstances. Future research should explore the aspects of identity development encountered by bisexual or transgender person.
- Further researcher should explore the unique experiences of sexual minority youth of different languages and cultures. A specific focus should be on the experiences of black lesbian women within townships as such initiatives could serve to raise awareness and, in doing so, advocate for the rights of these women.
- Further research should be undertaken into the field of sexual exploitation within the gay and lesbian community.

5.6 REFLECTION

The researcher would like to offer a reflection on this research process, which has been both taxing and rewarding. I was most surprised by the change that took place regarding my views of sexuality as I, too, was guilty of heterosexism unbeknownst to me. In my ignorance of others' sexuality, I once believed that one has a natural tendency or preference for one or another gender, however, during my research I became more knowledgeable and informed and now regard sexuality as fluid and not something that should necessarily even be defined by choice in partner. I want to acknowledge and respectfully thank the participants who so willingly shared their intimate and often painful experiences. I listened with a respectful ear and was often struck by the courage and grace with which the participants related to their families and later to themselves. The *youth* who participated in this research project demonstrated a degree of sensitivity and intuitiveness that is not found amongst all people. I experienced a certain degree of emotional pain whilst conducting my research. However, I felt privileged that the participants shared their stories with me and it was gratifying to reflect upon their journeys during our conversations. I have learnt that the world looks different through others' eyes and that we cannot begin to comprehend another's situation without first attempting to fully understand it and that this understanding begins through conversation with another. I felt sufficiently knowledgeable to begin this study as my twin brother is gay. I soon realised, however, new experiences and new knowledge are gained with each person's story. This study has taught me the importance of reflection, that we are resilient, that growth and change are an inevitable part of life and this alone is reason enough to be hopeful and look forward to the future.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The process of disclosure is difficult, at any age, It is especially challenging when faced with the normative stressors of adolescent development; negative societal attitudes; lack of support from family, friends and other institutions; and is combined with internalised homophobia and guilt. These factors add up to an inordinate amount of psychological strain for sexual minority youth. Matthews (2007) maintains that knowledge of coming out as a transitional process can help mental health professionals respond appropriately and effectively to the issues faced by sexual minority clients. Furthermore, these professionals can play a key role in assisting sexual minority youth in the development of a positive identity (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Mental health professionals can generate knowledge and understanding around the unique challenges faced by sexual minority

youth. The researcher believes that it is only through knowledge that effective understanding can develop. Butler and Astbury (2006) are of the opinion that, as adolescents become aware of their sexual minority status and develop appropriate coping mechanisms, they will become capable of responding to the demands of their culture and their society. Satisfaction with self furthermore can contribute to the development of respect for self and others and eliminate the sense of isolation. It is essential that homophobic attitudes and acts of violence are continually challenged, so that sexual minority youth are not exposed to unnecessary risks during disclosure (Hames, 2003). Much remains to be learned about the experiences of youths who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual during their adolescent years. When this study was undertaken there had been little research into the coming out process of lesbian and gay *youth*, in the South African context. It is hoped that this study can contribute to the generation of knowledge regarding the disclosure process of adolescents, not just in South Africa, but also internationally. Participants in this study expressed the view that other sexual minority youth need to realise that they are normal and perfectly acceptable, despite the fear, pain and guilt that they experience during their process of coming out.

All people are equal. It is not birth, it is virtue alone that makes the difference

Voltaire

Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education; they grow there, firm as weeds among stones

Charlotte Brontë

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ADDENDUM A



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24 February 2011

Tel: 021 - 808-9183
Enquiries: Sidney Engelbrecht
Email: sidney@sun.ac.za

Reference No. 481/2010

Ms V Robertson
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Stellenbosch
STELLENBOSCH
7602

Ms V Robertson

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE

With regards to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *Young adult homosexuality*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher/s remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal;
2. The researcher/s stay within the boundaries of applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, and applicable standards of scientific rigor that are followed within this field of study and that
3. Any substantive changes to this research project should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee with a view to obtain ethical clearance for it.

