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WESTERN CAPE**

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Bisexuality and identity of young adults: A qualitative descriptive study.

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Psychology (Structured) Degree.

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Lastly, a thank you to my grandfather: this mini thesis is dedicated to you, as God called you before its completion. Your memory shall live through my success.

Declaration

I declare that the research: *Bisexuality and identity of young adults: A qualitative descriptive study*, has not been submitted before for any degree, or examination at any other university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Signature:



Charné Petinger

December 2022



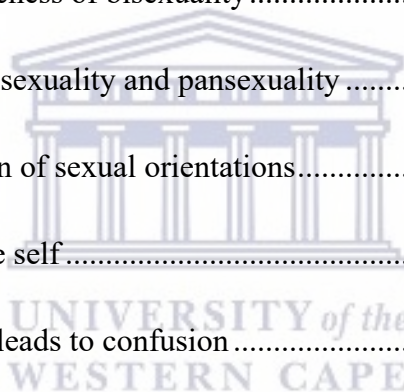
Abstract

Sexual identity development is an important part of developing a coherent sense of identity in young adulthood. When one identifies outside of the heterosexual identity, it can pose many challenges when one considers the stigmatisation that follows. Identifying as bisexual has its own difficulties, with its own stereotypes and stigmatisation, and research shows how it is often invalidated, made invisible, or treated as a transitional phase between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Bisexuality can be understood as having an emotional, romantic, and physical attraction to more than one gender. The aim of this research was to describe young adults' understanding of their sexual identity when they do not identify within the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality at a university in the Western Cape Province. This research utilised a qualitative descriptive design and semi-structured interviews to collect data. Participants were recruited after ethics clearance was received. Permission was obtained from the University of the Western Cape, and a recruitment email was sent via the university's campus-wide email service. The study yielded n=14 participants. Data was thematically analysed. The themes that emerged were *Identity beyond the self*, *Identity within the self*, *Social support*, and *Inviting in*. Key findings were that participants had difficulty navigating their bisexuality because initially, they did not know what it meant, as they only knew homosexuality and heterosexuality. Also, they faced invalidation of the sexuality from other people and had to process that to develop a solid understanding and pride in their bisexuality. This research used a queer theory lens to understand the findings that emerged. For future research, it would be necessary to develop research that is solely focused on bisexuality, and to explore the intersections of gender and sexuality.

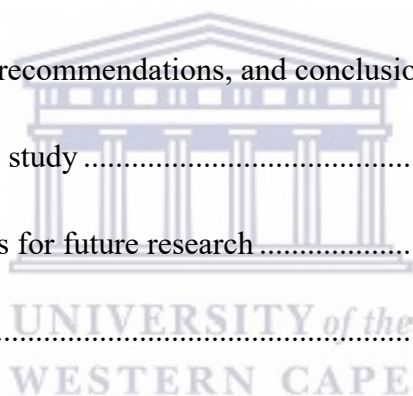
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Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores and describes bisexuality in young adults, pertaining to what it means to them to exist outside the hegemonic sexual binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and how they understand the development of their bisexual identity. The following chapter will outline a background on bisexuality and identity development, and the rationale for the study. It discusses the problem statement, research question, aim, objectives, and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Sexual identity development is an important part of developing a coherent sense of identity that takes place in young adulthood. As young adults between the ages of 18-25 progress into adulthood, they are expected to have a meaningful understanding of themselves, including their sexual identity (Arnett, et al., 2014; Morgan, 2012). According to Fadjukoff (2007), having a coherent sense of identity is not finalised during adolescence, and often many young adults continue to develop their identities. Subsequently, de Bruin and Arndt (2010) discussed how it is common for individuals to come to terms with and disclose their sexual identity during university. Sexual identity can broadly be conceptualised as the understanding an individual has of their sexual orientation, as well as various facets including desires, values, and relationships (Morgan, 2012). Negotiating the challenges faced by identity developmental processes, developing a clear understanding of one's own sexual identity is a major part of this (Morgan, 2012).

Developing one's own sense of identity includes a myriad of challenges which an individual must face (Fadjukoff, 2007). These challenges may involve reflecting on one's likes and dislikes, making new friends, and identifying a career path (Fadjukoff, 2007). Navigating sexual identity is difficult as well, as young adults come to understand their roles in relationships and develop an understanding of what they want in relationships (Morgan,

2012). To develop one's sexual identity as an emerging adult, Taylor and Neppel (2021) explicates that it is a complex process of recognising sexual attraction, developing it, accepting and then being able to understand it.

When one identifies outside of the heterosexual identity, it can pose many challenges when one considers the stigmatisation that follows (Callis, 2014). Taylor and Neppel (2021) explain how this developmental process of identification that is not heterosexual, is posed with unique and specific challenges, even in deciding if it is safe to disclose their identification. Identifying as homosexual is commonly met with stigmatisation from heterosexual people, one side of the dominant sexual binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Although with bisexuality, the stigmatisation and discrimination these individuals face are from both sides of this binary (Garelick et al., 2017). Bisexuality is different from homosexuality and heterosexuality because it is an orientation with more than one gender attraction. As a result, people who are homosexual and heterosexual may struggle to understand the difference in attraction, which leads to having misconceptions about bisexual people. This stigmatisation and discrimination faced by bisexual individuals can result in the individuals feeling rejected and as if they do not have a valid identity (Doan Van et al., 2019). Garelick et al. (2017) finds that individuals identifying as bisexual must, as a result of the hegemonic sexual binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, negotiate complex processes of sexual identity development that concerns socially and internally constructed understandings of their identity. Similarly, Khuzwayo and Morison (2017) found that the non-recognition and misconceptions about their participants' bisexual identity played a direct role in the construction of their identity.

Identifying as bisexual has its own difficulties, as it comes with its own stereotypes and stigmatisation, and research shows how it is often invalidated, made invisible, or treated as a transitional phase between homosexuality and heterosexuality (Angelides, 2001; Callis,

2014; Garelick et al., 2017). Bisexuality can be understood as having emotional, romantic, and physical attraction to more than one gender (Feinstein & Dyar, 2017). Hertlein et al. (2016) contends this, that bisexuality maintains a myriad of elements, such as the romantic attraction to others regardless of their gender. Gonzalez et al. (2017) understands bisexuality as being fluid, a sexual identity that cannot be contained within the rigidity of homosexuality and heterosexuality and does not change over time.

Bisexuality challenges the socially dominant binary, which leads to those who identify as bisexual, experiencing prejudice from both sides of the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Doan Van et al., 2019; Dodge et al., 2016; Garelick et al., 2017). A study done on university students' perceptions about those who identify as bisexual in South Africa, found that heterosexual people had the most negative attitudes towards bisexual people, followed by homosexual and asexual identifying people (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010). For example, some of these include bisexual people being viewed as promiscuous, hypersexual, and "in a phase" (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Gonzalez et al., 2017). These understandings and negative attitudes make it difficult for individuals who identify as bisexual to openly share their sexual identity with others, as well as accept their identities themselves. The prejudice and invalidation that bisexual people experience influences their sexual identity development, including confusion about their identity and feelings of rejection, which impedes their understanding of their sexuality (Barker & Langdrige, 2007).

1.2 Rationale

The understanding of one's sexual orientation holds an important role in developing one's sexual identity, which forms part of developing a coherent sense of identity holistically (Morgan, 2012). This process may be impacted by how bisexuality can be misunderstood and discriminated against, and the misconceptions of bisexual identities can have an impact on bisexual individuals' understandings of their identity. The binary categories of homosexuality

and heterosexuality are the dominant understandings of sexuality (Garelick et al., 2017). Bisexuality challenges this binary, as it falls between the distinct two sexualities, referring to an attraction to more than one gender (Angelides, 2001; Callis, 2014). As a result of this difference, bisexual individuals face prejudice and discrimination from both sides of the binary (Callis, 2014). This false dichotomy of understanding sexuality further aids in bisexuality being made invisible and erased in mainstream discourse (Flanders & Hatfield, 2014). It is important to consider the impact of this, as it allows the understanding of bisexuality where it is not delegitimised or stigmatised. Also, to illustrate how individuals who identify as bisexual navigate these differences and difficulties to form their own understandings of their sexual identity.

1.3 Problem statement

While studies on bisexuality is emergent especially in Northern America, it is still under-researched in the South African context (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). Stobie (2011) explicates the need for awareness and dialogue about bisexual identity in an African and South African context. The research on sexual minorities in South Africa has primarily focused on gay men and lesbian women with a lack of focus on other sexual minorities. Francis (2017) supports this, noting that especially in research on South African youth, a paucity exists in a focus solely on bisexuality. However, Sutherland et al. (2016) conducted a survey about attitudes of homosexuality and other non-conforming identities that has aided the dialogue on bisexuality in South Africa.

Barker and Langdrige (2007) explain the need for research on bisexuality in the field of psychology and argues that the exclusion of bisexuality within research is perpetuated by the propensity of the discipline to view sexuality as binary. De Bruin and Arndt (2010) corroborates this, explaining that in academic psychology, sexuality is still viewed as dichotomous which impacts the way any variations are theoretically perceived. By not

identifying within the dominant binary categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality, it brings upon a unique set of challenges (Callis, 2014). Misconceptions and prevailing prejudices make it difficult for these individuals to navigate their sexual identity. The understandings of bisexuality come from both heterosexual individuals as well as from within the LGBTQ+ community (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). There is also less focus on the psychology of individuals who identify as bisexual (Pollitt et al., 2019). Research on people with one gender attraction, such as homosexuality and heterosexuality, is dominant in psychology (Rubin & Matsick, 2018). There is thus a lack of research on different groups of sexual identities, particularly of bisexual identities and their understandings of their identities (Morgan, 2012).

1.4 Research question

What are young adults' understandings of their bisexuality?

1.5 Aim of the study

To describe young adults' understanding of their sexual identity when they do not identify within the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality at a university in the Western Cape.

1.6 Objectives

- To describe young adults' understandings of how their sexual identity develops when they identify as bisexual at a university in the Western Cape.
- To describe the understandings of what it means to young adults who do not fit into the binary categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality at a university in the Western Cape.
- To describe how young adults who identify as bisexual, relate to others within the LGBTQ+ community at a university in the Western Cape.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This chapter described the background, rationale, problem statement, and research aim and objectives of this study. The following chapter will delineate the current trends of research on young adults who identify as bisexual. Chapter Three describes the methodological and ethical approaches utilised. Chapter Four illustrates the results and themes obtained after data collection and analysis. Chapter Five provides the discussion of the key findings and interpretations thereof. Chapter Six will conclude the thesis, providing the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.



Chapter Two: Literature review

The following chapter explores the literature on young adults who identify as bisexual, how their bisexuality develops, and the influence of the homosexual/heterosexual binary. This will be shown through both international and local research. It is apparent that there is a dearth of South African research focusing specifically on bisexuality in young adults, and their experiences. The majority of the literature indicates the influence of the homosexual/heterosexual binary and how this binary impacts the understandings of bisexuality. Several prevailing misconceptions about bisexuality exist in large part due to the dominant, dichotomous understanding of sexuality. This chapter furthers this discussion, through examining the impact of the binary, the pathways to bisexual identity development and finally, a discussion of the theoretical framework, queer theory.

2.1 The homosexual/heterosexual binary

Garelick et al. (2017) explains how sexuality is viewed as a dichotomy, favouring homosexuality and heterosexuality as the predominantly expressed identities in society, which subjugates the expression of other sexual orientations such as bisexuality. Viewing sexual identity as dichotomous can thus be problematic for individuals who identify as bisexual (Flanders et al., 2019). As suggested by Barker et al. (2012), there exists an inadvertent pressure to identify as either homosexual or heterosexual because of the view of sexuality as a binary. In a study by Doan Van et al. (2019), it is evident that bisexual individuals are always expected to be attracted to only one gender, by both heterosexual people and homosexual people. This pressure to choose a monosexual orientation results in the individual who identifies as bisexual to feel unsafe and rejected (Doan Van et al., 2019).

Further, Garelick et al. (2017) suggests that bisexual individuals often face a range of different and unique prejudices. The ambiguity that bisexuality encompasses impacts social understandings and processing of sexual identity, as it often leads to confusion and

perpetuation of misbeliefs that may elicit negative beliefs of oneself (Garelick et al., 2017). Evidently, dominant perceptions of sexual orientation engender the misconceptions and prejudice bisexual individuals face (Garelick et al., 2017). Alternatively stated, misconceptions about bisexuality exist because of the dominant understandings of sexuality- being that sexuality should be binary- which inadvertently affects the way individuals either positively or negatively understand their sexual identity. Hertlein et al (2016) supports this, noting that bisexual individuals' perceptions of themselves are influenced by the way society conceptualises sexuality as a binary. Their findings suggest that bisexual individuals' views of bisexuality are further influenced by internalised homophobia, stemming from the dominant discourse surrounding sexuality in general, thereby influencing their own stigmatisation of bisexuality (Hertlein et al., 2016).

In a study conducted on how bisexual individuals define their sexual identity, Flanders et al. (2019) found that many of their participants understood their bisexual identity as fluid, not an identity that changes based on romantic endeavours. This corroborates Hartman's (2013) findings that stereotypes allow bisexuality to only be made visible when individuals engage in certain sexual behaviours, despite it being understood as a stable sexual identity that does not depend on the sexual actions and expression of bisexual individuals.

2.2 Development of the bisexual identity

In studying the experiences of bisexual individuals, Bradford (2004) found that these individuals go through specific stages to accept themselves and integrate their sexual identity. The stages include: "questioning one's own identity, inventing one's own identity, and maintaining that identity" (Bradford, 2004, pp. 19-20). The findings suggest that, especially with the stereotypes and rejection associated with the bisexual orientation, that uncertainty about their sexual identity persists throughout the process, even when individuals have accepted themselves and identify as bisexual (Bradford, 2004). Francis (2017) finds that

because of the way bisexuality is viewed as ambiguous, bisexual individuals may have problems with developing their identity.

