

Sexual identity: Same-sex experiences of young males

HE Joubert
23348119
BEdPsych

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Supervisor: Dr HB Grobler
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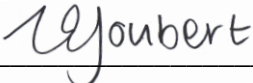
Preface

This dissertation is presented in article format in accordance with the guidelines set out in the **Manual for Postgraduate Studies (2010) of the North-West University**. The technical editing of this dissertation was done according to the guidelines and requirements set out in Chapter 2 of the manual.

The article will be submitted to the *Journal of Sex Research*. The guidelines for submission to the journal are attached as Addendum 4, Journal submission guidelines.

Declaration

I, Helena Elizabeth Joubert, declare herewith that the dissertation entitled **Sexual identity: same-sex experiences of young males**, which I herewith submit to the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, is my own work and that all references used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged.

Signature: 

Date: 2013/11/06

H.E. Joubert

Signature:  (on behalf of CTrans)

Date: 2013/11/01

CTrans (Centre for Translation and Professional Language Services)

Vaal Triangle Campus, North-West University

Tel: 016 910 3485

Summary

Key words:

Sexual identity, sexual preference, same-sex experiences, late adolescence, early adulthood

Same-sex experiences are more prevalent than is thought. Individuals often engage in same-sex behaviours in order to understand their same-sex attractions, which may result in the incorrect integration of a homosexual or bisexual sexual identity. Same-sex behaviour may also lead to feelings of guilt and shame, and can result in confusion regarding sexual identity, which could ultimately influence the successful integration of a sexual identity (a key developmental task during adolescence) and subsequent stages of an individual's life. This study investigated how young males experienced their sexual identity after having same-sex experiences. In order to better understand these experiences, this study also looked at sexual identity and its development from a psychosocial approach. In addition, this study also took a phenomenological approach into account to better understand how young males understand their same-sex experiences within their socio-cultural context.

The qualitative research method was used because it aims to understand how people make sense of their everyday lives and foregrounds participants' perceptions and experiences. When researching human behaviour, context and behaviour cannot be separated and therefore a phenomenological design was used. The population included five young males who lived in the Boland and Northern suburbs of the Western Cape and who have had same-sex experiences. The participants were selected utilizing the non-probability (convenient purposive) sampling technique, however, the sampling procedure also made use of snowball sampling. Biographically, the participants were between the ages of 18 and 24, and had different sexual

orientations. The participants included black and white students who spoke Afrikaans or English, and originated from different provinces in South Africa.

Data were collected through a two-part semi-structured interview. The first interview focused on questions about the participants' sexual preference and identity, same-sex experiences and support system. During the second interview participants were asked to make a collage representing how they viewed their sexual identity with regards to the same-sex experiences they have had. This interview also focused on member checking. The collages and member checking served as forms of triangulation.

Data were transcribed and analysed by means of a content analysis that focused on four main categories. These categories corresponded to four main questions that formed part of the first interview. The researcher concluded that each participant experienced his sexual identity and same-sex encounters differently and that none of them experienced the development of their sexual identity as 'natural' or as something that was present from birth. They all experienced confusion and conflict about their sexual preference because it was in contrast to their socio-cultural context. Same-sex experiences were the result of confusion but also caused confusion and this confusion was mostly experienced in the earlier life stages.

More research is needed on the heterosexual identity development of heterosexual identified individuals who have same-sex experiences, so that these individuals can also be accommodated within a sexuality. The development of programmes for therapeutic and/or educational purposes, that focus on the sexual identity and sexual identity development of adolescents, must also be considered in future research.

Section A

Part I: Orientation to the Research

1. Orientation and Problem Statement

Same-sex experiences among males seem to be more prevalent than commonly thought. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) found that a significant number of men (regardless of their sexual orientation) have engaged in same-sex experiences at one point or another throughout the course of their lives. Although their work was widely criticised in the past, it appears to have been re-evaluated in recent years and has consequently become more prominent within current research (Brown & Fee, 2003).

There are many possible reasons for same-sex attractions. Yarhouse (2001) is of the opinion that same-sex sexual arousal can occur while watching a movie, while wrestling or even in a locker room at school. In order to make sense of same-sex attractions, individuals might engage in same-sex behaviour which in turn might lead to the understanding that their same-sex attraction or behaviour is indicative of their true identity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b). When looking at same-sex behaviour from a phenomenological point of view, same-sex experiences that are in contrast to one's beliefs, values or socio-cultural context, can be experienced as a crisis (Yarhouse, 2001; Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005a).

Rose, Rodgers, and Small (2006) argue that individuals in a state of moratorium and who have not yet made a commitment to a sexual identity, experiment with different beliefs, roles and sexual identities. Moratorium, from a psychosocial perspective, refers to an interruption in the process of committing to one's identity and a time during which individuals can explore their

identity in order to make identity-defining commitments (Kroger, 2000). Confused adolescents may take longer than non-confused adolescents to integrate a sexual identity because of the stigma surrounding sexual identity and a sense of discontinuity. Engaging in same-sex behaviour may also lead to feelings of shame and guilt (Reback & Larkins, 2010) and may have a negative impact on identity synthesis (Erikson, 1968).