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards



Sidney Engelbrecht
MR SF ENGELBRECHT

Secretary: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Non-Health)

Semi-structured Interview Guide

1. Please tell me your reasons for taking part in this study?
2. Describe your first memories of being attracted to girls/boys. How old were you and what can you remember?
3. When did you first realise that you were not heterosexual? What memories do you have of how you came to that conclusion? What were your peers reactions, the school community, did you come up against prejudice?
4. Could you describe the context of your first disclosure? What were your reasons for doing so? How did they react?
5. Could you describe the context of coming out to your parents? What were your reasons for doing so? What were your mother, father and sibling(s) responses to becoming aware of your sexual orientation? How long did it take you to come out to your parents after coming out to yourself or to others?
6. What were your concerns about disclosure to your family? Were there consequences of your disclosure?
7. Could you describe your relationship with your parents and sibling(s), has it changed since your coming out and what is it like now?
8. How much did they know about homosexuality before disclosure and has their understanding improved?
9. What would you like parents or sibling(s) to know or to do differently?
10. Could you suggest any advice to support someone else in the position of coming-out? What strategies could you suggest that would help?
11. Do you mind the term 'gay/lesbian' or 'homosexual'? What do you think about these terms?
12. What have you learnt from your experience of disclosing your sexual orientation?

ADDENDUM C

Guide to reflective notes (debriefing session)

Now that the interview process is complete I would like to spend a few minutes discussing your feelings around the topic as well as your experience of the interview process. If there are any questions that you would like to ask please feel free to do so.

1. How do you feel about the topic of the study?
2. How did you feel at the start of the interview?
3. How do you feel now?
4. Has anything you said struck you as significant? If so, could you tell me more about this?
5. How could I improve on the interview process? Are there other areas that you feel should be explored?
6. What would you like your future to hold?
7. What kindness will you do for yourself tonight?

ADDENDUM D



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INVITATION TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Homosexuality: The disclosure process during adolescence

Dear Participants

I am an Educational Psychology Master's student at the University of Stellenbosch and I am presently working on my thesis. The main aim of my thesis is to explore and describe the experience of disclosing one's alternative sexual orientation to family members during adolescence. This includes exploring the reasons for and against disclosure, parental reactions to disclosure, exploring the relationships within the family before and after disclosure as well as what participants have learnt from the process. In order to do this study I require participants to be between the ages of 20 and 26 who have disclosed their sexual orientation during the ages of 13 - 18, to one family member.

Semi-structured interviews will be utilized in order to explore the above. This is planned to take place in March of 2011. Arrangements will be made regarding the venue of interviews. It is hoped that through this research a deeper understanding of how and to whom sexual minority youth choose to disclose their sexual identity will be reached as such an understanding is critical to providing the necessary emotional supports. This study seeks to help fill the gaps by giving voice to the youth's experiences of disclosure and ways to better navigate the disclosure process. Your participation in this study will be invaluable in helping to generate data that could inform awareness programs in the near future.

Research will be based on ethical principles in order to protect and respect participants. Participants can choose whether they want to take part in the study or not. Before making this decision all ethical issues, the nature of the study and any risks regarding the study will be discussed to ensure that participants make an informed decision. The researcher will obtain informed consent from the participants. If they volunteer to be in this study, they may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind and will still be provided with support i.e. counseling. They may also refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with a participant will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with their permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms or codes. The names of the participants will not be known. This research aims to contribute to the general well-being of people; participants' rights will not be abused for the purpose of gaining information or knowledge.

Should the interviewer feel it necessary, she will refer the participant to a counselor or psychologist to provide support. The following counselors/psychologists have experience in the field of

alternative sexual orientation and can be contacted: Jason Bantjes (jbantjes@bishops.org.za, 083 234 5554), Noleen Seris (noleenseris@gmail.com, 082 925 0177), Famsa Western Cape (famsa@famsawc.org.za, 021 447 0170).

Should you be interested in this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number provided below. I will provide more information about the study, should you agree to it. Please note that this study concerns only you and your parents will not be contacted.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Kind regards,

.....

Veronica Robertson

MEdPsych University of Stellenbosch

Cell: 082 567 6359

Email: veronica@myplaytherapist.co.za

ADDENDUM E



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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Homosexuality: The disclosure process during adolescence

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Veronica Robertson, a master's student from the department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your eligibility as a homosexual youth.

1. Purpose of the study

For the purpose of this study I am undertaking research concerning the exploration of disclosure in adolescence.

2. Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I am requesting your participation in an interview as well as to tape record the interview. During the interview discussions will centre on your experience of the coming out process to your family as well as the consequences thereof. The interview is to take place at a convenient time, in a secure and private place, which will be decided upon before the time. You are under no obligation to participate and may withdraw from the interview at any time without consequences of any kind and still be provided with support in the form of debriefing and/or counselling. As a researcher I intend to inform you beforehand about the intent of the research, what the potential impact could be as well as provide debriefing during and after the interview in order to clarify any misconceptions that may have occurred. Should the need arise for counselling during or after the interview this to will be provided.