Flanders et al. (2019) found that social support has an impact on the experience of the bisexual identity. They enunciate that the impact of acceptance or rejection, stigmatisation and stereotypes have a direct influence on the way in which bisexual individuals perceive themselves (Flanders et al., 2019). Similarly, an earlier study conducted by Barker et al. (2012) found that in their study on bisexual inclusion in the United Kingdom, the acceptance or rejection given by the community on their bisexuality directly impacts the experience of their identity development.

Brown (2002) proposes a model of understanding bisexual identity development that incorporates the different experiences people may have because of their gender, explicating how a positive identity is developed through social support and negatively impacted by stigmas. Thus, the support from the community and people close to them influences the individual who identifies as bisexual in navigating their identity (Barker, et al., 2012). Subsequently, Brown (2002) found that regardless of their acceptance and exploration of their sexual identity, bisexual individuals experience some uncertainty and difficulty outwardly expressing their identity. Ultimately, navigating sexual identity as a sexual minority is complex and becomes more difficult when the hegemonic binary's understandings of sexual identity is salient and the way in which it is constructed to stigmatise spaces and identities outside of that binary (Burrill, 2001).

2.3 Perceptions of bisexual individuals

A study done by Burke and LaFrance (2016) on 1379 students about the conceptions of sexual minority groups, found that heterosexual people view bisexual people less positively than homosexual and heterosexual people (Burke & LaFrance, 2016).

Strengthening this, Zivony and Saguy (2018) explored heterosexual people's evaluations of bisexual women and determined that heterosexual people view these women as more promiscuous and confused about their sexuality.

In a study of the perceptions and attitudes towards bisexuality, Hertlein et al. (2016) found that heterosexual people can be less tolerant of bisexual identities than people who are homosexual. They found that heterosexual people believe that bisexuality is a state of transition, where the individual who identifies as bisexual is using bisexuality as a segue into homosexuality (Hertlein et al., 2016). Moreover, these perceptions can differ based on the bisexual individual's gender identity. Hertlein et al. (2016) found that heterosexual people tend to view bisexual men more negatively than bisexual women. However, bisexual women are being sexualised by people who are heterosexual, saying that women only identify as bisexual to be promiscuous (Hertlein et al., 2016).

According to Khuzwayo and Morison (2017), the exclusion and not fitting in is experienced by both homosexual and bisexual people. Homosexual people tend to hold and perpetuate anti-bisexual attitudes and perceptions and therefore, this perspective is more complex than the attitudes of heterosexual people towards those who identify as bisexual (Hertlein et al., 2016). Furthermore, de Bruin and Arndt (2010) found, in exploring the attitudes towards bisexual individuals in a university context in South Africa, that bisexual individuals experienced rejection from not only heterosexual people, but homosexual people as well. This is because of a perceived privilege that bisexual people pose in being with a partner of the opposite sex, which in-turn minimises constant prejudice having obtained a "pass" by heterosexuals (Hertlein et al., 2016). This experience further excludes bisexual people from those who identify as homosexual which in-turn impacts on bisexual individuals' social and psychological health and how they may construct their sexual identity (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010; Rubin & Matsick, 2018).

2.4 Bisexual erasure

A pervasive issue commonly described in bisexual research is concerned with bisexual erasure. Khuzwayo and Morison (2017) define bisexual erasure as the process in which bisexual identity is de-legitimised in society as unintelligible and inauthentic. Doan Van et al (2019) found that bisexuality is treated as illegitimate and ignored, and generally denied in the perception of others. This results in these individuals feeling isolated from the queer community and society in general (Doan Van et al., 2019). Flanders et al (2016) posits that bisexual erasure is beneficial for both homosexuality and heterosexuality, as it maintains and stabilises the dominant norms of society. Studies found that individuals who identify as bisexual and experience bisexual erasure felt excluded and not ‘gay enough’ (Doan Van et al, 2019; Roberts et al., 2015; Rubin & Matsick, 2018). This means that their participants were made to feel that they do not fit in with the queer community because they might engage in heterosexual practices (Roberts et al., 2015).

To further this, bisexual people practice both heterosexual and homosexual behaviours which leads to the exclusion from both groups. This experience results in them lacking a sense of social support (Flanders et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2015). Besides social isolation, bisexual erasure affects other areas of life as well, such as facing invalidation from family, experiencing emotional and cognitive difficulties, and how they construct their identity (Flanders et al., 2016; Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017; Rubin & Matsick, 2018).

2.5 Disclosure of bisexuality

Disclosing one’s bisexuality is found to be a difficult process to manage (Feinstein & Dyar, 2017). This process can be defined by the act of understanding and acknowledgement of one’s lifelong orientation, which in this case is bisexuality (Gonzalez et al., 2017). Calzo et al. (2011) finds that this process of disclosure or “coming out” is an identity developmental milestone for individuals. Gonzalez et al (2017) strengthens this, finding that their

participants experienced a sense of identity development when they disclosed their sexual identity. The process of disclosure, however, is informed by experiences of bisexual erasure, misconceptions, the pressure to conform to the binary, and how they will be perceived by the people they tell (Barker, 2012; Feinstein & Dyar, 2017; Flanders et al., 2016).

It is evidenced that the prolonging of disclosure is characterised by an avoidance of parental and peer rejection (Calzo et al., 2011). Dodge et al. (2016) found that individuals who identify as bisexual are often less likely to disclose their sexual identity to their family and friends. Khuzwayo and Morison (2017) postulate that individuals who identify as bisexual do not disclose their sexuality because of their fear of it being perceived as illegitimate and being undermined. Disclosure of one's identity is accompanied with certain risks depending on how the information is received. Flanders et al (2019) determined that these reactions are usually negative in nature owing to religious views or confusion regarding bisexuality in general. The exposure to these negative reactions and possible resultant discrimination has a significant impact on these individual's mental health and self-perception (Calzo et al., 2011). However, disclosing one's identity can also be positive, especially as it assists in relating to others and fostering relationships (Maliepaard, 2018). Therefore, it is difficult to disclose a widely criticised identity, and the expected biphobia increasing the hesitancy of coming out (Flanders et al., 2016). Queer theory provides a lens from which to view the experiences of those within the LGBTQ+ community and how this identity is explored and experienced by the individual as well as their surrounding communities.

2.6 Queer theory

Queer theory examines how gender and sexuality are constructed and categorised (Callis, 2009). According to Calafell and Nakayama (2016), it is a perspective that can be used by scholars to conceptualise sexualities and attempt to understand them. Watson (2005)

understands queer theory as a way of navigating the complexities that identity encompasses, which includes group dynamics and oppression. It identifies the heteronormative assumptions about gender and sexuality that non-heterosexual individuals must manage (Watson, 2005). Further, queer theory research interrogates existing concepts and categories, and how these categories do not often reflect the lived experiences of certain individuals (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016).

According to Callis (2009) queer theory attempts to deconstruct the hegemonic binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The term “queer” in itself disrupts the way we think about sexuality in a binary sense, to encapsulate the diverse and more ambiguous nature of sexualities (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). Callis (2009) further discusses how queer theory has, in the past, perpetuated in illuminating the homosexual/heterosexual binary it deems to challenge, which aids in the invalidation of the bisexual identity. It is thus found that bisexuality is minimally perpetuated in queer theory research (Rubin & Matsick, 2018). Burrill (2001), however, explains how queer theory critique’s sexual identity categories, and how utilising this framework could be useful for discourse on bisexuality.

Queer theory can be useful to understand how hegemonic sexual identity categories do not allow space for the existence of other categories such as bisexuality, and how individuals with more fluid identities outside the dominant categories understand it (Burrill, 2001). Burrill (2001) suggests that queer theory can be useful in offering a more fluid way of understanding the experiences of sexual minorities, such as bisexuality. Thus, queer theory can be used as a framework to open space for identities that do not fit within dominant categories through illuminating the different aspects that cloud the meaning of these identities (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016). This lens allows researchers to deconstruct the dominant binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, through the exploration of identity categories and their

complexities outside this binary, particularly in interpretation of the data in this specific research, thus enhancing the credibility of the research.

2.7 Chapter summary

The literature discussed above indicates that the common understanding of sexuality impacts the way bisexuality is perceived by individuals who identify as bisexual. Sexuality is understood as dichotomous, meaning that it is socially accepted that people can be either homosexual or heterosexual. This postulates that other sexual identities, like bisexuality, is not commonly accepted. There is a pressure to conform to the binary and identify as either homosexual or heterosexual. This results in young adults feeling rejected and confused about their sexuality, which leads to negative beliefs about themselves. Evidently, bisexual erasure poses a great impact on their construction of their identity and the resulting isolation experienced from society and the LGBTQ+ community. Perceptions of bisexuality directly impact self-perception and psychological health. Therefore, queer theory assists in deconstructing dominant understandings of sexuality, how individuals navigate the complexities of LGBTQ+ identities and to explore new understandings of bisexuality. The proceeding chapter describes the methodology that was used for this study.

Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter covers the methodological approaches to achieve the aim and objectives of this research. It discusses the qualitative descriptive research design, research context, sampling and participants, procedures, thematic data analysis, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethical considerations that were followed.

3.1 Research design

The study utilised a qualitative descriptive design. The qualitative descriptive design allowed for a detailed account of the perceptions or experiences of participants (Doyle et al., 2020). Qualitative studies allow researchers to study phenomena or events as they appear naturally without any interference or manipulation (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). This study required a description of the understandings and experiences of young bisexual adults, and as a result, the qualitative descriptive design was suitable (Turale, 2020). The straightforward descriptions this design produces are important and meaningful, because of the depth and detailed account of participants' experiences (Turale, 2020).

Sandelowski (2000, 2010) explains that research using qualitative descriptive designs attempt to provide accurate descriptions of the participants' experiences or perceptions. A qualitative descriptive design produces authentic and meaningful descriptions of these experiences or perceptions (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). This design was therefore applicable for the study as it achieved the aim and objectives, which are to describe the understandings of young adults who identify as bisexual.

3.2 Research context

The study took place within the context of a university in the Western Cape, and all interviews with participants were conducted online via a videoconferencing application, Google Meets, as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions not allowing in-person interviews.

3.3 Sampling and participants

According to Doyle et al. (2020), qualitative descriptive designs utilise participants who have experience and knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Doyle, et al., 2020). Purposeful sampling is useful in qualitative descriptive research designs, as it grants the opportunity to gain broad insights and rich information (Turale,2020).

The study therefore selected participants who are young adults (n=14) between the ages of 18-25, who identify as bisexual and of all genders. The ages of the participants were between 18 and 25, whereby the majority of the participants were aged between 20 to 23 years of age. The genders of the participants included men, women, a transgender man, and one nonbinary individual. The ages 18-25 are chosen based on Arnett's (2000, 2007) conceptualisation of emerging adulthood as it explains the independent exploration individuals typically undergo during this time as it relates to their occupations, relationships, and worldviews.

Furthermore, snowball sampling was also used to generate a greater sample. Participants referred others that might be eligible to participate in the study. Sample size in qualitative descriptive studies generally depends on reaching saturation (Doyle, et al., 2020). The sample size depended on estimating enough data to meet the aim of the study until such point that no more new information was obtained (Doyle, et al., 2020). Data saturation was thus obtained after 14 interviews, as no new information had been introduced after the first 10 interviews. Although qualitative descriptive research can range anywhere between three and twenty participants, an estimate of ten to fifteen participants is acceptable, particularly to reach data saturation (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009).

3.4 Data collection

The study made use of semi-structured, online interviews, as it aligns with the descriptive qualitative framework (Sandelowski, 2000). Semi-structured interviews serve as guided conversations which allows the researcher to collect data pertinent to their inquiry whilst providing the participant leniency to describe their experiences completely (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the semi-structured interview was appropriate for this study as the researcher was able to collect rich in-depth data and to provide accurate descriptions of participants' understandings vis-à-vis the aim and objectives. The participants were allowed to expand on their experiences and understandings of bisexuality without feeling constrained by a limited or short answer. Furthermore, because of the COVID-19 enforced lockdown, face-to-face interviews were not possible therefore the study used online, videoconferencing tools, such as Zoom and Google Meets, to collect data.

3.5 Procedures

Data collection commenced after ethics clearance was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and permission from the university's registrar's office was granted. Participants were recruited via the university's campus-wide email service with an attached advertisement for the study (see Appendix D). Participants were asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. Once contact was made, participants received an information sheet (see Appendix B) and consent form (see Appendix C) to be read and signed prior to the interview. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the participants and conducted with the use of a videoconferencing application, Google Meets. With the verbal and written consent of the participant, the interviews were recorded. The interviews were also guided using an interview guide (see Appendix A).

3.6 Data analysis

An appropriate method for data analysis for qualitative descriptive research is thematic analysis. Clarke and Braun (2013) define thematic analysis to identify and analyse patterns that emerge in the data. It is a flexible method that can be used with a range of research questions, such as describing experiences and understandings (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). The primary goal of a thematic analysis is to gain an understanding of the meanings from the emerging patterns from the data (Sundler et al., 2019). The data analysis allowed the researcher to accurately describe the experiences and understandings of the participants.

Clarke and Braun (2013) propose six phases for conducting thematic analysis. The first stage is familiarisation with the data, which requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the data through reading and re-reading transcriptions of the interviews. The second step is coding, wherein codes are assigned and collated. The third step entails searching for themes, in which the researcher identifies meaningful and coherent themes from the coded data. The fourth step is to review the emergent themes, where the researcher will assess the identified themes for accuracy and meaning. Fifth, is to define and name the themes in a way that addresses the research objectives whilst capturing the essence of the data. The final step is writing up, whereby the researcher weaves the narrative from the data and contextualises the data with the literature (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.4).