According to most models on sexual identity development, a stage of confusion (where identity comes into question) may lead to individuals experiencing same-sex attractions, after which they will self-identify as and integrate a lesbian, gay or bisexual (hereafter referred to as LGB¹) identity (Troiden, 1988; Kroger, 2000; Yarhouse, 2001; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009). In order to understand their same-sex attractions, individuals may assume an LGB-identity, especially if their socio-cultural context is supportive of an LGB-identity, which in turn will make this stage of confusion less severe (Yarhouse, 2001). Individuals may reconsider the identity they have chosen, depending on how well they integrate their sexual behaviour with their values and beliefs. Phenomenologically speaking, culture and community, family, peers, professionals, and the social environment all play important roles in identity development (Yarhouse, 2001).

Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2010) state that experiencing same-sex attraction does not necessarily lead to identifying as LGB. Specifically they state that when individuals are comfortable with and aware of their same-sex experiences and do not feel the need to change their heterosexual label, they may not integrate an LGB-identity. Yarhouse, Tan, and Pawlowski (2005c) support this notion by stating that because sexual orientation is only one dimension of sexual identity, it is possible for a person to experience same-sex attractions and still retain a heterosexual sexual identity. Zucker (2002) agrees and says that “there are many individuals who

¹ As referred to in the literature.

are primarily or exclusively sexually responsive to same-sex persons yet do not adopt a homosexual or ‘gay’ identity” (p. 5). In fact, it seems that most heterosexual individuals who experience same-sex attraction do not identify as LGB (Hegna & Larsen, 2007).

Very little research has been conducted on the sexual identity development of heterosexual individuals experiencing same-sex attraction or going through a stage of confusion (Rose et al., 2006; Morgan, Steiner, & Morgan Thompson, 2010; Reback & Larkins, 2010). Most studies and models on identity development view a stage of confusion as a step in the process of identifying as LGB. Yarhouse (2001), in this regard, states that a person moves towards an integrated LGB-identity through normal same-sex identity development. According to Frankel (2004), it is assumed that a heterosexual identity develops naturally. It is notable that there are fewer models on heterosexual identity development than there are on homosexual identity development (Hoffman, 2004). This may be due to the assumption that heterosexuality is believed to be in place from birth and that it is a ‘natural’ experience (Morgan, 2012). Rose et al. (2006) suggest that future research should investigate heterosexual individuals who are confused about their sexual identity. There is thus a contradiction in the literature: on the one hand research states that experiencing same-sex attraction does not necessarily lead to identifying with an LGB-identity (Tasker & McCann, 1999; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b); while, on the other hand, according to existing models of identity development, a state of confusion is usually followed by identifying with an LGB-identity and does not accommodate individuals who experience same-sex attraction and do not identify as LGB (Yarhouse, 2001).

In reaction to the relatively little research on heterosexual identity development, Worthington, Savoy, and Dillon (2002) proposed a multidimensional model of heterosexual identity development consisting of five identity development states: *unexplored commitment*,

active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and *synthesis*. Relevant to this study is the status of *active exploration*. During this state individuals may explore same-sex attraction or engage in same-sex behaviour which can lead to either *deepening and commitment* or *diffusion*. People in a stage of diffusion may experience confusion about their identity and lack self awareness and understanding.

Whether or not individuals later identify or dis-identify² as LGB, being in a phase of confusion may have negative effects on their development. Confusion about identity may lead to the anticipation of stressors associated with being gay, such as lower social competence and lower self-worth. Sexual identity confusion influences a healthy and stable identity and can lead to problematic behaviour (Rose et al., 2006).

Over the past 30 years, models on sexual identity development have changed significantly. Most stage models were based on the supposition that sexual identity exploration would lead to the integration of a stable LGB-identity. Various classic models (Cass, 1979, 1984; Troiden, 1988; Fox, 1996) illustrate a linear process of moving from being aware of sexual attractions to sexual identity confusion and engagement in sexual behaviour, to the disclosure of one's sexual identity to others, and finally to the integration of a sexual identity. These models are limited in that they only include typical sexual identities (i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual), however their value is in their description of the developmental stages of identity development. Sexual identity is now understood as fluid and changing, and the emphasis is on developmental milestones, and not stages (Russell et al., 2009).

It appears as if the prevalence of same-sex attraction is higher amongst adolescents and young adults, and that this might be because young people are more open to expressing and exploring their sexual desires and needs (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2010). Although

² A term used by Yarhouse et al., 2005c to explain a person not integrating an LGB-identity.

identity develops, from a psychosocial viewpoint, throughout a person's lifetime, Erikson (1968) states that exploring identity and establishing a sense of sexual identity are key developmental tasks that one should complete during adolescence. Tasker and McCann (1999) see adolescence as a "critical time for decisions concerning sexual identity formation" (p. 30) and it is especially during late adolescence when a clear sexual identity will be developed and intimacy integrated into relationships (Salmela-Aro, 2011). During young adulthood, individuals must solve the psychosocial crisis of *Intimacy vs. Isolation* (Erikson, 1968). This crisis refers to individuals' abilities to form relationships based on support and openness with another, without fearing the loss of their own identity. Intimacy can be established when a personal identity has been fulfilled and an individual identifies as valued, competent, and meaningful to others (Meyer, 2004b).

The development of a sexual identity is paramount to the healthy development (Shtarkshall, Santelli, & Hirsch, 2007) and stable identity of an individual (Lucente, 1996; Kroger, 2000). A person's sexual self consists of three elements: *sexual or gender identity*, *sex or gender role*, and *sexual orientation* (Kroger, 2000). Relevant to this study is *sexual orientation* and *sexual identity*, since it is during the establishment of sexual orientation that individuals often experience same-sex attractions, which may lead to confusion about sexual identity (Floyd & Stein, 2002). Confusion may also lead to the incorrect integration of an LGB-identity.