3. Potential risks and benefits to subjects and/or society

A potential risk to participants could be that unpleasant memories may surface during the interview. Should the researcher feel it necessary she will refer you to a counsellor or psychologist to assist you. This research could potentially lead to a greater understanding of the disclosure process to families. Thus benefiting those who are impacted negatively by the process of disclosure, both the individual and families alike. As a participant you are requested to feel free to ask any questions that may arise during the interview or afterwards.

4. Payment for participation

There will be no payment for participation in the research.

5. Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The interview data will be safeguarded as only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the information and it will be kept in a secure and private place. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of anonymity, any references in the research report will be handled anonymously and all information of a personal nature will be managed confidentially at all times. The information will not be used for any other purposes other than the research.

The recorded interviews will be erased after the researcher has finished transcribing the interview. This process will take place within the following week after the interview was conducted. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. The participant may request a copy of the transcription. Findings regarding the research will be made available in the dissertation. The dissertation will be made available to the participants in order to know exactly what has happened to the information.

6. Participation and withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. Identification of investigators

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Veronica Robertson on 082 567 6359 or alternatively her supervisor Charmaine Louw on 021 808 2319.

8. Rights of research subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Malene Fouche, 021 808 4622, mfouche@sun.ac.za, at the Unit for Research Development.



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SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

.....

The information above was described to me by Veronica Robertson in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

.....

Name of participant

.....

Signature

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

.....

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to
He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

.....

Name of researcher

.....

Signature

Date

ADDENDUM F

Interview 8

Inter: Can we begin by you telling me your reasons for taking part in this study? You can just tell me, some of your thoughts.

P8: I was interested in the study and wanted to help, to help others, my story is (pause) interesting and if I could help other people then I wanted to. It is important to talk about, I think that we are all trying so hard to impress our parents and peers, to make others happy and we don't make ourselves happy. Plus there are all the other problems that we face in our everyday life and if my story can help then I want to help.

Inter: Thank-you. Could you describe your first memories of being attracted to boys/men? How old were you and what can you remember?

P8: I was about 6 years old, I remember sitting in the car one day and we were watching all these people and I remember saying to her (my sister) "oh, that boy is really cute" and she just turned around and looked at me and I sort of knew it was wrong. I knew just from the way she looked at me, I knew it wasn't right. I could tell from her body language and the look of sheer horror and disgust. She would have been about 11 then. I remember from preschool, I used to draw a lot, when we were allowed free time I always choose to draw and I always used to draw boys, blonde hair, blue eyes, rosy cheeks every single time and I used to bring the picture home to my mom of the boy with blonde hair, blue eyes and rosy cheeks. I tried to push those feelings aside but they started bubbling up again at the age of 13.

Inter: When did you first realize that you were not heterosexual? What memories do you have of how you came to that conclusion?

P8: What actually happened was, I had a girlfriend - this is quite a hectic story - I had a girlfriend and we broke up, she cheated on me and we broke up and 2 weeks later I received an invite by this girl ...

Inter: And how old were you at the time?

P8: I was 16. I received an invite from this girl on mixit called (Girl) and she said that she met me at a party and she got my number from a friend. We started chatting and about 2 weeks later it turned out that it was actually a guy and that he had never been with a guy before and he was wondering if I was the same, and well I hadn't. We decided to meet up and I thought everything was hunky dory and about 3 months later we slept together and one day at the beach we were talking and things just weren't adding up as he kept on referring to himself as XXX and not YYY. So I spoke to my one friend and eventually I found out that he was actually my ex-girlfriends brother and I remember my ex always telling me how much of a slut her brother was and I felt really bad. What's going on and I phoned my mom and I didn't know what to do and this was just a once off thing. I thought that it was a relationship but he was just fooling around, he could be quite promiscuous. Well I didn't really phone my mom, she phoned me as she could tell there was something wrong over the phone, so I had to tell her over the phone, as she was in Joburg. I had to tell her that I had now slept with my ex-girlfriends brother.

Inter: And his age at the time?

P8: He was about the same age and then I sort of realized that ok well, as shocking as this is and as horrible as it made me feel I am still attracted to guys. So that experience didn't turn me off of guys. Even when I dated girls, I am still friends with them and I loved them lots but it was never really a sexual kind of an attraction it was like a love but I got confused between love for a friend and love when in a relationship. After that I felt very confused, I had been with a guy but he was not the guy that I thought he was.

Inter: Could you describe the context of your very first disclosure? What were your reasons for doing so?