3.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through the consideration of the four concepts as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) specifically: dependability; credibility; transferability and confirmability. Dependability was achieved through consistency in procedures with all participants, such as the use of an interview guide for all interviews (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Credibility is the value of truth that the data holds and was ensured through providing thick descriptions and linking the interpretation to a theoretical framework (Colorafi &

Evans, 2016). Transferability was ensured by providing rich descriptions of the participants and their contexts and also explicating how the study's findings can be used in further research (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Confirmability refers to the study being free from researcher bias and was ensured through being aware of personal assumptions and possible biases (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). The researcher aimed to ensure this through keeping a reflective journal, as well as through reflexivity.

3.8 Reflexivity

Sandelowski (2010), explains analysis in qualitative descriptive research still requires the interpretation of researchers. Therefore, researchers must be aware of potential biases and personal assumptions that may impede the research process. According to Babbie (2013), reflexivity is done through the examination of personal beliefs and influences as data is being collected and analysed. Reflexivity was maintained through keeping a reflective journal throughout the entire research process. The researcher was consequently cognizant of her own biases that may be implicated in the study, particularly as a queer-identifying individual. The reflective journal allowed the exploration of personal assumptions and internalised beliefs of being queer, and how it may possibly impact the research process. These included what it meant to be bisexual for the researcher and that she was open to not let her internalised beliefs of sexuality impact the information that was elicited. Through continuous consultations with both supervisors, the process of being reflective was maintained and further added to the rigour of the current study. Internalised beliefs were discussed, and the essence of the participants experiences was foregrounded.

3.9 Ethical considerations

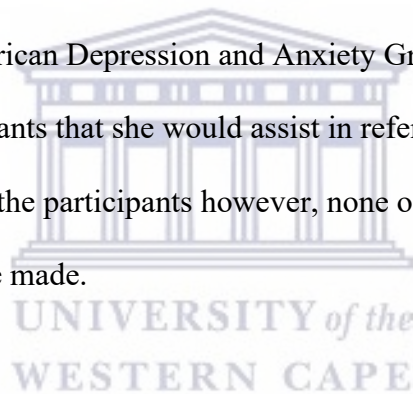
Ethics clearance was sought from the HSSREC, and the ethics reference number is, HS21/7/34 (see Appendix F). Permission to conduct the study at the university had been requested at the University of the Western Cape's registrar office (see Appendix E). An

information sheet and consent letter were provided prior to data collection to ensure participants were able to provide informed consent to partake in the study (see Appendix B and C). In these letters the participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained using pseudonyms when referring to participants in the study, and no identifying information had been discussed within the study.

Access to the recordings of the interviews were limited to the researcher and her supervisors. The recordings and interview transcripts were kept under password protected files and will be destroyed after five years. To ensure that there is no harm caused to participants, as the nature of the study is sensitive, the participants had been provided with information to mental healthcare professionals on campus, such as the Centre for Student Support Services, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group and the Counselling Hub. The researcher assured participants that she would assist in referrals should the nature of the study have undue influence on the participants however, none of the participants indicated that they needed a referral to be made.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter delineated the methodology of the study. This study utilised a qualitative descriptive design, collecting data online through semi-structured interviews, which were analysed thematically. A description was given of the sampling and participants, procedures, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethics considerations. The next chapter will discuss the results after it was collected and analysed.



Chapter Four: Results

This chapter will discuss the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. A total of fourteen participants were interviewed, ranging from 18-25 years of age, with a wide range of gender identities, including male, female, and nonbinary transgender. Table 1 below summarises the demographics of the participants further:

Table 1:

Summary of participant demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Preferred pronouns	Study programme
Participant A	18	Female	She/her	BA
Participant B	20	Female	She/her	Medical bioscience
Participant C	20	Nonbinary transgender	They/them & he/him	Social Work
Participant D	18	Male	He/him	Dentistry
Participant E	18	Female	She/her	LLB
Participant F	20	Male	He/him	Biotechnology
Participant G	18	Female	She/her	Education
Participant H	22	Male	He/him	Physical Sciences
Participant I	20	Prefer not to say	He/him	Psychology
Participant J	19	Female	She/her	BCom General
Participant K	23	Female	She/her	MA Psychology
Participant L	19	Female	She/her	BCom Accounting
Participant M	23	Female	She/her	LLB

Participant N	25	Male	He/him	LLB
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Table 2 below provides a summary of the themes and subthemes identified through the thematic data analysis process. This process entailed, familiarisation of the data, after which the process consisted of searching for patterns and coding, identifying, and naming themes, and formulating definitions for the themes. A total of four themes were constructed and eleven subthemes identified.

Table 2:

Summary of themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
4.1 Identity beyond the self	4.1.1 Lack of awareness of bisexuality 4.1.2 Bisexuality and pansexuality 4.1.3 Self-education of sexual orientations
4.2 Identity within the self	4.2.1 Invalidation causing confusion 4.2.2 Freedom and belongingness
4.3 Social support	4.3.1 Family 4.3.2 Heterosexual people 4.3.3 Comm(unity) with the LGBTQ+ community
4.4 Inviting in	4.4.1 Fear of judgement 4.4.2 Telling friends, not family 4.4.3 Telling queer people

4.1 Identity beyond the self

This theme discusses how individuals who are exploring their sexual identity come to understand bisexuality. It explicates the nature and extent of confusion the participants faced coming to terms with their bisexuality, the past and current understanding of their bisexuality, and how different definitions have implicated these understandings.

4.1.1 Lack of awareness of bisexuality

Participants indicated that they were not aware of the bisexual orientation knowing only the homosexual/heterosexual binary. This resulted in a state of confusion because they could not put a name to what they identified as, nor could they understand what it meant, knowing only what they were not. This is further explained by Participant M:

Participant M: *“I didn’t know anything in-between. I knew gay and straight, and I knew the other two was wrong. If it wasn’t a boy and a girl, it’s wrong. I knew I didn’t just like girls, but I knew that you’re either straight or the opposite. But there’s so much more. It took me a while to figure that out because I didn’t have access to that information. All I knew was straight or gay. I knew I wasn’t a lesbian. I didn’t know that the spectrum was big enough to include someone who is attracted to boys and girls, or I even didn’t know about the spectrum of genders outside of that.”*

It is evident that it was enforced into this participant’s understanding of what is “right and wrong” when it comes to sexuality, and that heterosexuality was the only ‘right’ one. Taking this further, the dominant understanding of sexuality is that you can only be one or the other. Participant M explains this and how it caused her confusion. The fact that she did not know that *“the spectrum was big enough to include someone who is attracted to boys and girls”*, shows this lack of awareness of bisexuality, as well as other sexual identities. This is evident in the other participants’ experiences as well, as seen with Participant A’s experience:

Participant A: *“At first, I didn’t know what meant. Most people at twelve like, okay fine boys, stuff like that. But, what about girls too? I liked girls too, what does that mean? I didn’t know where to fit in, should I go with the boys, or should I go with the girls”.*

It is evident that Participant A had experienced this confusion at a young age, that she thought that she had two positions to choose from, neither of which fully encapsulated her experience. She was experiencing an attraction to men and women but thought that she had to fit into an either-or category. These experiences illuminate participants disconcertedness of feeling forced to follow an either-or route, with emphasis drawn to a ‘correct’ route, while neither fully encapsulated their experience. This solidifies the importance of queer theory, which attempts to deconstruct the hegemonic binaries that result in the invalidation and marginalisation of categories outside of these binaries (Callis, 2009). The participants were faced with major uncertainty regarding their sexual identity because of the dominant indoctrination of the homosexual/heterosexual binary.

Furthermore, when participants became aware of the term “bisexual” and started identifying with it, it was difficult to develop a holistic understanding of it. Their understanding was tainted by the stereotypes of what this orientation means which is often in contrast to what they were experiencing. This is expressed by Participant B:

Participant B: *“I was so confused, I kept it in for a whole- for a whole lot of years I kept it in. Yeah. Because I didn’t know what it meant or like I knew... but I wasn’t sure like, was this really happening to me?”*

With Participant B’s experience, she did not know how to navigate her bisexual identity, resulting in her keeping it hidden and not dealing with it. Similarly, Participant F attempted to avoid it to fit into the norm of homosexuality or heterosexuality, *“I think more of*

a ‘trying to fit into the binary’ I’d say. And trying to avoid it as whole.”. The uncertainty of navigating bisexuality resulted in the avoidance of accepting and processing it.

4.1.2 Navigating bisexuality and pansexuality

Bisexuality can be roughly understood as having an attraction to more than one gender (Garelick et al., 2017). This means that the bisexual person does not identify as homosexual or heterosexual, even if they are attracted to the same and opposite sex. According to Participant A, bisexuality, “... means we’re not straight. And we’re not homosexual. I feel like it’s the line between homosexuality and heterosexuality.” People who experience multiple attractions can therefore not be encompassed by the ‘traditional’ binary. For some, bisexuality can mean only being attracted to cisgender men and women, and no other gender identities, such as nonbinary people and transgender people. Participant I noted:

Participant I: *“I think what gets me in that answer is that it insinuates that I wouldn’t be necessarily attracted to non-binary, for example. Then again, I don’t have the experience, I don’t know many people that are non-binary. I don’t want to exclude anyone in my answer. Right in the beginning, it was very much limited to those who were assigned to those binaries at birth, so, that was my initial idea. It was very biological initially, and then it moved away from that.”*

It is evident that bisexuality can appear to be limited because it might appear that the word refers to being attracted to only two genders, however, this is not the case for Participant I. Participant F strengthens this stating that bisexuality could be understood as, *“I’d say, broadly being attracted to both male and females, but at the same time, being attracted to the broader... Because keeping it at male and female would only be, I don’t know... um... limited.”*. Therefore, the meaning of bisexuality for these participants includes more than two genders. However, while Participant M concurs with this idea of bisexuality

being an attraction to more than just men and women, it does not entirely mean that for her: *“I am not attracted to, for instance, nonbinary people. I think for me it’s just [cis]men and [cis]women.”* Thus, bisexuality can refer to the attraction to more than two genders, but that does not necessarily have to be the case for all people who identify as bisexual, as seen with Participant M.

As seen previously, bisexuality can mean that it is inclusive of more than two genders, to rid any exclusion another definition may bring. Flanders et al. (2017) found that there is a varied response in the definitions of bisexuality, for their participants, bisexuality could refer to the attraction of more than two genders, as seen with this study. This is also where the confusion may arise with pansexuality, another sexual identity that entails attraction irrespective of the person’s gender. According to Participant B, pansexuality is an attraction to more than one gender, *“Because when a person is pansexual, they do not care about your sex you know.”* Therefore, bisexuality is likened, in a way, to being attracted to more than one gender.

Participant N states that meanings are flexible, particularly ones of labelling sexualities. *“I think it can be inclusive in itself. I think meanings of terminology and definitions are flexible, so I don’t see... I understand pansexuality and I can identify as pansexual ... I think the two are interchangeable.”* For this participant, his meaning of bisexuality overlaps with what he understands of pansexuality. The definitions of the two may intersect, but bisexuality is the preferred label to describe their attractions.

Therefore, in identifying as bisexual, these individuals also had to navigate another sexual identity that is similar- pansexuality. However, bisexuality seemed like a better fit for their attraction and preferences and their meaning included the genders they felt it suited.

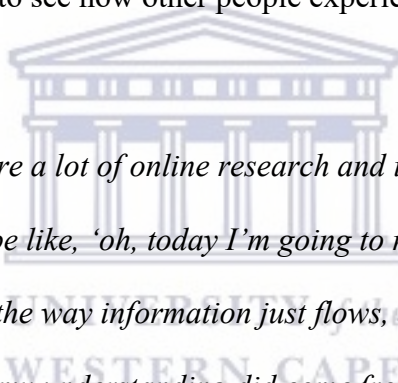
Finally, after exploring and educating themselves on their sexual identities, that is what allowed the participants to feel comfortable in identifying as bisexual.

4.1.3 Self-education of sexual orientations

Participants highlighted that their experience of bisexuality brought about learning of the existence of bisexuality and other sexual identities, like pansexuality, that resulted in them questioning their identity. Having these multi-gender attractions are accompanied by confusion about oneself and identity, requiring one to gain more knowledge about it.

Many participants expressed that one thing that made them comfortable with their bisexual identity is doing research about it online. This helped them understand bisexuality and what it means to them, and to see how other people experience their bisexuality.

Participant H explains:



Participant H: *“It’s more a lot of online research and it’s not like where I had to come and sit down and be like, ‘oh, today I’m going to research about bisexuality and, no.’ It’s just more the way information just flows, and I learn more the more I get older and, yeah, but my understanding did come from a different source, which is the way information flows through the media and all that.”*

Participant H explains that the way information is distributed in the media played a role in how he understands bisexuality. He posits his source of information about bisexuality in the form of online media.

For Participant L, using social media pages and online articles can be useful in obtaining information about sexuality and learning more about it, *“I mostly get my information through this Instagram page, LGBTQ, and then I verify by going back to Google and reading up articles about it, seeing what it’s all about.”* Participant G notes that, *“Tiktok is actually a very nice place to learn about things like that.”* Demonstrating that Tiktok

became useful in learning about bisexuality. Participant H concurs with this, *“I honestly think social media really helped. Oof. Okay, especially subscribing to Tiktoks, on other people who also post things. You know there’s this, a whole thing, there’s a queer Tiktok.”*. Thus, following “queer” pages on social media assisted participants in learning about sexuality and their own bisexuality.

Participants also explained that learning through exploring and having different experiences helped them to discover more about and accepting their sexual identity. Participant D found that being with someone of a different gender than his previous relationship helped in shaping his bisexual identity, *“I was with this guy, after that relationship, I had this attraction to a woman, and that is when I had been with someone as well. I think that that basically was shaping me, that I was bisexual.”*. This shows that exploring their identity through venturing in relationships with different genders helped the participant understand their bisexual identity.