The process of sexual identity development is influenced by a number of contexts (Tasker & McCann, 1999). Individuals are aware of discrimination and prejudice against the so-called minority sexual orientations, and consequently view being gay, lesbian, bisexual or asexual as undesirable. An awareness of homophobia and the concern over how others may perceive homosexuals can also have an influence on sexual identity formation and may cause individuals to integrate a sexual identity based on what is 'more acceptable' by society (Tasker & McCann,

1999). On the contrary, individuals may identify with the minority group because of feelings of not being accepted and low self-regard, which again may lead to the incorrect integration of a particular sexual identity. Individuals who have same-sex interests and experiences may integrate a bisexual identity as it is sometimes seen as more acceptable by society (Tasker & McCann, 1999).

It is from the researcher's experience as a teacher and supervisor in a high school hostel, that adolescents, and especially boys, may experience confusion about their sexual identity. Most of the boys the researcher worked with later self-identified as gay or bisexual, while one was still unsure of his sexual identity. For him, being gay or bisexual was the only explanation for his same-sex attraction, since, to his mind, heterosexuals do not experience same-sex attractions, and he therefore concluded that no alternatives existed. Some of the boys experimented with their same-sex attractions by engaging in same-sex behaviour, and were subsequently even more confused about their sexual identity, than those who did not engage in same-sex behaviour. They viewed themselves as heterosexual, and therefore could not reconcile their sexual identities with their same-sex attractions and/or behaviour. In addition, they experienced feelings of shame and guilt, which impacted on their identity synthesis.

The researcher's experience as a teacher confirmed the findings in the literature that some young males often react to their sexual identity as follows:

1. They experience confusion about their sexual identity and then experiment with same-sex attractions and/or behaviours (Worthington et al., 2002).
2. They experiment with other males (mainly because of physical attraction) and then experience confusion about their sexual identity.

3. They experiment with other males (mainly because of physical attraction) but are sure about their heterosexual identity (Reback & Larkins, 2010).

This study looked at identity and identity development from a psychosocial approach as discussed by Kroger (2000), and specifically looked at Erikson's psychosocial stages of development (1968). The influence of individuals' socio-cultural contexts was taken into account in order to better understand how individuals make sense of their experiences, as consistent with a phenomenological approach (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2005).

From the above problem formulation the following research question, which defines and gives focus to the problem being researched (Graziano & Raulin, 2000), was formulated:

How do young males experience their sexual identity after being involved in same-sex experiences?

2. Research Aim

The aim of the study was to conduct research of an exploratory and descriptive nature. Specifically the study aimed to explore and describe how young males experience their sexual identity after being involved in same-sex experiences. According to Bless, Higson-Smith, and Kagee (2006), explorative studies are conducted to gain insight into a phenomenon or individual. Descriptive research, according to Neuman (2003), provides specific detail of a social setting or relationship, which made this type of research relevant for the study.

3. Literature Review

In order to gain some information about the topic at hand and to determine the viability of the study, the researcher consulted sources about sexual identity development (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2000; Frankel, 2004) and the influence of sexual identity confusion on identity synthesis (Rose et al., 2006). From the literature it is apparent that research on sexual identity development focuses on homosexual identity development (Troiden, 1988; Floyd & Stein, 2002) and that very little research has been conducted on heterosexual identity development and same-sex experiences. The researcher consulted numerous journal articles and books, and databases such as *EBSCOhost* and *ScienceDirect* were used in the literature search.

4. Concept Definitions

For the purposes of this study it is important to define certain concepts.

4.1. Sexual identity.

According to Kroger (2000), the sexual self comprises three elements: *sexual or gender identity* (feelings of masculinity, femininity, being genderless, and being undifferentiated), *sex or gender role* (how one expresses his/her biological gender according to the norms and stereotypes of the society one lives in), and *sexual orientation* (the gender to which a person is sexually attracted and interested in – these sexual orientation categories include heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual).

Sexual identity is influenced by personal characteristics, interpersonal experiences, beliefs, attitudes and convictions. Sexual identity is not fixed and may take many forms as a person ages (Lucente, 1996). Worthington et al. (2002) state that the recognition, acceptance, and

identification of one's sexual preference are only one facet of sexual identity. According to Yarhouse and Tan (2005b), sexual identity is the way in which individuals think about themselves sexually and how these ideas are communicated to others (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b).

Yarhouse et al. (2005c) describe sexual identity as including the following: *biological sex* (male or female), *gender identity* (a psychological sense of being male or female), and *sex role* (how one adheres to social expectations of one's sex). According to Althof (2000), sexual identity can be seen as a substructure of sexual functioning and refers to *gender identity* (being male or female), *object choice* (which sex one is sexually attracted to), and *intention* (how one wants to react to sexual impulses).

For the purposes of this research, sexual identity was viewed as including one's biological sex (being male or female), sex or gender role (how you adhere to society's expectations of masculinity or femininity), and sexual preference (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual). Sexual identity is one part of an individual's identity and is influenced by society, beliefs, values, characteristics, experiences (sexual behaviour), and religion. Sexual identity is formed over time and can change. Sexual identity refers to how you think about yourself sexually and your sexual preferences, and how you communicate this to others.