P8: I came out to my friend when this was all happening and I told her this is starting and I don't know what to do. And she was fine, I just told her because I just needed to talk to someone and I didn't want to worry my mom. I didn't really want to tell her, I always wanted to be straight, I always tried to be straight. So I told (Friend) and she was pretty ok with it, it then turned out that she was also doubting her sexual orientation. I told my ex-girlfriend when I slept with her brother, she is actually now lesbian - I know - she was more upset that her brother did that to me than anything else. I was 17. I always tried to have guy friends and I tried to play sports, and I tried to, I don't know, I wasn't born like a

raging queen but I always tried to act as straight as possible, be as straight as possible, have girlfriends just to make others happy but um, I always knew deep down, I mean it was still me, because as soon as I came out I didn't change that much, it was still just me, if that makes sense. It puts a lot of pressure on one, it is almost like hiding but it is more hiding from the truth, I believed that if I acted straight for long enough, I would become straight, I think that was what was sort of going on in my mind, if I act straight I will be straight but the feelings were still there at the back of my mind but you still know those feelings are still there no matter how hard you try to make it go away. It puts a lot of pressure on you as you know that it is who you are in some ways and not who you are in others, trying to be straight, for instance I used to play sports because that is the straight thing to do, I never enjoyed sports. I used to love water sports but I remember my dad wanted to get me into cricket and rugby and all those sort of sport and I remember I tried cricket and I was kicked off the team because I was too scared of the ball, I used to see the ball and run and soccer I never used to enjoy it, I suppose that it puts pressure on you just to make people happy, to make other people happy when you are not really happy. I tried to make my parents happy, I think that is what a lot of gay people have to face, I don't think they really worry about their friends I think they worry about their family, that is who they want to keep happy. It is especially hard when you have divorced parents.

Inter: Did you live with your mom or your dad?

P8: I stayed with my mom until I was 8 and then I went to stay with my dad when I was in high school and then I went back to my mom when I was in grade 8 to 10 and then I went back to my dad for the last two years of school so it was a constant change, I was in the same high school but different households and rules and for that you also have to sort of, with my mom I always felt more comfortable because I grew up with her, so depending on where I was I would have to change who I was according to the week and the week-end. During the week if I was with my dad I had to be more macho and then on the week-end with my mom I could relax and be me. With my mom, my mom has always know, I've always known she has known but I know she just didn't want it, it was not that she was unhappy because I was gay it was because she knows it was a difficult life and people find it difficult to accept so she was caring for me.

Inter: That leads us to the next question could you describe the context of coming out to your parents?

P8: I came out to my mom on the phone, she took it quite well, I think, it is difficult to judge how she took it over the phone, she probably got off the phone and burst out crying. She seemed to take it well, it was never spoken about openly until this year in Feb 2011, I came out to her in 2007 when I was 17. Recently, when I was visiting her we were all sitting at dinner and for the first time in company she said "well, M is gay" and I got a fright because it has never been spoken about or said aloud and we were with my step dad and his family and I know my mom is always cautious about what she says around them and she just said it, she just said it, it was such a shock and such a relief as well and we got home and we sat on the grass until 2pm and I asked her what happened and she said "I have accepted you and if other people can't accept you well tough luck for them". As for my dad, my sister was staying with us, step-sister and my dad and my step-mom were in Welkom and I had my boyfriend over at the time and (Friend) had a girlfriend over at the time and we were just relaxing and having a good time. My boyfriend kissed me and my sister saw, it was just a mess, I walked inside to talk to her and she had closed her door and I could hear her talking to a friend on the phone and then (Friend's) girlfriend went to go speak to her and she came out and she said "look I can't speak to any of you guys you all disgust me, I am leaving now" and then she left for the week-end and she fetched my dad from the airport. This was about 6 months after I had come out to my mom, it was in 2008 and my dad fetched me from school and said to me that your step sister says that you have something to tell me. I said look it is nothing and he told me that I had better not be lying (emphasis in voice).

Inter: And how were you feeling at that time?

P8: I was feeling terrible, I was so nervous, I was anxious, I was shaking and I went to lie down on my bed as I was feeling light headed. My dad came into my room and said "you better not be lying to me" and I told him that my step-sister caught my boyfriend and I kissing and he walked out and said wait until (Step-mother) gets home, she is my step-mom and she got home, and I was so nervous, I had to, now my step-mother and step-sister are afrikaans and my dad is english, I had to go tell my dad and my step-mom now, you know that afrikaans people have a different way of looking at things to english people, not

necessarily a bad way just different. They were sort of listening at the beginning and then I just remember my step-mom saying we are going to get a prostitute for you and I was like wondering, I didn't think she was being serious. Then I was grounded, and I had to work in the garden and I wasn't allowed to see any of my friends and my phone was taken away.

Inter: For what?