A sense of solidifying their sexual identity came from exploring relationships with people of the same gender. Therefore, he felt more accepting and confident in his bisexuality through this exploration. In a relationship with a same-sex partner, Participant F felt more comfortable in identifying as bisexual. He states, *“I’m sure of it. And ultimately, there wasn’t the thing of he sees me as gay, he always saw me as bisexual. I think that helped the personal experience of accepting.”*

Being in his first same-sex relationship gave Participant F the confidence to accept his bisexual identity. Having other people support the exploration of their bisexuality aided in this acceptance. This can be seen in Participant I’s experience as well, *“I think I feel really comfortable exploring myself when I have somebody to hold my hand almost. Making sense of everything, hearing their own experiences help a lot.”* Exploring on his own aided

Participant I and having someone be there for him in this exploration assisted him with it too. What was also important for participants to learn about sexuality was going to university and learning about it more. Participant N explains:

Participant N: *“I’d say when I got to university I was on this journey of understanding different sexualities and understanding different gender identities, it was when this whole “woke” thing came about and I didn’t understand the language or the lexicon and I didn’t want to be this ignorant person who were making commentary on things I didn’t understand, especially since I knew that my own sexuality might not be straight. It wasn’t necessarily talking to people about bisexuality, it was more online resources what really helped me understand and expand the way I see bisexuality.”*

Educating himself about sexuality and gender identity was important when he came to university. Participant N explains that it was important to feel informed in his conversations with different people and to develop an understanding of his own sexuality as well. Coming to university and learning about different concepts aided in his understanding of bisexuality. Participant K explains that taking various courses at university furthered her understanding regarding bisexuality, *“I did a lot of gender courses in my undergrad and that is sort of where I developed an understanding of gender and sexuality a lot more than I had before.”*

Therefore, educating herself by means of university courses was an important aspect of Participant K’s understanding about different gender and sexual identities. Participant H, however, explains how just coming to university and the independence he experienced enabled him with the freedom to explore his identity, *“I was able to explore things myself without any outside influence. And by doing that, I actually figured out it’s a normal thing, it’s not what I was taught exactly.”* He felt more comfortable in developing his identity by

coming to university and to reconstruct and reconsider his own understandings of identity without the tainted influence of others. This facilitated his acceptance and comfortability of his bisexuality.

Therefore, exploration of bisexuality through online spaces, social media (such as TikTok), and through physical exploration assisted participants in understanding their bisexuality. This facilitates learning about bisexuality within participants own means and furthered a greater understanding of themselves and what being bisexual means to them.

This theme focused on how sources outside of participants' internal world influenced their bisexual identity development and their subjective experiences of what this means for them. At first, participants did not know what bisexuality was and how they could find something that accurately describes their sexuality. When participants finally learned about bisexuality, they still found difficulty in navigating what it means. It also came with a lot of confusion about the definitions of bisexuality and wondered whether bisexuality fully encapsulated their experience, thus their confusion with pansexuality. They finally found that exploring and educating themselves helped with understanding bisexuality and being able to confidently identify as bisexual.

4.2 Identity within the self

Participants had difficulty in discovering and identifying with bisexuality because of their lack of understanding of bisexuality, and this is seen in how they used outside sources of information, like social media, to find ways of describing their sexual identity. This theme will focus on the internal processes of the participants and how they now make sense of their identity. The subthemes discuss how individuals navigate their internal world and their sense of acceptance with their sexuality. Their internal world reflects their inner processing of information, beliefs, reflections, and choices (Tashimova et al., 2020).

4.2.1. *Invalidation leads to confusion*

Participants noted that misconceptions and stereotypes of bisexuality influenced their own perceptions of sexuality. Bisexuality is often invalidated by others, whether it be through people deeming it as a phase or someone who is afraid to identify as homosexual, and this results in participants having trouble with their identification. Flanders et al. (2015) also found that stigma negatively influenced the mental health of bisexual individuals.

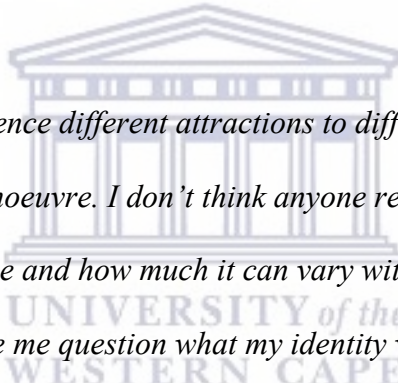
Participant N: *“There’s a lot of stereotypes about bisexual people, where you even get to the point where you question your own sexuality because of these stereotypes and these restricting notions of what sexuality should look like. I’ve always had that kind of struggle, especially as a male there’s this enforced heterosexuality that’s imposed upon you and anything other than that is seen as emasculating. The point is that I don’t think those feelings of greyness ever go away, there’s just a point where you’re like, my sexuality is valid, it is a sexuality in itself and it’s not half-half of whatever. It’s its own thing.”*

Participant N captures this experience. He had to go through stages of working through stereotypes and finally reaching a point of acceptance of his own sexuality.

Participant B substantiates this, noting that her mother’s beliefs of sexuality influenced her own beliefs for a while, *“Because my mom always told me like, this is a phase, you’re going to get over this. So, I always thought like okay, maybe she’s right, this can be a phase you know.”* This illuminates how invalidation from other people may lead to confusion of one’s own identity.

The idea of preferences and specific attraction also played a role in participants’ feelings of invalidation. Some participants experienced more attraction to a specific gender than others, which made them question their bisexuality. Hartman (2013) notes that bisexual

individuals often do not have the freedom to date one specific gender more often than others because society would attribute their behaviour to a different sexual identity. Participant G states that because she experiences a stronger attraction towards women, it causes her confusion, *“I very rarely get attracted to the opposite gender. It’s very infrequent. And when it does happen, I sometimes get upset by it. And I would definitely say that the social stigma definitely influenced how I feel about it.”* Even if she experiences this stronger attraction to women, her bisexual identity remains valid, however, social stigma affected her understanding of it. This participant must navigate what it means to be bisexual for herself, and what it means in society, especially after dealing with stigma and the hegemonic binary, she now must validate the sexuality she now identifies with. Furthermore, Participant I substantiate this:



Participant I: *“I experience different attractions to different genders. Because of that it was a bit weird to manoeuvre. I don’t think anyone really explains the different experiences you can have and how much it can vary with experiences with different people. I think that made me question what my identity was or how that fit in necessarily. It’s been quite difficult, and I’ve invalidated myself a lot in it.”*

Participant I’s different attractions caused him to invalidate himself and question his sexual identity. However, despite the invalidation by themselves or others, they felt most comfortable labelling themselves as bisexual. It led to a process of working through these stereotypes to gain a better understanding of the self.

Participant C: *“So, I sort of like had to deconstruct that to see that, that stereotype isn’t just what bisexuality is as a whole, and that stereotype doesn’t have to define me. And even if I slot within that stereotype, that doesn’t make bisexuality less of a varied and multifaceted experience that is touched by so many other aspects in people’s lives. It’s just*

been a process of pushing away from those stereotypes and not letting them be something that prevents me from being authentic of who I am as a bisexual person.”

Participant C sums up this experience: the only way they felt comfortable in identifying as bisexual was to deconstruct the stereotypes that made them question and feel invalidated. For the participants, it took time and experience to do so. Participant H notes, *“After a while, after a bit more experience, I would say “yes”, I definitely- there’s no other way.”* Bisexuality was the only label that encapsulated their sexuality and experience.

4.2.2 Freedom and belongingness

This subtheme discusses how participants transitioned from being riddled with confusion about their sexuality, through invalidation, to acceptance of themselves and a firmer sense of self. Participant L explains how identifying as bisexual made her understand herself better:

Participant L: *“Honestly, it’s great. I can now understand why I am like this; I can no longer feel confused. The confusion has ended, it’s great, and it’s also great that people are being educated about it. Because it’s not a phase. It’s not like I can switch off who I like and who I don’t like. I was even able to talk to my family and tell them that I was bisexual.”*

She no longer experiences confusion, but a positive feeling about herself and her experience. Participants also note that it comes with a sense of liberation, that they are no longer confined to either end of the binary, but the fact that they finally found a label or a group that captures their experience, they feel freer. Participant A notes, *“It felt good to belong to something. It made me feel like I belong, that I’m not an outcast. That I’m normal. I’m not the only person going through this.”* This positive experience shows the importance

of bisexuality- that it provides a space for people to feel like themselves and be accepted for who they are.

Participant N: *“Bisexuality to me, what does it mean... it’s me! It defines me. I think I never really fit in, in many aspects of my life. So, it makes sense that even with bisexuality I don’t really fit into being gay. It’s being a bit outside of the norms.”*

Thus, identifying as bisexual provided participants an opportunity to find and describe themselves, as they were not able to before. As seen with Participant N, he never felt like he “fit in” anywhere but identifying as bisexual assisted him in finding a space where he felt like he could fit in and be himself. Moreover, this led participants to be proud to identify as bisexual and be able to freely explore their identity, Participant L show this, *“But I can say it to whomever, I’m proud of my sexuality. I know this is my sexuality, I stand by it, and no one can change it, I don’t really care if you come with your views.”* This participant demonstrates her resolve in her sexual identity, indicating that stereotypes and beliefs about bisexuality does not impact her identification in any way, and that she is proud of identifying as bisexual. Living their authentic selves is important to these participants, as noted by Participant C, *“I’m pretty proud of it. I’m just- yeah, fine completely with being bisexual, it’s just the world who has issues and that’s their problem, not mine. I’m living my truth and I’m having fun, so, yeah.”* Social stereotypes about bisexuality have no more influence on these participants’ satisfaction with their sexual identity.

This sense of freedom that comes with the acceptance of self as bisexual is incredible for the participants, especially after the navigating through stages of intensified and complex confusion and invalidation that they experienced. Unfortunately, the stages of confusion and invalidation was further intensified for some participants who were not supported and

provided with a space of safety and security to further explore themselves as evidenced in the following theme.

4.3 Social support

It is evident that social support is an important factor in participants' understanding of themselves and sense of "fitting in". This theme discusses the roles of family, the LGBTQ+ community, and heterosexual people in these bisexual individual's experiences. It shows how these communities have impacted the participant's understandings and feelings of bisexuality, as well as their sense of acceptance and rejection.

4.3.1 Family

Family is the closest, and sometimes the most important people in a participant's life. As a result, their perception of the participant's bisexuality is an important factor to consider, and often has a major influence on a participant's sense of self. When disclosing her sexual identity to her mom, Participant B was faced with confusion and denial: "*Well, the thing is... the first time I came out to my mother, she was like- she made me so confused, because, she was like, 'but you like boys, you've been with boys, I've never seen you with a girl before. So why do you like girls?'*". With her admission, she did not receive any sort of immediate acceptance. Whilst the participant did not receive acceptance, it was not a rejection either. Similarly, Todd et al. (2016) found that these comments and confusion about bisexuality from the family caused participants to feel isolated and invalidated.

Some participants are hesitant to disclose to their parents for reasons such as religion. This is consistent with the findings of Garelick et al. (2017), that religion influences the way bisexuality is received. The religiosity of their parents impacts the way they view sexuality, and as a result, participants are afraid to disclose. For participant M, her mom told her to refer to religion to rid her of her queerness, "*I told her once and she basically told me to 'pray the*

gay away’.” This substantiates her hesitancy to come out, as her mother already expressed her disapproval.

Participant H’s response strengthens this notion of the influence of religion in his parents’ acceptance of queerness, *“I was raised up in a Christian household, so religion played a role- religion helped a lot with the internalised homophobia, if I can say that.”* This participant posits that religion has an influence in the acceptance of his bisexuality. Religion played an important role of this participant’s internal struggle with his sexuality, which majorly impacts his own self-evaluation and identity. Importantly, religion influences his family’s homophobia, as well as his own internal struggle with it. These participants may not feel the support they require concerning their bisexuality as a result of the impact of religion on sexuality.

This had not been the case for other participants. For some, their parents may not know or approve, but they had a sense of ally-ship with other members in their family. For example, as Participant B’s mother did not immediately approve of her bisexuality, her aunt was the one that supported her.

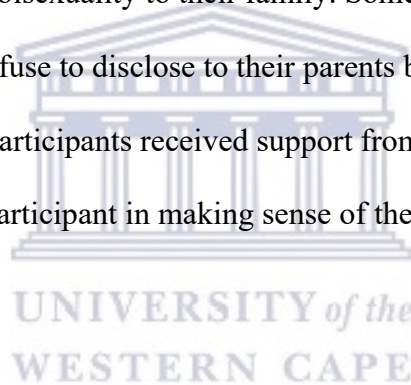
Participant B: *“I... came out like three years ago- three years ago yeah- yeah it was hectic for my mum to be honest, I can say that she is still in denial or something but the rest of my family were very supportive towards me. Especially my aunt, my mum’s younger sister. She told me like she knew from the beginning that I was always into girls and yeah she was just waiting for me to grow and to accept myself for who I am.”*

Participant B therefore received support from her family, even though it was not her mother. Some participants noted that their cousins were sources of support regarding their bisexuality, especially because they were queer as well:

Participant A: *“My cousin is pansexual. She’s the only person in the family who I can talk to about these matters. Even when I came out, she’s the person who helped me come out.”*

Participant D: *“My cousin is also queer, so we often have conversations in that line and, yeah, we would just talk about being with people or say, if I have someone then I would update her, and so.”*

These participants’ cousins provided them with solidarity and support, as participants noted that in terms of family, their queer cousins were the only people that they could speak to and would understand them. Family is important to participants, and participants expressed that they want to disclose their bisexuality to their family. Sometimes, this is not received well by their parents, or they refuse to disclose to their parents because of their religiosity and beliefs. However, other times participants received support from family, like their mom, aunt, or cousin, and this helped the participant in making sense of their bisexuality and became a pillar of support.