4.2. Sexual preference.

According to Worthington et al. (2002), sexual preference refers to the object of one's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction. Yarhouse and Tan (2005b) state that sexual orientation is more stable and reflects the sex to which a person is sexually attracted. Several factors influence how people label themselves in terms of sexual preference: the sex to which people are romantically and sexually attracted (male or female or both), whether they are male or

female, what their gender identity (masculinity and femininity) is, their moral framework, and their sexual behaviour (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b).

It seems as though the terms 'sexual orientation' and 'sexual preference' are interchangeably used in the literature. For the purpose of this paper, sexual orientation or preference referred to the object of one's sexual and romantic attraction (heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual), or lack thereof (asexual) (Zucker, 2002).

4.3. Same-sex experiences.

Sexual attraction and sexual behaviour need to be taken into account when considering same-sex experiences. Curiosity or temporary experimentation can lead to individuals having same-sex attractions which do not necessarily have considerable influences on their life. Sexual orientation is only one dimension of sexual identity and it is therefore possible for a person to experience same-sex attractions, but still have a heterosexual sexual identity (Yarhouse et al., 2005c).

Individuals may engage in sexual behaviour in order to understand their sexual attraction because they might view the attraction as reflective of their true sexual identity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b). Reback and Larkins (2010) have found that the participants in a study about men who have sex with other men, did not see their same-sex experiences as inconsistent with their heterosexual sexual identities. Although the participants engaged in same-sex experiences, they still thought of themselves as heterosexual (2010). In a study by Lever, Kanouse, Rodgers, Carson, and Hertz (1992) about bisexuality, the researchers found that a distinction should be drawn between sexual behaviour and sexual identity, because not all men who identify as bisexual (in other words, equally attracted to both males and females) have had sexual

experiences with both males and females, as is implied by bisexuality. The current study applied this notion by stating that same-sex attraction does not necessarily lead to same-sex behaviour, and conversely, same-sex behaviour does not necessarily lead to a homosexual or bisexual sexual preference.

For the purposes of this study same-sex experiences referred to any sexual experience including holding hands, kissing, fondling, touching and sexual intercourse between two individuals of the same sex. There are various reasons for same-sex attraction and same-sex behaviour, and having same-sex experiences is not indicative of one's sexual identity or sexual preference.

4.4. Late adolescence.

The psychosocial stages identified by Newman and Newman (1999) refer to *later adolescence* as including people who are 18–22 years old. They also state that this stage is crucial in identity development, although identity development is a life-long process. Later adolescence (as defined by Newman & Newman, 1999) is similar to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stage of *Puberty and adolescence*. Erikson does not ascribe ages to his stages, and adolescence is viewed as only one stage, whereas Newman and Newman divide adolescence into *Early adolescence* and *Later adolescence*. Beyers and Çok (2008) state that the development of a stable identity is “a central developmental task during adolescence” (p.147). During adolescence, individuals have to ascertain their place in the community, reorganise their social relationships, and make decisions about their future (Beyers & Çok, 2008). Meyer (2004a) states that during adolescence choosing a career path, integrating a moral code, and successfully developing a sexual identity are important factors in establishing an identity.

4.5. Early adulthood.

Erikson's (1968) stage of *Young adulthood* is similar to Newman and Newman's (1999) stage of *Early adulthood* (22–34 years). During early adulthood, individuals need to resolve the psychosocial crisis of *Intimacy vs. Isolation*, according to Erikson (1968). This crisis is resolved when an individual can establish a relationship with another based on support and openness, without fear of losing one's own identity. Intimacy is established when personal identity has been fulfilled and an individual identifies themselves as being valued, competent, and meaningful by others. This in turn might lead to feelings of isolation from others, which will be resolved when an individual can establish a sense of intimacy (Meyer, 2004b).

It would seem that same-sex attraction mostly occurs amongst adolescents and young adults. It might be because these young individuals are more open about their sexual needs and desires (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2010). The participants for this study were between the ages of 18 and 24 years. Although some of them are already considered to be in the stage of early adulthood (according to the ages prescribed to each psychosocial stage by Newman and Newman, 1999), their initial same-sex experiences occurred during adolescence. This study therefore included both late adolescence and early adulthood and made use of the term 'young males' to refer to participants who were between the ages of 18 and 24 years.

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Research approach and design.

A qualitative, applied research methodology was used for this study, which comprised both exploratory and descriptive research. Exploratory research (Bless et al., 2006; Babbie, 2010) was used to gain insight into the experiences of the young males regarding their sexual identity, while

descriptive research (Neuman, 2003) was used to describe these experiences. The qualitative method was selected for this study because qualitative research aims to understand how people make sense of their everyday lives and brings forth the respondents' perceptions and experiences (Fouché & Delpont, 2011). This study aimed to investigate the same-sex experiences of young males, which made the selection of a qualitative approach suitable. A phenomenological design was followed which, according to Williams, Unrau, and Grinnell (2005), refers to an interpretative branch of research where the focus is on how people (including the researcher and respondents) subjectively experience and interpret the world. According to Fouché and Schurink (2011), phenomenology "aims to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives" (p. 270). Welman et al. (2005) state that a person's context must be taken into account when researching human behaviour and that context and behaviour cannot be viewed separately. This study was concerned with sexual identity, which is one component of identity. Chryssochoou (2003) states that identity is concerned with how we think about ourselves and the world we live in. The manner in which the participants in this study made sense of their same-sex experiences was based on their culture, family structure, group of friends, how they were accepted by society and so on. It was therefore impossible to separate the participants' experiences from their context, making the phenomenological design appropriate for this study.