P8: For being gay! My step-mom was doing more talking, she was saying that it was wrong and that it was a phase and they would get a prostitute and and and. I think my dad was more influenced by her. So I was grounded and on Saturday morning I remember working in the garden and it was really hot and I had to move all the stones from one end of the garden to the other. My dad said that he needed to go and exchange paint and will I come with him because he wants me to listen to what these people have to say because they may not want to exchange the paint. So I said yes, anything to get out of working in the garden and I remember driving and we drove to this place and it said (Brothel) and I thought this is a strange paint place, I remember it had red walls and all these paintings and a couch and I thought this is weird and then it clicked. I was sitting on the couch while my father went to speak to someone and I could hear what was going on and I saw the bar woman talking to my dad and as he was there this woman walked past and I could tell she was a prostitute and the bar woman said is that your son and she asked how old I was and when he said I was 17, she said "don't waste my time, go take him to the arcade". So I just sat there and pretended like I didn't know what was going on and my dad came back and said we have to leave, you are not allowed to be here. He asked me if I knew where we are? And then told me that we are at a brothel, and I just pushed the drink back into his chest and said that I am going to sit in the car and on our way back I asked him please could you just take me to my friend. I was quite surprised that he did but I think he could see how upset I was and then I phoned my mom. I asked my mom not to say anything as my mom and dad have always had a very good relationship and I didn't want them to be arguing over me and it would have made things worse. My sister since that she has not really spoken to me, ever since then, we used to be very close and now she is distant and cold, she doesn't hug me hello, she is just very off just not very friendly, this has been almost 4 years. At the end of 2008, at the end of matric my dad kicked me out, he said that he didn't want to see me or anything. I went to live with my mom and I came back here in 2010 to study but that also didn't work, my dad just ... but since 2007 things have not been the same, I felt very much

like an outcast, I became very withdrawn and I felt very excluded from the family and I don't know if it was me or the family and then things just didn't work out, my dad kept on reminding me about this and that. I think it is more from my step-mother's side, I was having lots of trouble with my dad and step-mother and my mom sent me to a psychologist and he said that I should maybe take a look at my step-mom and see what she is doing, and she was influencing my dad. I had her on facebook and I took her off, not to hide anything from her because I didn't have anything to hide but I didn't think she deserved to know, if she wanted to know she could just ask me. What she was doing was she was going behind my back and copying all the photo's and wall posts and sending them to my dad, so after I removed her she had her daughter doing it, my step-sister was sending it to her and she would send it to my dad. It was a very poisonous atmosphere, she got very cross with me. Things with my dad and I just started drifting apart again.

Discussion about an incident with his step-mother regarding the passing of a family member over new years day. The family did not let him know that his grandmother had passed and instead directed him to find it out via facebook when he was in the house with the family. Mark arrived on new years day to wish his father and step-mother happy new years and found his family to be very somber. He entered all happy and then was told by his step-mother that since he did not have her on his face book that he better go check (Aunt's) page and find out what happened, so he went to his room and checked and then had to come down and tell the family that he had not known about her death and then his father asked him to leave.

Inter: Oh, I am sorry my heart feels sore after you telling me this, it seems to be a loss.

P8: Well my dad and I were never really close though, which does help.

Inter: What was your relationship like before and how has it changed since your coming out?

P8: My mom and I had have a good relationship, she knows me and she would do anything for me. Has it changed? For about a year or two things were not really spoken about but it is slowly, things are getting a lot better, it seems now that she is 100% cool with it. I don't think that people understand how much stress it is when your parents aren't happy because of you being gay and when they finally accept it it is the most amazing feeling ever, it is such a huge relief, I can't explain it to you, that night was the biggest relief ever. I have always wanted to make my mom happy because she has always tried her best to make me

happy, that is why I tried to be straight for so long and then when I came out I realized that I was not really making her happy so when she finally accepted it, it was awesome and we became so close after that again. It wasn't that we weren't close, I just think that I felt more comfortable around her. With my dad well we weren't really ever close, he wasn't much of a father figure so I don't really know if things changed, I guess that I was just more aware of what was happening, things did change I guess, his acceptance, I never really knew where I stood with my dad, I thought he had me because he felt as if he had to have me there. It was quite weird, I always used to do average in primary school when I went to my mom in high school my marks just shot up and when I went back to my dad in grade 10 my marks just dropped again. I never realized it at the time. I only realized this when I was looking back over my marks.

Inter: Well your emotional functioning has an effect on your overall functioning and perhaps it just goes to show how you were able to concentrate on your school work more and achieve when you were more emotionally at ease, I am guessing as you mentioned that you felt more relaxed when living with your mom.