4.3.2 Heterosexual people

People who identify as heterosexual are oftentimes key figures in the lives of people who do not identify as heterosexual. These are usually family or friends within the individual’s life and therefore, the support and interactions from heterosexual people plays a significant role in the experience of being bisexual.

Therefore, the support and interactions from heterosexual people plays a significant role in their bisexual experience. This subtheme demonstrates how queer theory does not view sexuality as a core attribute of identity, but how performativity of heterosexuality- and sexuality in general- is repetitive and how the repetition constructs meaning and influences how certain concepts, like bisexuality, are perceived (Ryan, 2020).

The participants posited that people who identify as heterosexual often do not understand bisexuality, and their views on sexuality often invalidated participants' bisexuality. Participant N states that, *"It's very difficult to speak about bisexuality to straight people, it really is. They have their own assumptions, especially as a man, a lot of people think you're just gay and you're just scared to come out."* The beliefs heterosexual people hold about sexuality make it difficult for them to understand bisexuality. Participant M explains this:

Participant M: *"Like, you know those homophobic things people would say if you're a girl and you're with a girl they're going to say, "you're going to miss the real thing", implying that men are the real thing, that you're going to cheat on your girlfriend with a man. That type of thing helped me understand how straight people who have no interest in understanding others."*

She explains that people who identify as heterosexual would rather hold on to their ignorant beliefs about bisexuality, than to learn more about it. It is evident, especially in the South African context, that this dominant stance with heterosexual people can become dangerous, such as when heterosexual men would attempt 'corrective rape' to 'convert' queer women to heterosexuality (Stobie, 2011). Alternatively, some participants note that when they disclose their bisexuality to a heterosexual person, the person would ask an excessive number of questions that would often be too invasive. Participant A stated, *"Straight people- even if they don't try to be homophobic, they are. Even their questions."* This is further explained by Participant C:

Participant C: *"It's just, when you divulge that information about yourself, they feel entitled to know everything about how you present. Like, how this experience is for you. Even if they don't intend on dating you. Which I don't know why they feel they*

need to be privy to those details or anything. To like, how sex works or how you flirt with people. It's really invasive and it's- I don't understand why people don't have boundaries when it comes to that."

Heterosexual people often ask invasive questions, that are often out of bounds and can become offensive as seen with this participant. They often focus on the sexual part of queer relationships, and that leads to their invasive questions. Participant B explains that with heterosexual men she has dated before, she felt sexualised, *"Or, something is that it's "sexy", you know, really disgusting. They do that a lot."* Unfortunately, Participant I experienced a similar encounter, *"The men that I was with, they were, they identified as heterosexual. It was that thing of being fetishized and me being used and manipulated in certain situations."* He notes that his sexuality was fetishized by the men he was dating and sexualised. This illustrates how precarious and detrimental misconceptions of bisexuality can become. Furthermore, Stobie (2011) explicates the danger of this, how experiences of corrective rape are prevalent in South Africa, as well as the ignorance about bisexuality and sexism.

Whilst participants have negative experiences with people who identify as heterosexual, some participants had positive experiences with them. This is seen with Participant J, *"I cannot point out a negative experience where anyone has made me feel any less because of what I identify as."* She explains that they had not treated her any differently because of her sexual identity. Participant E confirms this, *"They didn't change their feelings towards me. They didn't treat me differently after I told them I am bisexual."* These participants have positive experiences with heterosexual people, despite other participants having the opposite. Evidently, these participants all are female identifying that had more positive experiences. With queer theory, we investigate the nuances of gender and sexuality and because of the dominant understandings of masculinity, that men are viewed more

negatively when associated with homosexuality, that would explain this phenomenon (Ramirez & Sterzing, 2017).

Participant G explains that people who identify as heterosexual are relatively accepting of bisexuality, however, they might not understand it that well. *“Most of them are quite accepting of it. But also confused by the concept. There are only a few people that are genuinely against it or think it’s wrong.”* Participant L explains that sometimes they appear accepting because they do not want to seem judgemental, *“Sometimes you can see the wheels turning in their head, you know, that sometimes they want to ask questions, but they don’t want to be those people who ask stupid questions as they think of them.”* Thus, she explains that heterosexual people often do not understand bisexuality. Participant K explains and furthers this:

Participant K: *“I think everything has become so... you get ‘cancelled’ if you’re not supportive. People are very sceptical of how they respond, so they are always like ‘okay and?’, ‘that’s cool’, ‘that’s fine’, but it doesn’t feel like a genuine reaction. Almost like they don’t want to seem like they are not being supportive.”*

According to Participant K, people identifying as heterosexual want to appear supportive, even though they might not be, because they do not want to be shunned by society for being bigoted. Participants are therefore sceptical about heterosexual people being supportive, because they might be accepting and supportive solely to not be perceived as a bad person or homophobic.

Although, participants experienced acceptance, from their closest friends, participant D explains, *“they didn’t give me a specific reaction like ‘woah I’m going to judge you’. Yeah, so I don’t think they gave me any bad vibes.”* This shows that his friends accepted him, regardless of his sexuality.

With this subtheme, participants have an assortment of experiences with people who identify as heterosexual. They experience both acceptance and judgement, but what stands out is that heterosexual people do not fully understand bisexuality. This leads to them depending on stereotypes, and asking invasive questions, but also having a fear of being perceived as bigoted.

4.3.3 *Comm(unity)*

Participants' experiences within the LGBTQ+ community is important, as it is a space for them to be themselves and to be understood. The support and solidarity they receive from this group is vital to their experience. Participant N elucidates this:

Participant N: *“So, when I am in a LGBTQ+ space, you do feel a bit more free to be more expressive with your gender expression. Like, you can be out there saying “yaaaas queen, slay!”, “work girl!” and you can’t be like that whilst with heterosexual people, you don’t feel like you have that space.”*

From the above it is evident that the participant experiences a sense of freedom to be himself when he is in a LGBTQ+ space, something he does not feel among heterosexual people. This support system is important for bisexual individuals to freely express their identity within this safe space. Other participants experience the same as seen with participant D, *“Whenever you are with people in the community, you can be yourself, you can talk about people you’ve dated, or so.”*

Participants feel more comfortable with this community because they can relate to one another and offer one another a shared compassion. Participant B explains, *“And they’re also in the community so we share the same feelings, the same experience, and... we talk about the same things, we’ve been through the same things. So, we relate a lot.”* The similarity in experiences is what makes this such a safe space for the participants. Participant L explains

that the community has this sense of unity, *“Because we are learning parts of ourselves that society is deeming weird and unnormal. So, we are marginalised, so we form a unity to protect ourselves but at the same time we understand.”*

Participant L shows that because of the rejection faced by society, people within the LGBTQ+ community must stick together to be there for one another. Society rejects and discriminates against queer identities, and as a result, people within the community must face unique difficulties. Participant H explains it as, *“We’re all in this together”*, indicating this shared solidarity because of the similar experiences and struggles. Participant H explains that there is an increased interest to get to know other queer people, just because of their similar experiences, *“Once you hear something about someone, you do get excited like, there’s another one who’s in my community. Who is this person? Like, I want to get to know this person. We can vibe!”*

Therefore, the experiences within the LGBTQ+ community has been much more positive than within heterosexual spaces. This community provides individuals, who identify as bisexual, the space to freely express themselves and a deeper understanding of what it means to be queer. Furthermore, this theme described how different the experiences are with certain groups, and how participants experienced support from people in their lives. Sometimes, participants obtain a sense of allyship with the people in their lives, but also judgement, as seen previously how this allyship can become complex with the LGBTQ+ community.

4.4 Inviting in

Disclosure of sexual identity is a big part of being bisexual as it allows bisexual individuals to freely express themselves, and to not hide who they are. This theme discusses the coming out experience, or as Participant N calls it “inviting in”. It elucidates the choice

the participants have of disclosing their bisexuality by their own means, and to people whom they trust.

Participant N: *“The way I think about it is, look, in life there’s always going to be layers of connecting with people around us and when it comes to sexuality, it’s not going to be a once-off event. When I talk about letting or inviting in, it’s me understanding that I have come to a point in my relationship with you that it’s relevant for you to be invited into my circle and understand that I am a bisexual man.”*

Thus, this theme will discuss this notion of inviting people in, which is an intricate process of deciding whether they can trust someone to be let into their intimate circle. The subthemes will highlight why participants decide to disclose to certain people, and how they experienced inviting friends, family, and other queer people in.

4.4.1 Fear of judgement

As seen from the results, participants experience judgement and rejection from other people because of their bisexuality, and often refrain from disclosing their identity out of fear. This subtheme will discuss the reasons why participants experience this fear of judgement that makes inviting in a difficult process.

The main reason why participants are hesitant to invite in, or disclose their bisexual identity, is because of how stereotypes and discrimination is perpetuated in society:

Participant E: *“Because of media. You know those people who make nasty comments about the LGBTQ community. You would wonder, are the people who you want to tell included in the people who judge or are rude to the LGBTQ community. I think that’s what makes me a bit scared.”*

Participant E substantiates this notion of other people's beliefs and behaviour toward queer identities causing a fear to disclose. Flanders et al. (2015) found that coming out would be a source of stress, anxiety, and exhaustion for bisexual individuals because of people not recognising bisexuality as legitimate, whereby they constantly had to explain their sexual identity. Furthermore, Participant L notes that she fears that when she finally decides to disclose her bisexuality, that she would be faced with judgement and invalidation. *“That knowledge that I share with them can turn those thoughts into judgements and then they would start tearing it down and trying to find flaws in it.”* Participants find it easier not to disclose to others sometimes because of the possibility of their identity being judged.

Other times, participants decide it is better to disclose earlier on, despite the possibility of judgement they may face. Participant C strengthens this, noting that it is best to find out earlier rather than later whether a person is bigoted. *“I don't want to form connections with people who will find out I'm queer in any way, and then find out that they're bigoted and then have all that work that I put into our bond undone.”* Thus, the fear of judgement persists, but for these participants, it is preferred to figure that out early in a relationship. The participants have come to a point where they feel stable in their identity, however, to open a space where they might be judged and invalidated brings about a sense of fear.

4.4.2 Telling friends, not family

As posited earlier, participants prefer to not invite in their family, because of their family's views on bisexuality. Todd et al. (2016) explains that bisexual individuals believe the negative reactions they expect from their families is not worth disclosing their sexuality, and rather feel comfortable telling specific people.

Participant E: *“I’ve only told my closest cousins and my friends. I know I trust my parents but... from my judgement I can see that they won’t accept. They might not accept immediately- let’s just say they’re not going to accept. It’s not going to be nice with conflict in the house.”*

This participant would prefer not inviting her parents in to avoid an uncomfortable living situation. This reason may be why certain participants feel comfortable waiting for independence from their parents before they disclose their identity. Participant H notes, *“I haven’t come out, and I don’t intend to for a while, not until I build my own foundation so I can support myself, and then I’m going to come out.”* Because of this, he has waited to disclose to his family.

Participants feel more comfortable letting their friends in, and as Participant H said, it is a *“pleasant experience”* when you let your friends in. Participant L strengthens this, *“So, with my friends it was never a problem. They are very much aware of it. They have never felt any how negative about it.”* Participant D explains that his friends were comfortable with him after inviting them in, *“They were quite supportive, they weren’t judgy, so I didn’t feel uncomfortable doing that.”*

Inviting friends in was important to the participants, it led them to develop a deeper friendship and sense of support and trust. Participant H strengthens this, *“Like, it’s not really a real friendship until you remove that from the friendship. When you remove the secrecy.”* Their friends supported them with their bisexuality, as Participant I notes, *“I had friends that come to pride with me, and it was really, really lovely. I felt a lot of support.”* Here, we see that it brings up positive feelings when participants’ friends know, and it was beneficial for this participant because these were the friends he initially disclosed to, before his family.

4.4.3 Telling queer people

Previously, participants felt connected with the LGBTQ+ community because they had a sense of solidarity and relation. The participants believed that the community served as a safe space for them. This subtheme will discuss participants' individual experiences with people in the queer community and note whether these encounters are different to how they feel about the queer community.

Participants explain that when they invite queer people in, they are met with acceptance. Some participants experience this acceptance with excitement. Participant J explains, *“Oh, they’re like, ‘Hey now girl, you too!’, like ‘hashtag me too!’ A whole positive movement. Like, ‘welcome home baby girl!’ They’re like, ‘Welcome to our world, how are you?’”* Thus, when inviting her queer friends in, she was invited in as well. This reciprocal action is experienced by other participants as well, that queer people invited them in too. This experience- of trusting someone to not be judgemental when you disclose your sexual identity- is easier for some participants when they do so with people within the queer community. This is because, according to Participant G, *“People who are LGBT are definitely more understanding of it than straight people because they’ve also gone through that process of questioning.”* Rubin and Matsick (2018) supports this, finding that lesbian and gay people have more positive attitudes toward bisexual people. Queer people are more likely to be understanding because they too must go through a process of questioning their sexual identity because they do not fit within the heterosexual category. The participants can express themselves easier when they are in a space with other queer people.

Some participants have also had instances where queer people did not immediately accept their bisexuality, rather they were questioned as to whether they are not just homosexual or heterosexual.

Participant H: *“This is actually surprising- like, they don’t believe. I feel like sometimes, when I do say it- it might just me doing it to myself- but when I do say it to people who I know are gay, they have this face where they don’t exactly believe me.”*

Participant H explains that he gets questioned when he tries to invite in people who are gay. This shows that bisexuality may be invalidated by homosexual people as well. Participant G further explains that she is hesitant to disclose her sexuality, especially online, because of homosexual people not being accepting of bisexuality. She explains, *“And especially online, there’s a lot of gay and lesbian people invalidating bi people, saying they need to pick a side and that’s also discouraging to me and a lot of people.”* This indicates that homosexual people also try to steer bisexual individuals toward the homosexual/heterosexual binary. Rubin and Matsick (2018) found that even within the queer community, bisexual individuals are believed to be afraid to come out as homosexual, that bisexuality is a transitory period.