5.2. Participants.

According to Welman et al. (2005), the population of a study refers to the collection of cases from which the sample was taken. The population for this study was young males who have had same-sex experiences and who lived in the Boland and Northern suburbs of the Western Cape during the time that the research was conducted. The researcher obtained

permission from the administrator of a Facebook group of a society for lesbians, gays and bisexuals, to join the group on Facebook and to post on the group page. This society is affiliated with a university and although there is no age limit for members, members are mostly still students who are in later adolescence (18–22 years old) and early adulthood (22–34 years old), as described by Newman and Newman (1999). The researcher asked males who have had same-sex experiences – irrespective of their sexual preference, language and culture – and who were willing to participate in two interviews, to contact the researcher. Three males responded via email or by sending a private message to the researcher on Facebook. The researcher then confirmed that the participants were 18 years and older, have had same-sex experiences and would be willing to take part in two interviews. A date and time for the interviews were then arranged with each participant via e-mail, SMS or WhatsApp, according to the participants' preferences. The participants were selected through non-probability (convenient purposive) sampling (Welman et al., 2005) that took into account the geographical area as well as economic considerations (Sarantakos, 2000). The sample included males of different sexual orientations. Sampling was initially done purposively (Strydom & Delpont, 2011), but snowball sampling (Strydom & Delpont, 2011) was later used as other participants were referred to the researcher.

The criteria for participants' inclusion were:

- Young males who have had same-sex experiences and who were willing and able to participate in two interviews.
- Participants who agreed to voluntary participation in the study.

Although no specific criteria existed for the inclusion of specific cultures or spoken languages, four of the participants were white and one participant was black, three participants spoke English and two of the participants spoke Afrikaans. Two of the participants identified as homosexual and were sure of their sexual identity and preference. One participant identified as bisexual and was sure of his sexual identity and preference. One participant identified as heterosexual with a bisexual sexual preference and was unsure of his sexual identity. One participant identified as homosexual but thought that he was also bisexual and was unsure of his sexual identity and preference.

5.3. Data collection methods.

The researcher conducted a two-part, semi-structured interview to gather a spectrum of data that was as wide as possible. An interview schedule was developed based on current literature concerning sexual identity and same-sex experiences. The semi-structured interview was selected because it gives, as Greeff (2011) puts it, “a detailed picture of a participant’s beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic” (p. 296). Louw and Edwards (2008) state that within a phenomenological method of research, participants should be allowed to share their personal experiences of life and that this should enable the researcher to study what people are concerned with and what their experience of living life is like. This also contributed to the decision to make use of a semi-structured interview. The researcher prepared an interview schedule for both interviews but could, due to the nature of the semi-structured interview, also deviate from the interview schedule to follow up on certain aspects in order to gain a more holistic idea of the participants’ experiences. The participants dominated the conversation and had optimal speaking time in the interview (Greeff, 2011). The semi-structured interview, as

opposed to the structured interview, afforded the researcher the opportunity to clarify certain responses that did not provide sufficient information (Welman et al., 2005).

The time and date of the first interview for each participant was arranged to suit the participant. The interviews with four of the participants took place at different locations (due to availability) in Stellenbosch. One participant was interviewed in Durbanville where the participant resided and studied. The researcher made sure that all the locations that were used for the interviews were private and secure, and would be free of interruptions. At the start of the first interview the researcher informed participants about the purpose and title of the study. The researcher then discussed the measures that were taken to protect the participant's privacy (see 7. Ethical Aspects), as outlined in the consent form. Participants were then allowed to read through the consent forms again before signing them. All of the participants signed the consent forms. The researcher obtained consent from each participant to record the interview with the use of a tape recorder. The researcher started the first interview by enquiring about why the participant chose to participate in the study and whether or not the participant had any expectations of the study. The researcher then proceeded to the questions. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked the participants how they felt and if they needed to talk to a counsellor about their sexual identity.

The second interview, which was also done individually, was arranged after the transcriptions and analyses of the first round of interviews were completed, and focused on member checking (Koelsch, 2013) and triangulation (Strydom & Delpont, 2011) by means of a collage. The researcher started the second interview by reminding the participants about the consent forms they had signed during the previous interview and the measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality. The researcher then obtained consent to use a tape recorder to

record the interviews. The researcher asked the participants to discuss how they felt about the first interview. As part of triangulation of the data, the researcher then asked the participants to make a collage from pictures and words that were provided to illustrate how they viewed their sexual identity with regard to the same-sex experiences they had. After asking the participants to clarify what they were trying to demonstrate in the collage, the researcher, while referring to the transcripts from the first interview, asked the participants questions based on the first interview. The researcher then gave the participants the opportunity to change, correct or object to how the researcher interpreted or understood the participants' responses during the first interview. The researcher ended the interview by asking the participants how they felt and if they needed to talk to a counsellor about their sexual identity. The researcher referred two participants to counsellors. The counsellors' practices were close to where the participants lived and the services were offered for free.

5.4. Data analysis.

Data were collected through a two-part, semi-structured interview (Greeff, 2011). After the first interview, the audio recording of the interview was transcribed (see Addendum 1). The researcher read and re-read the transcripts and developed the interview schedule for the second interview based on the transcripts of the first interview. The second interview schedule was developed with the focus on member checking and triangulation, which was done by means of a collage. During the second interview, the researcher clarified any uncertainties and followed-up on certain questions to ensure the correct interpretation of participants' responses during the first interview. The recording of the second interview was then subsequently transcribed. The data

from both interviews were integrated. The researcher then analysed the data by means of a content analysis (Sarantakos, 2012).