P8: And it is quite weird because when I was at my dad in martic it was all just one blur whereas when I was at my mom I can remember very specific events of us doing stuff and things. I am not actually sure why I moved back to my dad in grade 10, my mom moved back to Joburg so that was very difficult having her far away and no one to go to on weekends and then I found myself relying on (Friend's) parents for support as I didn't think that I could talk to my dad or my step-mom. I think that things have a way of working out as my (Friend) was going through the same thing at the time, and we could talk, we had each other and if I said to her that I was going through this then she would say so am I, what are we going to do about it and we would both counsel each other. In 2009 when I went back to see my mom, we are still very close but it has changed as we were not in face to face contact.

Inter: Your concerns about disclosure to your family? Did you have any specific concerns about coming out to your mom and your dad?

P8: I was scared that I wasn't going to be accepted. I was scared that I wasn't going to be ... I was upset when I told my mom but I was not really upset when I told my father as it sort of happened, I was scared, I thought if he accepts me, he accepts me and if he doesn't he

doesn't but then with the whole prostitute thing and grounding me and changing the way he treated me, and trying to change who I was, him trying to change me, I became resentful because I thought if he doesn't accept me that is fine but now when you come out and they try to change you, and you feel well this is difficult enough as it is and you are now trying to change me and obviously it is not a choice ... I tried to think how it was for them and it is almost like a loved one dying because what they saw and thought is not necessarily how things will work out now, you know not having grandchildren. As much as I would like to have my own children, but you know many girls have said they will be my surrogate so this may well happen.

Inter: Your parents and sibling, how much did they know about homosexuality before your coming out and has their understanding changed?

P8: Well my mom, I know she told me that she had lots of gay friends in university, I think that she did understand it, the lines were a bit blurred but she did sort of understand it. She thought that sometimes it was a stage or a phase, and sometimes it is for real and it is who you are. I think that she has now realized that it's not a choice because she knows that I would want to make her happy but I can't change. As for my dad we do have a gay uncle but this was never spoken about, it was really just that one day, that one week-end that we spoke about it, so I don't know what his understanding is, because he didn't really speak it was more my step-mom. She is the over bearing one who likes to have authority. And is not very accepting. I don't actually know, my dad and I don't speak now so ... I thought it was just better after the whole thing with my gran and what happened he did say I must leave, so I left and I have had to make the decision because it actually just caused more (pause)

Inter: Pain

P8: Pain, and it obviously hurts moving on but I think in the long run it will probably be better, for now at least as that drama is not nice. I don't need that drama (sighing).

Inter: Well it is also important for you to protect yourself, I can't actually imagine how you must feel in that situation ... you are arriving with so much good will in your heart and then they do not even let you know or you have to find out in such a manner.

P8: It was difficult enough at the time and then that still happens. Generally I am a very loving person, very forgiving.

Inter: Yes, you do strike me as a kind and considerate person.

P8: But I have now learnt to cut off emotion completely (said in forceful voice/emotion). I hate it because it is not really who I am but it has become a coping mechanism because the people I thought on my side have all just left so it has become more of a coping mechanism and now it is easier without my dad. I know he is not there now, whereas if I was still speaking to him I would still be thinking maybe he is or maybe he is not. Knowing where I stand is better.

Inter: Would you have like your parents to have done something differently or to have known something more.

P8: Well my mom, I am fine with the way that she dealt with everything. I understood that it wouldn't be just fine. I don't think that it is right if your parents don't say anything, I have a friend who told his mom he was gay and she was like "oh, when are you bringing your boyfriend home" you don't really believe it, you have to follow that process. Whereas my dad they didn't follow the process they just acted on what they believed at the time and didn't actually find out, if they maybe took the time to do some research, or ask me how I am feeling, instead of telling me how I am feeling or should be feeling, I think that would have made things easier. Just more acceptance I suppose.

Inter: Could you suggest any advice to someone else who is in the position of coming out?

P8: It is really difficult to say, I have given a lot of advice to different people, it depends entirely on the circumstances. I have one friend who doesn't want to come out because his dad is very homophobic, I have another friend who doesn't want to come out because his mom is very homophobic and I have another friend who doesn't want to come out because he is very close to his grandpa and he doesn't want to disappoint his grandpa, it really is different to each situation. I think if there was any advice, I would not necessarily say come out because it is not always the right thing to do in certain circumstances it may just make your life a lot harder than it already is and in others it might free things up more. I think assess your situation correctly, I think don't over look things.

Inter: So get a good understanding about how the people you want to come out to will react?