Moreover, Participant I further this, explaining that stereotypes of sexuality do not only affect heterosexual people, but homosexual people as well:

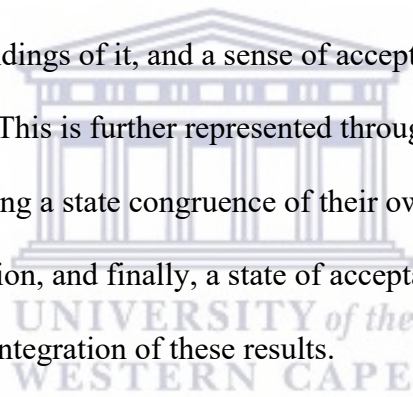
Participant I: *“I think it comes down to these ideas that many of them are struggling with, they’re preconceived ideas of what you meant to be and a box you need to fit in. When they meet someone that doesn’t fit into these categories, it’s kind of jarring for them.”*

He explains that the way bisexuality is understood and perpetuated in society also impacts the way people who are homosexual, understand bisexuality. Participant H substantiates this, *“From their perspective, they struggle just like straight people struggle with understanding it, even the gays do not understand it.”* Therefore, there is not much of an understanding of bisexuality, regardless of whether you are heterosexual or homosexual.

Therefore, this theme explicates how and when participants felt comfortable in disclosing their sexual identity to others. They must establish a sense of trust in the relationship, especially in terms of knowing whether they will not be judged before they invited people to know about their bisexuality. For the participants, it is easier to talk about topics surrounding their queer identity when they do so with people in the LGBTQ+ community, connecting to that sense of solidarity and understanding mentioned earlier.

4.5 Chapter summary

This study found that the participants go through a process of confusion, questioning, invalidation, and finally acceptance of their identity. This resembles the proposition of Bradford (2004), where young adults go through a process of questioning their identity, developing their own understandings of it, and a sense of acceptance after finally finding a label that resonates with them. This is further represented through participants in this study who vacillate between identifying a state congruence of their own sexuality, invalidation of it and further research, introspection, and finally, a state of acceptance. The proceeding chapter provides an interpretation and integration of these results.



Chapter 5: Discussion

This section serves as a critical integration of the findings of the study and the literature as it aligns to the proposed aims and objectives. This study aimed to describe young adults' understandings of their sexual identity when they do not identify within the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

5.1 Describing young adults' understandings of bisexuality

The first objective of this study was to describe the understandings young adults have about how their bisexuality develops. The theme that relates to this objective is the first theme, *4.1 Identity beyond the self*.

For the first subtheme, *4.1.1 Lack of awareness of bisexuality*, indicates a very important part of the process of developing one's identity, the process of discovery. One of the very first findings that emerged from the data was the participants' unawareness of the existence of bisexuality. Many studies described bisexual erasure and invisibility (Barker et al., 2012; Dodge et al, 2019; Flanders & Hatfield, 2014; Flanders, 2019; Garelick, 2017; Hartman, 2013). For Doan Van et al.'s (2019) participants, it was difficult to understand and accept their bisexuality because they were told that bisexuality was not real, which further precipitated their invalidation of bisexuality because they did not hear of it often. This illustrates a pertinent finding that bisexual erasure exists, and it impacts the way bisexual individuals understand their identity. One can infer from this that the development of a congruent sexual identity, beyond the 'mainstream' homosexual/heterosexual binary, is an arduous, oftentimes individual experience for participants.

The participants explained that they were taught that there was only one way to understand sexuality, Participant M explained that she only knew about homosexuality and heterosexuality, and that homosexuality was wrong. With this finding, the necessity of a

queer lens is made apparent, as it broadens the conversations and understandings of identities beyond the binaries (Brim & Ghiziani, 2016). These dominant binaries impede ‘other’ identities, such as bisexuality, as it does not allow these identities to be illuminated and normalised. Queer theory attempts to deconstruct these binaries that enforces an exclusionary view of ‘other’ identities (Brim & Ghiziani, 2016). Within this context, queer theory aims to highlight the nuances of what it means to be bisexual in a society that understands sexuality as dichotomous. Queer theory consequently provides a more inclusive perspective of ‘other’ understandings of identities beyond the hegemonic binary.

Sexual identity development is further strained when particular categories of identity simulate similar characteristics of other identities. In other words, participants not only come to understand that they do not resonate with the hegemonic binary, but once they identify other identities, they need to navigate the nuances of those identities to determine the identity most congruent for them. This was highlighted by participants in this study when navigating the differences between pansexuality and bisexuality, as seen in subtheme *4.1.2 Bisexuality and pansexuality*. This also indicates that not only can identity categories be social constructions, but a self-construct as well, as the participants had to develop their own understanding of these labels and how they resonate with each.

The confusion of different labels affected their development as a bisexual individual, and participants noted that there is not a lot of information available regarding queer identities. Khuzwayo and Morison (2017) noted the same, that the education of queer identities is meagre, especially in South Africa. In their study, one of their participants noted that they did not know anyone who identified as bisexual, which added to their confusion about their identity (Khuzwayo & Morison, 2017). This illustrates, not only the importance of education of bisexuality, but the dominance of the “main” sexualities- homosexuality and heterosexuality- in society. Moreover, as evidenced in subtheme *4.1.3 Self-education of*

sexual orientations, this lack of information of bisexuality is what lead participants to make use of external sources, like social media and the internet. The participants also noted the use of romantic exploration to develop their understanding of their sexual identity. This self-education is beneficial, not only because it allowed participants to understand bisexuality better, but also because it assisted in them gaining a sense of agency in terms of their own sexuality. Many explained how they were made to choose between two sexualities (homosexuality and heterosexuality), neither of which they identified with, and through this self-exploration they developed autonomy with regards to their sexual identity. The participants utilise this social construct of bisexuality and transformed it into a self-construct- into a concept that makes sense to them and that fully captures the essence of their experience and identity.

This demonstrates the necessity of developing a deeper understanding of societal constructs, which queer theory allows (Ramirez & Sterzing, 2017). Queer theory assists in understanding the construction of identities in society, however, one critique of the lens is that it does not consider the effect the social context- such as ideologies and how they are perpetuated- has on the everyday experiences of queer people (Ryan, 2020). As is apparent above, social constructs of identity have been imposed on the participants, which led them to experience confusion about their sexuality, and now that they are made aware of the different identities that exist, it further exacerbated their confusion. Queer theory destabilises the dominant binaries in society to bring awareness to the lack of representation of other identities, but it does not investigate the individual experiences of living with these destabilising identities (Ryan, 2020). Participants must deal with social impositions of their sexuality and attempt to create meaning for themselves out of that and gain a sense of autonomy.

5.2 Young adults' understandings of sexual identity beyond the binary

As mentioned extensively throughout this thesis, the way sexuality is dominantly understood in society, is through this binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality. As a result, it does not accord much space for other sexualities, like bisexuality, to be understood. The perceived ambiguity bisexuality holds impacts the cognitive processing of sexual identity information (Garelick et al., 2017). This supports this study's finding that participants often felt that they needed to conform to the binary, to pick a side. This resulted in confusion in terms of what the participants thought they were 'supposed' to be. Subtheme *4.2.1 Invalidation causing confusion*, captures this, as participants often had difficulty understanding and accepting themselves based on the invalidation of others and society.

Queer theory allows for a more inclusive approach beyond the binary whilst simultaneously noting the structural barriers that impede the lives of queer individuals and that sexuality cannot be encapsulated within the binary (Few-Demo et al., 2016). Bisexuality breaks societal barriers, which illuminates the perception of sexuality within society- that one-gender-attraction sexualities are dominant. This perception is often one that is stereotypical and results in the ostracization of bisexuality. Ghabrial and Ross (2018) supports this, explaining that bisexuality is understood through various misconceptions from both sides of the binary, resulting in bisexual individuals' perceptions of themselves being misconceived. It is clear in subtheme *4.3.2 Heterosexual people*, that people who identify as heterosexual often have difficulty understanding bisexuality. This is evidenced in participant M's conviction that people who identify as heterosexual do not present the interest in developing their understanding of bisexuality. This misunderstanding and ignorance of bisexuality is seen in the differences particular participants experienced. The female identifying participants indicated having more positive experiences with people identifying as heterosexual, although they might have felt more sexualised in some cases- as evidenced by

Participant B, which is different from the experiences of the male identifying participants. Moreover, this finding correlates with research, which shows that women who identify as bisexual would be hypersexualised and viewed as more promiscuous, whereas men would be viewed more negatively and especially invalidated in their identity (Beach et al., 2019; Dodge et al., 2016). With queer theory, it is possible to identify the problematic meanings attached to certain identities, especially with how differently sexuality is regarded depending on gender (Ryan, 2020).

This difficulty in understanding bisexuality is also seen when participants noted that disclosing their identity to people who identify as homosexual, as evidenced in subtheme *4.3.3 Telling queer people*, they sometimes did not receive immediate approval or acceptance, even though both sexualities are part of the LGBTQ+ community. The homosexual/heterosexual binary's deconstruction is important, and queer theory notes that heterosexuality remains the privileged position whereas homosexuality is seen as inferior (Ryan, 2020). Homosexuality had been viewed similarly as bisexuality is now, being wrong and invalid, but it is now at a position where it subjugates other sexualities like bisexuality for the same reasons. Thus, whilst homosexuality is viewed as inferior as opposed to heterosexuality, queer theory also aims to question the contestation of the identities outside of these sexualities, such as bisexuality (Ryan, 2020). Therefore, queer notes that bisexuality can be marginalised by both of these sexualities. Queer theory demonstrates the intricacies queer identities must navigate within the dominant structures that marginalise them, but it does not wholly account for the intergroup politics within the LGBTQ+ community (Pullen et al., 2016). It is evident that individuals who identify as bisexual must navigate how they are accepted within their broader community as well as within the LGBTQ+ community.

Even when participants experience this difficulty with moving between the homosexual/heterosexual binary, they can progress into a state of acceptance of themselves.

In subtheme *4.2.2 Freedom and belongingness*, the participants felt a sense of belongingness with their bisexuality and inclusion in a community after experiencing confusion and constant invalidation regarding their sexual identity. The participants realised that identifying as bisexual manifested a sense of fulfilment, and feelings of authenticity and congruence. They accepted that they do not have to be homosexual or heterosexual or to feel coerced into a specific category. After discerning that they do not fit within this binary, acceptance toward themselves and toward bisexuality was garnered. Therefore, the importance of inclusion when it comes to being bisexual is apparent.

This is also demonstrated further in terms of the influence of the family on the individual's perception of bisexuality and how this impacted on bisexual development, as seen in subtheme *4.3.1 Family*. The participants had to face invalidation from their families, who made them feel as if being bisexual was a phase or telling them that they had to pick a side. This added confusion as to what it means to be bisexual for the participants. Todd et al. (2016) found that family often invalidated bisexuality, telling bisexual individuals that they must conform to the binary- to decide between homosexuality and heterosexuality- or that it does not exist, adding to their experience of feeling invalidated and closeted. Taylor and Nepl (2021) explain how disclosure of sexual identity is also fuelled by whether they thought their parents would accept them. This may provide an explanation as to why participants felt more comfortable disclosing their bisexuality to their friends, and not family, as indicated by subtheme *4.4.2 Telling friends, not family*. Taylor and Nepl (2021) found that negative reactions from parents had an influence on their child's sexual identity, noting that the children had more struggles with their identity because of the rejection.

Moreover, participants also felt a sense of connection with queer family members, which solidified their acceptance of their sexuality. Doan Van et al. (2019) explains how confidence in their bisexuality is important for participants to not be negatively affected by

others' perceptions. This confidence can be reinforced with other queer family members, as seen with these participants, in how they felt comfortable disclosing their sexual identity and related aspects to family members who also identified with the LGBTQ+ community. Taylor and Nepl (2021) note how familial support is important to LGBTQ+ youth in terms of integrating their identity with full acceptance. Participants were able to process their sexual identity and feel comfortable identifying as bisexual when they were able to feel a sense of acceptance from their families.

Thus, a connection to the family has an influence on the way these participants perceived themselves, and especially if that connection is tied to the LGBTQ+ community as well. This relates to queer theory's aims, which is to show the inextricable link to the social context that sexuality has, how this intersection relates to the internal and external perception of the sexual identity (Ryan, 2020). It is therefore necessary to acknowledge how aspects like familial support and a close connection to the LGBTQ+ community impacts the way the participants feel about themselves and express their sexual identity.

5.3 How young adults relate to the LGBTQ+ community

The acceptance of bisexuality allowed the participants to feel connected to a group of people that understood them and shared similar experiences. This collective identity forms part of a larger group identification with the LGBTQ+ community, and this connection was perceived by the participants as both positive and negative. This objective is met through the subthemes *4.3.2 Heterosexual people*, and *4.3.3 Comm(unity) with the LGBTQ+ community*.

An important finding within this study is that the participants felt a sense of unity and community with the larger LGBTQ+ community, as explicated through subtheme *4.3.3 Comm(unity) with the LGBTQ+ community*. The participants felt more comfortable disclosing private details of their lives with people within the LGBTQ+ community. The

unique challenges people within the LGBTQ+ community face- for example, fear of rejection and judgement solely based on their sexuality- allowed for members to connect and create a sense of solidarity. The participants often felt a sense of unconditional acceptance and understanding from other members in the community. Having this acceptance and understanding allowed them to explore their identities and solidify themselves within their queer identities. Thus, the connection that LGBTQ+ community members have with one another is one that cannot be shared with cisgender, heterosexual people. Subtheme 4.3.2 *Heterosexual people* indicates this, that people who identify as heterosexual often have difficulty understanding bisexuality, and bisexual individuals find it difficult to connect with them. As evidenced in the abovementioned subtheme, people identifying as heterosexual oftentimes misunderstand bisexuality and they ask invasive questions, leading to a sense of ostracism being felt, which these bisexual young adults do not necessarily feel with LGBTQ+ community.