The interviews focused on four main questions that included the participants' experiences of their sexual preference and sexual identity, their experiences of same-sex encounters, and their support system. By means of descriptive content analysis (Sarantakos, 2012), these four questions covered the central content of the data that were collected and formed the four categories into which data were organised. The researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts and identified data by means of latent content coding (Stark & Roberts, 2005). Data were organised into four categories. Each category consisted of sub-categories but due to the small sample size, data from sub-categories were integrated with the main categories and were presented as a whole.

5.5. Procedures and research methods.

The following procedure was followed:

- Ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University.
- A thorough literature study was conducted.
- The researcher obtained permission from the administrator of a Facebook group for lesbians, bisexuals, and gays, to join the group and post about the research study.
- Willing participants e-mailed the researcher or sent her a private message on Facebook. Other participants were included by means of snowball sampling.
- The researcher contacted participants to enquire if they were 18 years or older, whether they have had same-sex experiences, and if they were willing to partake in two interviews.
- The researcher arranged a date, time, and place for the first interview for each participant.

- At the start of the interview, the researcher obtained informed consent from each participant and discussed the ethical considerations that were taken into account to ensure confidentiality.
- After each first interview the audio recording of the interview was transcribed, and the interview schedule for the second interview was developed based on data from the first interview.
- The researcher arranged a date, time and place for the second interview for each participant.
- At the start of the second interview, the researcher reminded the participants of the ethical considerations that were taken to ensure confidentiality.
- The audio recordings of the second interview were transcribed.
- Data from the first and second interviews were integrated and analysed.
- Findings are discussed in Section B.

6. Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (cited in Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011) identify four constructs that relate to the trustworthiness of research. These constructs include: 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) dependability, and 4) confirmability.

In order to ensure credibility the researcher asked all participants the same main questions. During the second interview, member checking was employed and triangulation was done by means of a collage. The participants had to make a collage in order to demonstrate their sexual identity and the same-sex experiences they have had. The interviews were transcribed and all the data that were collected throughout the study were stored safely. After the completion of the

research project, data will be stored at North-West University for five years before being destroyed.

Transferability was addressed by providing a rich and detailed description of the research findings and by collecting data from participants from different sexual orientations, languages, provinces, and racial groups.

The researcher asked all the participants the same questions, gave them the same pictures for making the collage and gave all of the participants the opportunity to object to the researcher's understanding and interpretation of their first interview answers in order to obtain dependability.

The researcher assured confirmability by keeping field notes which described her experiences of the research study as well as her own observations and assumptions and the influence these may have on the research findings.

7. Ethical Aspects

The following ethical issues were taken into account while conducting the empirical research: avoiding harm to participants, informed consent, avoiding violation of privacy/ anonymity/ confidentiality, and the release or publication of the findings (Strydom, 2011). This project fell under a bigger project that was approved by the Ethics committee of the North-West University: "Developing sustainable support to enhance quality of life and wellbeing for children, youth and families in South Africa: A trans-disciplinary approach" (NWU-00060-12-A1).

7.1. Avoiding harm to respondents.

The researcher was sensitive to the participants and respected the sensitivity of their sexual identity and their feelings about this identity by asking questions in a sensitive, non-judgemental and inoffensive manner. The researcher tried to avoid intentional as well as unintentional harm to the participants (Robson, Cook, Hunt, Alred, & Robson, 2000) and ensured that participants were informed of counsellors in their immediate living area, should the need for counselling arise from participating in the research. The researcher made contact with possible counsellors to inform them about the study and to obtain their consent to give their contact details to the participants, should the need for counselling arise from participating in the study. The researcher then made a printout of the counsellors' contact details and gave this to two of the participants that she felt might benefit from counselling. One participant was already seeing a psychologist and a psychiatrist and the researcher made sure that, should the participant have a need to talk to a professional person, he would contact his psychologist. Since the participant was already seeing a psychologist and a psychiatrist the researcher thought that it would be more harmful to refer the participant to a third professional as overlapping therapists could potentially have a negative and overwhelming effect on the participant. The researcher was convinced that two of the participants did not need therapy or counselling. This was established after the participants were asked about counselling. The researcher saw no need to make a referral although she did give the participants the contact details of possible counsellors they could see should they have the need.

7.2. Informed consent.

During the first interview the researcher ensured that participants were informed about the purpose of the investigation, the procedures that were followed, possible risks, and possible advantages or disadvantages of participation (Williams, Tutty, & Grinnell, 1995). The participants signed consent forms which explained the measures that were taken to protect them from harm or discrimination. By signing the consent form, the participants confirmed that they had read and understood that they were consenting to participate in two interviews, that the information gathered in the study could be used in research regarding the same-sex experiences of young males, that they could not benefit financially from participating in the study, that they were not being forced to take part in the study, that their names would be replaced with pseudonyms, and that the findings of the study would be published in an academic journal. At the beginning of the second interview the researcher reminded the participants about the ethical considerations and the consent form they had signed.

7.3. Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality.