P8: Yes, and how happy you want to be as well, if you are ok with going through a bit of heartache and trauma for a few months then you can go through with it, it is a lot lighter when everything is out there.

Inter: Ok, do you mind the term 'gay' or 'homosexual'? What do you think about these terms?

P8: If you asked me that last year, I never used to refer to myself as gay, I used to hate the word, I really did, I couldn't even say it, I would just say 'um'.

Inter: Do you think that is because that is where you were?

P8: Yes, in my life, I think definitely. I didn't have many gay friends, I tried to be straight and have straight friends and have girlfriends and then (Friend) invited me to stay here or let me stay here and this is just a gay friendly zone, this is a gay zone and I made so many gay friends and I realized that it is ok to be gay and also when my mom said that, so wow she said that the 'G' word. I know a lot of people who don't like gay or lesbian or any of that. It also classifies me as one particular person and one stereotype and I won't really go to gay pride or anything because I think that it's become more of a ... I think that you can't choose to be gay and you can't be proud to be gay, you can be proud of the things that you have overcome to be gay, just like because you can't be proud to be a woman its not something you chose, you can be proud that you are working and you are studying, I won't go to gay pride because everyone dresses up and it is so stereotypical gay, in dresses, so I didn't like the word gay because that is the way that people saw you, associate you with those dresses, and heels and drag queens, that stereotype. But then I thought, well, if people don't get the chance to know me and know that you don't necessarily have to be a stereotype gay. I don't think that people understand that gay is not just one set of people.

Inter: What have you learnt from your experience of disclosing your sexual orientation?

P8: You know who your friends are and you know who the people are who want to be in your life. You also learn who you are because once you are out you feel more comfortable and you can focus on Now, because remember I told you that I always wanted to make everyone else happy, now I know my mom is happy and I can now focus on making me happy and focus on what makes me happy because I was always trying to please everyone

else. So now I can start to become myself more. You realize that you have more friends than you ever thought you had. I gained so many friends once I came out, I gained a good friend in matric, there was this very popular girl in school, very pretty, and she always sat behind me and the one day I told her and sometime later she came to me and told me not to tell anyone but she was pregnant. I thought at first she was pretending to gain attention but 3 weeks later she told me again and I said ok, show me cause I didn't believe her and she showed me her stomach and she was showing - we became very close, to the point that people thought I was the father, I gave her my matric jacket because she was showing quite a lot, she kept her baby and they are financially secure and she has a good partner. I had another straight friend who I told and at first he was a little freaked out because we used to sleep over at each others houses and he thought I would come onto him or think about him but then later he came around and apologized and said he was acting so stupidly and that he was sorry, of course he doesn't like every girl he sees. You make good friends.

Inter: Did any of your high school friends know, what was the school's reaction did you come up against any prejudice?

P8: A lot of the school knew, a lot of people knew, but it was quite weird from grade one even before I knew it, I was already being called gay, I didn't even know what it meant. I know it wasn't every boy, it was me and another boy and he also turned out to be gay so I don't know if children know if someone is different from a young age. In high school I sort of came out slowly, I had lots of people coming to me and saying I heard you were gay why didn't you tell me and I was taken aback, I was not going to make an announcement that I was gay, if people asked me, I would be like cautiously say yes, but I wouldn't deny it. The teachers knew but I didn't really have, there was some meanness sometimes but I mean everyone goes through that, being teased, that sort of stuff. I just let it go and tried not to worry about it, as I was there to learn and have fun at school.