Scroggs and Vennum (2020) finds that further identity development is signified through connecting with similar groups of people, and this connection assists in processing marginalising experiences from other people. Queer theory identifies the impact of the dominant sexual identities on the marginalised ones, like bisexuality, but it does not delineate the individual experiences of marginalisation and how that impact identity development (Pullen et al., 2016). Therefore, this gap is imperative- it is necessary to investigate how individuals develop their sexual identity within the nuances of group connection.

However, participants have explained that their experiences with people in the LGBTQ+ community have not always been positive. Specifically, the participants explicate the invalidation they faced from homosexual people, and this is evident in subtheme 4.4.3 *Telling queer people*. They disclosed their sexuality to people who identify as homosexual, and they are questioned or told that they (the people who identify as homosexual) do not

believe the participant is bisexual. This false understanding by homosexual people of bisexuality can be explained by the construct of monosexuality- attraction to only one gender- and the dominant understanding of sexuality as dichotomous. One participant explains this, noting that it is difficult for people who identify as homosexual to understand bisexuality because of their preconceived ideas about sexuality. Doan Van et al. (2019) finds that bisexual individuals are told by homosexual individuals that bisexuality is transitional to identifying as homosexual, or that it does not exist. Rubin and Matsick (2018) strengthens this finding, that prejudice is found within the LGBTQ+ community specifically around bisexuality. This finding strengthens the argument of queer theory- that there are dominant understandings of sexuality (which is that homosexuality and heterosexuality can be deemed as the 'acceptable' sexualities), and that this power dynamic is evident in all social, political, and cultural structures that develop into the marginalisation and ostracization of identities such as bisexuality (Ryan, 2020). Therefore, the influence this group has on bisexual young adults cannot be disregarded, especially as this group is perceived to provide a sense of solidarity. Flanders et al. (2019) corroborates this finding, that there is a negative outcome on identity affirmation and feelings of illegitimacy when there is a closer connection to the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, there are both positive and negative aspects to connecting with the LGBTQ+ community, and for the most part, the negativity can be lessened through a more open dominant understanding of bisexuality.

5.4 Describing young adults' understanding of their sexual identity when they identify as bisexual

One important finding to highlight is the realisation of participants feelings of agency concerning their sexual identity. They realised that it is acceptable to identify outside the homosexual/heterosexual binary, and that it is their choice to disclose their sexual identity. Disclosure of sexual identity is an important aspect in the lives of queer people and can

become complicated and nuanced (Feinstein & Dyar, 2017). The way bisexual individuals make their sexual identity known is a process, and often it is done so with consideration of whether they will be rejected or invalidated (Feinstein & Dyar, 2017). This section will discuss the theme, *4.4 Inviting in*.

Participants practice “inviting in” whereby they decide when to disclose their identity to people they deem trustworthy and who will accept them regardless of their sexuality. This choice of disclosure is common practice for queer identities (Pullen et al., 2016). The participants highlighted their fear of judgement impeding the disclosure of their sexuality. This fear of judgement is valid as it is found in this study and others (Doan Van et al., 2019; Dodge et al., 2016; Flanders & Hatfield, 2013; Garelick et al., 2017; etc). It affects the relationships of the participants, as some participants felt closer to their friends when their friends knew about their sexuality, for example. Thus, yet again the importance of the social context in the experience of their bisexual identity, which is a key tenet of queer theory (Ryan, 2020).

There are many factors that are associated with disclosure or “inviting in” for bisexual individuals, however, it is necessary to note that participants felt comfortable sharing this part with others- after all the invalidation and confusion they faced- with a sense of agency and confidence in their bisexuality. This is significant because it illustrates the bisexual individual’s acceptance of themselves, and their comfortability with freely expressing themselves. It signifies a sense of understanding of who they are and pride in their identity. More importantly, it facilitates the distribution of power being changed. As mentioned previously, identities such as bisexuality are being marginalised by the dominant sexualities in society, which makes it difficult for these individuals to navigate their interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences. By demonstrating the process of inviting in, the participants are reclaiming their power and creating a space for themselves where they do not experience

judgement from other people, because they are choosing when and to whom they are disclosing their sexuality.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter provided the interpretation of the key findings of the study, with the use of literature to support. It is clear that bisexual identity development is convoluted due to the existence of stigma and misconceptions of sexuality and bisexuality. Young adults who identify as bisexual must face many difficulties that impact their experience of acceptance, self-perception, and identity construction. Therefore, these individuals are impacted by the hegemonic binary, and must work through the impositions caused by it to develop their sexual identity and acceptance of themselves. The following chapter will conclude the thesis, discussing the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.



Chapter 6: Limitations, recommendations, and conclusion

The ensuing chapter shall discuss the limitations to the study after reflection of the entirety of the study. Thereafter, it provides recommendations that can be implemented in future research based on the findings, and finally, the conclusion of the thesis.

6.1 Limitations of the study

The data collection of this study was conducted in 2021, when COVID-19 restrictions in South Africa did not permit in-person interviews, and only online interviews was possible. In-person interviews would have been beneficial and allowed for easier rapport building and non-verbal cues to generate deepened data.

This study attempted to describe the different experiences young bisexual adults had with individuals who identified as homosexual and heterosexual, and how that plays a role in their understanding of being bisexual. However, while it was important to note the hegemonic binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality on bisexual individuals, it would have been useful to enquire about the experiences with other bisexual individuals. The way bisexual individuals form a community or connection would facilitate a deeper understanding on the ways in which the bisexual identity develops. Moreover, a deeper understanding on how bisexual individuals navigate misconceptions together would illuminate how they understand their sexual identities.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

It is important to reinstate that research, especially in a South African context, on bisexuality is lacking. Research on LGBTQ+ matters have become more developed the past years, however, bisexuality in psychology remains a neglected area, specifically, research on bisexuality isolated from other sexualities. Therefore, the development of research on this topic would be highly beneficial.

Another recommendation would be to focus on how gender and sexuality intersects, and how it plays a role in their bisexual development. A few participants of this study did not identify as cisgender, and they enunciated the importance that their queer gender identity played a role in how they navigated their identity and sexual identity. This intersects with how they express themselves and how their relationships with other people look. Therefore, an inspection into how queer gender and sexuality intersect is needed.

Furthering the topic of gender and sexuality, it may be useful to look at how different the experiences of bisexual individuals are based on their gender identity, when they are cisgender. For example, Dodge et al. (2016) investigated the way bisexual men and women are perceived in society, and highlighted the different perceptions based on gender. Thus, we can investigate how different perceptions based on gender influences young adults' understanding of their bisexual identity.

Another recommendation that can be considered, is to look at a discourse analysis of the terms people within the LGBTQ+ community use to construct/label their identities. This is because this study found that sexuality is a self-construct as much as it is a social construction. There is a multitude of labels that queer people must consider in describing their sexual and gender identity. With the labels come different lexicon used within the queer community. For example, many participants would utilise the term “gay” or “queer” as an umbrella term to describe their identity loosely. Thus, the navigation of different terms is an important process in queer-identifying individuals and may reveal key aspects of identity development for these individuals.

6.3 Conclusion

This project sought to describe the experiences of young adults who identify as bisexual and how they experience not identifying within the dominant sexual binary of

homosexuality and heterosexuality. Evidently, bisexuality was not a known concept to the participants when they attempted to make sense of their sexuality. They realised that their multiple attractions could not be described by what they know- homosexuality and heterosexuality. This confirms the conception that homosexuality and heterosexuality are made dominant, and this subjugates the idea of other sexualities (like bisexuality). The manner in which sexuality is understood in society impacts how young adults understand their own sexual identity, particularly in a time where self-discovery is pertinent to their development. When they can clearly understand and describe their sexuality, they develop a sense of agency and autonomy.

Navigating the binary can lead to young adults identifying as bisexual to progress into a sense of self-acceptance after facing confusion and invalidation. They realise that they need not fit into a specific category that cannot fully capture their sexuality.

The impact of other people is important to the experience of bisexual young adults. Their family's invalidation may impede the development of their sexual identity and acceptance of it. Experiences with queer family members were found to be beneficial. Moreover, the acceptance and openness of friends, and the sense of community created through connecting with the LGBTQ+ community furthered self-acceptance and confidence in their sexual identity.

Finally, the confidence and acceptance of their sexual identity allowed the participants to make decisions about who they are, and to whom they may disclose their identity to. This step is important as it takes away the subjugation they faced when "coming out" to everyone, rather, they decided who they would disclose their sexuality to, fostering a sense of ownership over their identity. By doing this, they are able to reclaim the power and validation of their sexuality, that is otherwise taken away by common misconceptions of sexuality in

society. This final step culminates the experience of developing one's sexual identity when identifying as bisexual- after discovery, facing confusion and invalidation from oneself and others, navigating interpersonal experiences with family, friends, and other queer people, one can confidently understand bisexuality and develop ownership over a sexuality that is misunderstood and oppressed in society.



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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide



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INTERVIEW GUIDE

Note: The details of the interviews will depend on the answers given by the participants, and as such the following questions will be used to guide the interview:

SECTION A: Demographic data

Gender:

Age:

Faculty:

Degree:

Year level (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc):

Sexual orientation:



SECTION B: Questions

To build rapport

1. Thank participants for joining the study, remind participants of the ethical considerations such as anonymity and confidentiality that will be upheld through protecting their identifying information, and that they may leave or stop the interview at any point if they wish to do so without any repercussions.
2. Ask participants if they have any questions about the study, anything they wish to know before commencing the interview.

3. Ask participants how they are doing, how are they finding the online environment, are they enjoying their studies.

Bisexual Identification and Development

1. You have taken part in this study because you identify as bisexual. Could you tell me a little more about this?
 - a. Prompts: At what age did you know that you were bisexual?
 - b. How do you feel about your bisexuality? Could you describe this experience a little more?
2. How would you define the term bisexual?
 - a. What does your bisexual identity mean to you?
 - b. Have you always understood bisexuality as this? Or when did this change for you?
3. When you hear the term “bisexual” what are some of your thoughts and feelings about it?
 - a. Prompt: Could you tell me how or why those are your thoughts?

Experiences with heterosexual people

1. Tell me about your experiences with people who identify as heterosexual?
 - a. What are their reactions to you?
 - b. What makes you disclose your sexual identity to others?
2. How would you describe heterosexual people’s reactions when you reveal your sexual identity to them?
3. How often would you disclose your sexual identity to people who are heterosexual? Could you tell me a little bit more as to why?

Experiences with the LGBTQ+ community

1. Tell me about your experiences with people who identify as homosexual (gay or lesbian)?
 - a. What are their reactions to you?
 - b. What makes you disclose your sexual identity to others?
2. How would these encounters be different than those with heterosexual people?
 - a. Prompt: Would you be able to describe an instance where it is different / similar?
3. How would you describe homosexual people's reactions when you reveal your sexual identity to them?
4. How often would you disclose your sexual identity to people who are homosexual?
Could you tell me a little bit more as to why?
5. How would you describe your encounters with people with other gender and sexual identities within the LGBTQ+ community? (Transgender, pansexual, asexual, non-binary or queer individuals, for example). Prompt: Could you tell me why these are the same or different?

ONDERHOUD GIDS

Neem kennis: Die besonderhede van die onderhoude sal afhang van die antwoorde verskaf word vanaf die navorsing deelnemers, en die volgende vrae sal gebruik word om die onderhoud te lei:

Afdeling A: Demografiese data

Geslag:

Ouderdom:

Fakulteit:

Graad:

Jaarvlak (1^{ste}, 2^{de}, 3^{rde}, ens.):

Seksuele oriëntasie:



Afdeling B: Vrae

Om verband te bou

1. Bedank deelnemers dat hulle in die projek deelneem, herinner hul van die etiese oorwegings soos anonimiteit en vertroulikheid wat sal behou word deur hul identifiserende inligting te beskerm, en dat hulle die onderhoud mag stop op enige punt sonder enige nagevolge.
2. Vra deelnemers of hulle enige vrae het oor die projek, enigiets wat hulle graag wil weet voor die aanvang van die onderhoud.
3. Vra deelnemers hoe dit met hul gaan, hoe bevind hulle die aanlyn omgewing, hoe hulle hul studies geniet.

Biseksuele identifisering en ontwikkeling

1. Jy het deelgeneem aan die projek want jy identifiseer as biseksueel. Kan jy my 'n bietjie meer oor dit vertel?
 - a. Onderzoekende vrae: Op watter ouderdom het jy geweet jy is biseksueel?
 - b. Hoe voel jy oor jou biseksualiteit? Kan jy die ondervinding bietjie meer beskryf?
2. Hoe sal jy die term “biseksueel” definieer?
 - a. Wat beteken jou biseksualiteit vir jou?
 - b. Het jy altyd biseksualiteit so verstaan? Of wanneer het dit vir jou verander?
3. Wanneer jy die term “biseksueel” hoor, wat is van die opkomende gedagtes en gevoelens vir jou?
 - a. Onderzoekende vraag: Kan jy my vertel hoe of hoekom die jou gedagtes is?

Ondervindings met mense wat identifiseer as heteroseksueel

1. Vertel vir my jou ondervindinge met mense wie identifiseer as heteroseksueel?
 - a. Wat is hulle reaksies teenoor jou?
2. Wat maak jou, jou seksuele identiteit openbaar aan ander?
3. Hoe sal jy heteroseksuele mense se reaksies beskryf wanneer jy jou seksualiteit aan hul openbaar?
4. Hoe gereeld sal jy jou seksuele identiteit aan mense wat heteroseksueel is openbaar?
 - a. Kan jy vir my 'n bietjie meer vertel hoekom?