The researcher ensured privacy and confidentiality by using pseudonyms to refer to participants. The names of participants, hostels, schools or universities were not mentioned in the final report and will not be published (Strydom, 2011). The researcher ensured confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms when referring to participants so that the participants could not be singled out or identified in any way and would therefore be protected from possible discrimination. The researcher ensured privacy by conducting the interviews in a private and secure room. The researcher also took measures to protect the participants' identity by making sure they were not seen by anyone when entering and exiting the

interview room. Some of the interviews were held in private seminar rooms at the library of the University of Stellenbosch and the researcher protected the identity of the participants by not making the reason for the interview or the name of the study known to others. Data gathered throughout the study will be stored at the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed.

7.4. The release or publication of the findings.

The findings of the study will be published in the *Journal of Sex Research*. The researcher guarded against bias, plagiarism, subjectivity, and unethical practices when the final report was compiled (Strydom, 2011). To prevent plagiarism, the researcher submitted the final dissertation to *Turnitin*. The participants were informed that the findings of the study will be published in an academic journal and that the researcher will inform the participants about the name and date of the publication as soon as the article is published or a date for publication has been set.

7.5. Debriefing.

At the end of each interview the researcher asked the participants if they needed to talk to a counsellor about their sexual identity or anything that was discussed in the interview. The researcher also recommended that two of the participants see a counsellor as she was concerned about issues that the participants had, although these issues did not arise from participating in the research. The researcher gave the participants the contact details of counsellors in their immediate area, who had offered their services for free. The counsellors agreed to respect the confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants, as bound by the ethical code.

8. Choice and Structure of the Research Dissertation

This dissertation followed the article format prescribed by the North-West University. The APA referencing style was followed and the dissertation consists of the following sections:

Section A

Part I: Orientation to the Research

Part II: Literature Overview

Section B

Article: Sexual identity: same-sex experiences of young males.

Section C

Summary, Evaluation, Conclusion and Recommendations

Section D

Addenda

The *Journal of Sex Research* has been identified as a possible journal for submission.

9. Conclusion

This study looked at how young males experienced their sexual identity after having same-sex experiences. Same-sex experiences may lead to an individual incorrectly integrating an

LGB-identity. Very little research has been conducted on individuals who have had same-sex experiences, but still identify as heterosexual. The focus of this study was on how young males experienced their sexual identity after they have had same-sex experiences. Since same-sex experiences seem to be more prevalent amongst adolescents and young adults, the participants of this study were between the ages of 18 and 24 years (although their same-sex experiences occurred during adolescence). These two psychosocial stages, namely later adolescence and early adulthood, were discussed. From the literature it was evident that the development of a sexual identity is especially important during the adolescent years and that failure to integrate a healthy sexual identity may influence other stages of a person's psychosocial development.

The next chapter comprises an in-depth literature review and discusses identity and identity development during later adolescence and early adulthood, sexual identity and sexual identity development during later adolescence and early adulthood, and same-sex experiences.

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Section A

Part II: Literature Overview

1. Introduction

The following literature review discusses the different perspectives on and approaches to identity and identity development, including Erikson's psychosocial stages of development (Erikson, 1968). In addition, a broad overview of identity from different perspectives as summarised and discussed in Kroger (2000), within a framework of Phenomenology (Louw & Edwards, 2008; Valle & King, 1978), is also given. Sexual identity as a component of identity is discussed with specific reference to sexual identity development, sexual identity confusion, and same-sex experiences.

2. Contextualising Identity

Identity is a feeling of being the same person over time and in different places and social situations. It includes social roles, reputation, values, priorities, and an understanding of one's potential (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). Others see a person and recognise in them the sameness and continuity of their character across different contexts (Kroger, 2000). Identity is both a conscious sense of individual uniqueness and an unconscious desire for a continuity of experiences. A person's identity is configured by integrating significant identifications and social roles (Erikson, 1968).

Identity develops from an individual's intra-psycho characteristics and characteristics of interaction with society (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Individuals must judge themselves by

comparing their own views of themselves, to how they are viewed by others, as well as in relation to their typology. From a social perspective, Chrysochoou (2003) says: “Identity encapsulates simultaneously the way we think about ourselves and about the world in which we live” (p. 227). She further states that the relationship between individuals and their society is represented by identity, and that knowledge about individuals is fundamentally social. This relationship between individuals and their society comprises three elements, namely *cognition* (self-knowledge), *self-action* (claims made by people about themselves), and *others actions* (recognition by others to make claims about oneself). These elements answer fundamental questions that determine how individuals view society and how they form relationships with society: “Who am I?”, “Who are they?” and “What is our relationship?” (Chrysochoou, 2003, p. 227).

A person’s sense of identity, according to Erikson (1968), is shaped by their biological characteristics, physiological needs, and the culture/environment in which they live. Identity is not something that a person achieves, nor is it ever established, static or unchanging (Erikson, 1968). People reformulate their identity as their biological, psychological, and societal circumstances change (Kroger, 2000).

From a Phenomenological approach, Valle and King (1978) state that it is not possible to understand individuals if they are separated from their environment:

It is via the world that the very meaning of a people’s existence emerges both for themselves and for others. The converse is equally true. It is each individual’s existence that gives his or her world its meaning. Without a person to reveal its sense and meaning,

the world would not exist as it does. Each is therefore totally dependent on the other for existence (p. 8).

Although Phenomenology is not a theory of identity or identity development as such, it does provide valuable information on how individuals cannot be separated from their context, and consequently how, in the process of understanding individuals, their context must always be considered. According to Edmund Husserl (as cited in Louw & Edwards, 2008), human experience can only be understood by studying things as they are experienced and as they appear. Phenomenology supplies us with “ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). Who people are cannot be understood without taking their contexts into account as well. People’s identities are influenced by their culture, the society they live in, their characteristics and psychological needs, to mention only a few. The next section will discuss different theories on identity and identity development.