ADDENDUM G

Coding	Portion of the transcription from the interview with participant 6
<p><i>Reasons for disclosure: family member found letter, mother asked, share my life, might as well tell</i></p> <p>Defense mechanisms: denial, lying, pretend to be heterosexual</p> <p><i>Reaction from parent: anger, disappointment, denial</i></p> <p>Reasons against disclosure: rejection, public shame, scared of losing friends</p> <p>Reasons against disclosure: rejection, religious beliefs, kicked out of home, loss of financial support, fear</p> <p><i>Reaction from parent: verbal abuse, continued arguments, could not accept</i></p> <p><i>It's not a choice</i></p> <p>Reaction of parent: Coercion</p>	<p>Inter: Could you describe the context of your very first disclosure? What were your reasons for doing so?</p> <p>P6: I didn't actually say to my mother that I am gay. It happened when I had to have my wisdom teeth taken out. <i>My mother often found letters that I had written to (Girlfriend) or she had written to me and I kept on denying it, that there was nothing going on, we were just friends, maybe she is going through a phase but I am definitely not gay.</i> This was when I was 16 years old. That day at the hospital, <i>my mother asked me "Are you gay or aren't you?"</i> I didn't say anything, I just nodded and well she knew, a mother knows and she <i>started crying and she said "This is not the way I raised you and this is not the picture that I have for you" and that she will never accept it as it is a sin,</i> my mother is very religious, and at that stage it was a lot to deal with as my friends at school didn't know and I had to lie about who my boyfriend was, making up names. I didn't trust them enough to tell them, I didn't know what they would think of me or if they would think that I was trying to hit on them. I didn't feel safe enough to tell them, "I am gay, this is who I am and you have to accept me" because you know what children are like if you are in school they talk and rumors will start to spread. I was scared of loosing my friends and that I would not be accepted. It was like I was living two separate lives. It was difficult and <i>I often felt that I wanted to share my life.</i></p> <p>Inter: And your concerns about telling your family? Did you have any specific concerns about coming out?</p> <p>P6: I was worried that she would reject me, that she would not accept me as a person, I felt that no one in my family would accept me because my family is very religious and my mother, and my father, well at that time I didn't know him very well so I was not worried about what he would think but my close family. At that stage I was still living at home and I was scared that she would kick me out and where would I go, what would I do, I was only waitressing at the time, how would I support myself. It was a scary time. <i>I thought that she already knows so I might as well tell her and I must just deal with the consequences if there are any.</i> This put a strain on our relationship, we already had a conflict filled relationship, a conflict filled bond and this put even more strain on it and we would even get violent with one another. I would defend myself and I would defend my girlfriend and my mother would tell me not to go to that girl and if I spoke to her or saw her my mother would carry on fighting with me so I would just leave my house and I would go for days and just stay with friends rather than stay at home, fighting all the time. This was during high school and after high school, there was a stage when I left my job, and I left my mother's house, I packed my clothes and I went to stay with one of my friends. In the end I moved back to my mothers house and then we were fighting even more. Horrible fighting, I told you so, this is a sin, you are going to burn in hell. There was a time that I told my mother that <i>I don't think it is a sin, like god planned your path, he planned my path, he knew that this was going to happen to me and that people get born this way, why would I choose this.</i> She thought that it was a choice and that I am going to burn and its a sin, my mother even told me that I need to change my life and become straight.</p>

ADDENDUM H

Theme	Sub-theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Coping Strategies	Denial to parents or friends/others	*	*	*		*	*	*			*
	Wishing, hoping and praying for change	*	*	*	*	*					
	Hiding and monitoring behaviour of self	*	*	*		*		*		*	
	Trying to prove heterosexuality by dating other-sex individuals		*	*		*	*		*		*
	Saying it is just a phase to others	*					*			*	
	Lying when confronted by others	*				*	*	*			
	Concise decision to act 'straight'		*	*			*		*	*	
	Creating fantasies: "I pretended I was a boy"; "I pretended I had a twin brother"		*	*	*	*					
	Banish or minimize thoughts about same-sex attractions	*		*			*		*		
	Avoid friends when talking about relationships			*		*	*				
	Analyze same-sex attractions			*	*	*					
	Making plans for your own survival: saving money, preparing to leave home etc		*	*			*			*	
	Studying parents reactions to homosexual topics or others	*		*						*	*
	Pretending to be something you are not			*		*	*	*	*	*	
	Keeping it secret	*	*					*		*	*
Sense of humor: "head gay boy"	*	*	*							*	

ADDENDUM I



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jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

14 February 2011

Ms Veronica Robertson
Dept of Educational Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Private Bag X1
MATIELAND
7602

virobertson@webmail.co.za

Dear Ms Robertson

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION FOR PROJECT 481/2010
("Young Adult Homosexuality: The disclosure process")

With reference to the ethics review report of the University's Ethics Committee, I give institutional permission that you can continue with the above project with students in the support group known as the Lesbian Society providing:

- that you adhere to the findings and recommendations of the Ethics Committee, and
- that you have the consent of the Dean of Students (as the Head of Student Societies) to contact the members of the Lesbian Society for their participation in your project.
Contact details for the Dean: Dr Llewellyn Macmaster, lmacmast@sun.ac.za; tel. 021 808 2222

Kind regards

PROF JAN BOTHA
SENIOR DIRECTOR:
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Copies:
Mr Sidney Engelbrecht, Division for Research Development
Dr Llewellyn Macmaster, Dean of Students



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Aldeling Institusionele Navorsing en Beplanning • Institutional Research and Planning Division
Privaatsak/Private Bag X1 • Stellenbosch • 7602 • Suid-Afrika/South Africa
Tel. +27 21 808 3967 • Faks/Fax +27 21 808 4533