Ondervindings met die LGBTQ+

1. Vertel vir my oor jou ondervindinge met mense wie identifiseer as homoseksueel (gay of lesbies)?
 - a. Wat is hul reaksies teenoor jou?
 - b. Wat maak jou, jou seksuele identiteit openbaar aan ander?

2. Hoe sal hierdie ondervindinge anders wees as dié met heteroseksuele mense?
 - a. Onderzoekende vraag: Sal jy kan 'n geval kan beskryf waar dit anders of dieselfde is?
3. Hoe sal jy mense wat identifiseer as homoseksueel se reaksies beskryf as jy jou seksualiteit openbaar aan hulle?
4. Hoe gereeld sal jy jou seksualiteit openbaar aan mense wat homoseksueel is? Kan jy my 'n bietjie meer vertel hoekom?
5. Hoe sal jy jou ondervindinge beskryf met mense met ander geslag- of seksuele identiteite binne die LGBTQ+ gemeenskap? (byvoorbeeld, transgender, pansexual, aoseksueel, non-binary, of queer mense)
 - a. Onderzoekende vraag: Kan jy my vertel hoekom dié dieselfde of anders sal wees?



Appendix B: Information sheet



UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone:

(021) 959-2283/2453. Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: *To describe young adults' understandings of their bisexual identity at a South African university: A qualitative descriptive study.*

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Charné Petinger, a MResearch student at the University of the Western Cape. You have been contacted to participate in this research project because you are a young adult, who has disclosed that they identify as bisexual. The purpose of this research project to explore the understandings of young adults who identify as bisexual and do not fit within the sexual binary categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The study aims to explore how young adults who identify as bisexual understand and navigate their sexual identity.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed via Google Meets or any other videoconferencing application that you are most comfortable using. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes. You will be asked questions about your sexual identity and understandings of identifying as bisexual. The interviews (the answers to your questions) will be recorded to help me ensure that I adequately capture all of your responses. The recordings will be kept under password protected folders of which only myself and my research supervisors will have access to.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, your identifying information, such as your name will be protected with the use of pseudonyms in the write-up of the study. To ensure your confidentiality, I will

ensure that what you shared with me (when answering my questions) will not be shared with anyone else apart from those who work on the study. All the information that you give will be securely stored with a secret password on my computer, to ensure that no one else has access to it. If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. All human interactions and talking about oneself or others may carry some amount of risks. I assure you that the aim of this research is to gain a broader understanding of your experiences. However, because the nature of this study is deeply personal and sensitive, you may feel emotional discomfort as a result of participating in this study. The researcher will provide you with information to assist you with accessing counselling services should you wish to make use of those services. I will nevertheless try to minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally or directly, but the information gained from you will help the researcher to learn more about understandings of bisexuality and to gain a deeper understanding of how bisexuality is understood. I hope that in future, that people reading the study may benefit from it through the improved understanding of bisexuality.

Do I have to be in this research, and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you decide to stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?

This research project is conducted by Charné Petinger from the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:

Charné Petinger <i>Masters student</i> Department of Psychology University of the Western Cape Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535 3720520@myuwc.ac.za	Prof Michelle Andipatin <i>Supervisor</i> Department of Psychology University of the Western Cape Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535 mandipatin@uwc.ac.za	Mr Kyle Jackson <i>Co-Supervisor</i> Department of Psychology University of the Western Cape Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535 kmjackson@uwc.ac.za
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Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Prof Anita Padmanabhanunni
Head of Department: Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
apadmana@uwc.ac.za



Prof Anthea Rhoda
Dean: Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville

7535

Tel: 021 959 4111

e-mail: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

Should you require any counselling or psychological services contact the Centre for Student Support services:

csss@myuwc.ac.za

Tel: +27 21 959 2299

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group:

<https://www.sadag.org>

Tel: 011 234 4837

The Counselling Hub:

info@counsellinghub.co.za

Tel: 021 462 3902 / 067 235 0019





UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa,

Telephone: (021) 959-2283/2453 Fax: (021) 959-3515

Telex: 52 6661

INLIGTINGSBLAD

Projek Titel: *To describe young adults' understandings of the bisexual identity at a South African university: A qualitative descriptive study.*

Waaroor gaan die projek?

Dié is 'n navorsingsprojek wat uitgevoer word deur Charné Petinger by die Universiteit Wes-Kaapland. Jy is gekontak om deel te neem in die navorsingsprojek, want jy is 'n jong volwassene, ondergraadse student wat openbaar het dat jy identifiseer as biseksueel. Die doel van die navorsing is om die begrip van jong volwassenes te verken wanneer hulle nie binne die binêre kategorieë van homoseksualiteit en heteroseksualiteit in pas nie. Die studie mik om te verken hoe jong volwassenes, wie identifiseer as biseksueel, hul seksuele identiteit verstaan en navigeer.

Wat word van my gevra as ek instem om deel te neem?

As jy instem om deel te neem, sal 'n onderhoud gevoer word deur Google Meets of Zoom vir 'n maksimum van 60 minute. Jy sal vroeë gevra word rondom jou seksuele identiteit en begrip van jou identifisering met biseksualiteit. Die onderhoude sal opgeneem word om seker te maak dat ek al jou antwoorde akkuraat buitmaak. Die opnames sal verwyder word sodra die navorsingsprojek opgeskryf is.

Sal my deelname in die projek vertroulik behou word?

Die navorser neem toe om jou identiteit en bydrae te beskerm. Om jou anonimiteit te verseker, sal jou identifiserende besonderhede, soos jou naam, beskerm word met die gebruik van pseudonieme. Om vertroulikheid te verseker, sal ek seker maak dat wat jy met my deel, wanneer jy my vroeë beantwoord, nie met enigiemand anders buite die projek gedeel word nie. Al die inligting wat jy verskaf sal veilig gestoor word met 'n geheime wagwoord op my

rekenaar, om seker te maak dat geeneen toegang het na dit nie. As daar 'n verslag of artikel geskryf word oor die projek, sal jou identiteit beskerm word

Wat is die risiko's van die navorsing?

Daar mag risiko's wees om deel te neem in die projek. Alle menslike wisselwerkings en gesprekke oor die self en anders dra 'n getal risiko's. Ek verseker jou dat die enigste doel van die navorsing is om 'n breër begrip van jou ervaringe te kry. As gevolg van die aard van die projek wat baie persoonlik en sensitief is, mag daar egter emosionele ongemak ontstaan wanneer jy deelneem in die projek. Die navorser sal vir jou informasie toedien oor beskikbare terapeutiese dienste. Ek sal nogtans sulke risiko's verminder en dadelik optree as jy enige ongemak, sielkundig of anders, gedurende die proses van jou deelname in die studie ervaar.

Wat is die voordele van die navorsing?

Die navorsing is nie ontwerp om jou persoonlik of direk te help nie, maar die inligting wat jy verskaf sal die navorser help om meer te leer oor die begrip van biseksualiteit, om 'n dieper begrip te ontwikkel van hoe biseksualiteit verstaan word, en om ryk beskrywings te kry van biseksuele persone se ervaringe met anders in die LGBTQ+ gemeenskap. Ek hoop dat in die toekoms, mense wat my navorsing lees 'n voordeel sal trek uit dit deur die verbeterde begrip van biseksualiteit.

Moet ek in die navorsingsprojek is, en mag ek op enige tyd ophou deel neem?

Jou deelname in dié navorsing is heeltemal vrywillig. Jy mag kies om totaal en al nie deel te neem nie. As jy kies om deel te neem, mag jy op enige tyd ophou deelneem. As jy kies om nie deel te neem nie of ophou op enige tyd, sal jy nie gepenaliseer word of enige voordele verloor nie.

Wat as ek vrae het?

Die navorsingsprojek word uitgevoer deur Charné Petinger vanaf die Departement van Sielkunde by die Universiteit Wes-Kaapland. As jy enige vrae het oor die navorsingsprojek spesifiek, kontak asseblief:

Charné Petinger <i>Meesters student</i> Departement van Sielkunde University van die Wes- Kaapland Privaat Sak X17 Bellville 7535 3720520@myuwc.ac.za	Prof Michelle Andipatin <i>Toesighouer</i> Departement van Sielkunde Universiteit van die Wes- Kaapland Privaat Sak X17 Bellville 7535 mandipatin@uwc.ac.za	Mr Kyle Jackson <i>Mede-Toesighouer</i> Departement van Sielkunde Universiteit van die Wes-Kaapland Privaat Sak X17 Bellville 7535 kmjackson@uwc.ac.za
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As jy enige vrae het rondom die studie en jou regte as 'n navorsing deelnemer, of as jy wens om enige probleme wat jy ervaar het bykans die studie, kontak asseblief:

Prof A Padmanabhanuni

Hoof van die Departement: Departement van Sielkunde

Universiteit van die Wes-Kaapland

Privaat Sak X17

Bellville 7535

apadmana@uwc.ac.za



Prof Anthea Rhoda

Dekaan: Fakulteit van Gemeenskap en Gesondheidswetenskappe

Universiteit van die Wes-Kaapland

Privaat Sak X17

Bellville 7535

chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

e-pos: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

Hierdie navorsing is goedgekeur deur die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland se Menslike en Sosiale Wetenskappe Navorsingsetiekkomitee.

Menslike en Sosiale Wetenskappe Navorsingsetiekkomitee

Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland

Privaatsak X17

Bellville

7535

Tel: 021 959 4111

e-pos: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

As jy enige terapeutiese of sielkundige dienste benodig, kontak die Sentrum vir Studente Ondersteuningsdienste:

csss@myuwc.ac.za

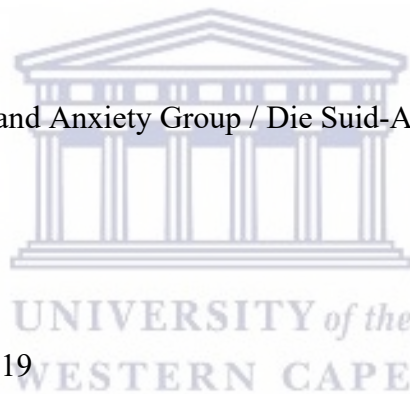
Tel: +27 21 959 2299

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group / Die Suid-Afrikaanse Depressie en Angs Groep: <https://www.sadag.org>

The Counselling Hub:

info@counsellinghub.co.za

Tel: 021 462 3902 / 067 235 0019



Appendix C: Consent form

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone:

(021) 959-2283/2453/ Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: *To describe young adults' understandings of the bisexual identity at a South African university: A qualitative descriptive study.*

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

I agree to be recorded during my participation in this study.

I do not agree to be recorded during my participation in this study.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville

7535

Tel: 021 959 4111

E-mail: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za



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DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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(021) 959-2283/2453. Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

TOESTEMMINGSFORM

Titel van navorsingsprojek: *To describe young adults' understandings of the bisexual identity at a South African university: A qualitative descriptive study.*

Die navorsingsprojek is aan my verduidelik in 'n taal wat ek verstaan. My vrae oor die projek is beantwoord. Ek verstaan wat my deelname behels en ek stem in om deel te neem met my eie keuse en vrywilligheid. Ek verstaan dat my identiteit met niemand bespreek sal word nie. Ek verstaan dat ek mag op enige tyd onttrek uit die projek sonder om 'n rede te verskaf en sonder vrees van negatiewe gevolge of verlies van enige voordele.

Ek stem toe om opgeneem te word tydens my deelname in dié projek.

Ek stem nie toe om opgeneem te word tydens my deelname in dié projek nie.

Deelnemer se naam.....

Deelnemer se handtekening.....

Datum.....

Menslike en Sosiale Wetenskappe Navorsingsetiekkomitee

Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland

Privaatsak X17

Bellville, 7535

Tel: 021 959 4111

e-pos: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

Appendix D: Advertisement

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!



We are looking for students between the ages of 18 and 25 who identify as bisexual! Any genders are welcome. The study concerns the understandings of the bisexual identity and how young adults navigate their sexual identity development when identifying outside the heterosexual / homosexual binary.

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to describe the understandings of bisexuality, and what it means to not fit into the binary categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The study will look at how young adults understand their bisexual identity, how it develops and how they might relate to others within the LGBTQ+ community.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

The study will use online interviews via Zoom or Google Meets, or any application that is most convenient for you.

You will be required to have an interview with the researcher which will only take around 45-60 minutes.

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

- Identify as bisexual
- 18 - 25 Years old
- Any gender



If you are interested in the study, please contact the researcher (Charné Petinger) at:
3720520@myuwc.ac.za

Appendix E: Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE



14 September 2021

Ms C Petinger
Psychology
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

HSSREC Reference Number: HS21/7/34

Project Title: Bisexuality and identity of young adults: A qualitative descriptive study

Approval Period: 13 September 2021 – 13 September 2024

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.

The permission to conduct the study must be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

Director: Research Development
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
Bellville 7535
Republic of South Africa
Tel: +27 21 959 4111
Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC-130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

Appendix F: Permission to conduct research



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

DEAR **Charne Petinger**

This serves as acknowledgement that you have obtained and presented the necessary ethical clearance and your institutional permission required to proceed with the project referenced below:

RESEARCH TOPIC

Bisexuality and identity of young adults: A qualitative descriptive study

Name of researcher : Charne Petinger
 Permission valid till : 13 September 2024
 Institution : University of the Western Cape
 Ethics reference : HS21/7/34
 Permission reference : UWC 5092603693229190759

You are required to engage this office (researchperm@uwc.ac.za) in advance if there is a need to continue with research outside of the stipulated period. The manner in which you conduct your research must be guided by the conditions set out in the annexed agreement: Conditions to guide research conducted at the University of the Western Cape.

Please be at liberty to contact this office should you require any assistance to conduct your research or require access to either staff or student contact information.

Regards
 Dr Ahmed Shaikjee
 Deputy Registrar Academic Administration

Approval status: **APPROVED** 5 October 2021

To verify or confirm the authenticity of this document please contact the University at researchperm@uwc.ac.za.

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
 Robert Sobukwe Road, Bellville, 7535, Republic of South Africa