Identity has been the focus of various disciplines and approaches. There are many approaches to understanding identity and how, due to its complex nature, it is formed. Erikson’s theory of the psychosocial stages of development is holistic in the sense that it integrates psychosocial, biological, historical, and socio-cultural approaches (Kroger, 2000), and therefore provides an overall idea of what identity is and how it is formed. The researcher agrees with Erikson’s theory, especially because of its holistic nature, and will use it as a definition for what identity is and how it is formed. Because of its integration of socio-cultural aspects, Erikson’s theory is in-line with the principles of Phenomenology, specifically with regard to the view that individuals cannot be separated from their context, and that when trying to understand people, their experiences of the context in which they live must be understood. This is also a contributing

factor for the decision to use Erikson's theory as a basis for understanding identity and identity development. The psychosocial approach will therefore be discussed in more detail than the previously mentioned approaches to identity and identity development.

2.1. Psychosocial theory.

In this discussion on psychosocial theory, the focus will be on the work of Erikson (1968) and Newman and Newman (1999). Based on Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, Newman and Newman identify eleven stages in addition to Erikson's work. Although Newman and Newman's stages are named differently to those of Erikson, the psychosocial crisis that should be resolved in each stage is largely the same. Where Erikson refers to *Puberty and Adolescence* with the psychosocial crisis of *Identity vs. Role confusion*, Newman and Newman distinguish between *Early adolescence* and *Later adolescence* with the psychosocial crisis of the latter being *Individual identity vs. Identity confusion*. Newman and Newman also prescribe certain ages to each of their stages, which makes it easier to distinguish when adolescence ends and early adulthood begins – as opposed to Erikson's stages that are, to a certain extent, open to interpretation by the reader. The researcher therefore chose to incorporate both authors' work in a discussion on psychosocial theory.

A psychosocial approach to identity integrates the social context as well as the individual's intra-psychic dynamics and biology. McAdams (2001) states that both the person and the person's social world form identity. Identity is formed by childhood identifications which are absorbed into a new configuration that is dependent on how a society identifies an individual (Erikson, 1968). Baumeister and Muraven (1996) argue that identity is not merely created by society and forced onto individuals, and individuals therefore have to choose and adapt their

identities in accordance to their social context. They further argue that identity cannot be formed in a vacuum. This view on identity has parallels with the characteristics of Phenomenology in that a person is influenced by his/her context and that we should therefore keep a person's context in mind when trying to understand that person (Valle & King, 1978). Society therefore plays an important role in the formation of identity. An optimal sense of identity is experienced as psychosocial well-being; when you feel at home in your body, when you experience a sense of knowing where you are going, and when significant others recognise an inner assuredness of anticipation in you (Erikson, 1968).

Through *ego identity* individuals can be seen by others as being the same person over time and in different social contexts (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Kroger (2000), when looking at how Erikson (1968) viewed ego identity (a sense of self), refers to the "tripartite nature of ego identity" (p. 9). She states that ego identity is influenced by three interrelating elements: *biological characteristics, psychological needs, interests and defences*, and the *cultural milieu* a person lives in. According to Erikson (1968), one's gender, appearance, and physical abilities give a sense of "bodily self" (p. 211). In this regard, a person's sense of bodily self will have to adapt according to physical changes.

Koepke and Denissen (2012) refer to personal identity as an individual's identity that is noticeable by their identifications, roles, beliefs, values, and lifestyles. Psychological needs, interests, and defences give a sense of 'I' that is more constant over time and changing situations (Kroger, 2000).

Social identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves in terms of the social and cultural contexts they live in (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). People can express themselves through and in the social and cultural environment in which they live. Being able to find one's

place within the broader community contributes to reaching optimal identity development (Kroger, 2000). According to Erikson (1968) identity formation is a complicated process.

In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. (p. 22-23)

Identity forms out of the rejection and assimilation of childhood identifications, and how these are integrated into new configurations. These new configurations depend on how the individual is recognised by society (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2000). Development stems from an individual's abilities and needs and its interaction with the individual's social context. Developmental stages influence each other. Thus, if one stage is not successfully completed, it will have a negative impact on future stages (Wait, 2004).

Erikson identifies eight psychosocial stages that span across a person's life with a psychosocial crisis in every stage that must be resolved successfully in order to establish a healthy identity. An identity crisis does not refer to a critical moment or dilemma but rather refers to "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshalling resources, growth, recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson, 1968, p. 16). These stages and their psychosocial crises are as follows: *Oral sensory* (Basic trust vs. Mistrust), *Muscular-Anal* (Autonomy vs. Shame and doubt), *Locomotor-Genital* (Initiative vs.

Guilt), *Latency* (Industry vs. Inferiority), *Puberty and Adolescence* (Identity vs. Role confusion), *Young adulthood* (Intimacy vs. Isolation), *Adulthood* (Generativity vs. Stagnation), and *Maturity* (Ego integrity vs. Despair).

Newman and Newman (1999) identify eleven stages based on and in addition to Erikson's eight psychosocial stages of development. These stages, although differently named, largely overlap with those of Erikson. The various stages are linked to particular ages and are as follows: *Prenatal, Infancy, Toddlerhood, Early school age, Middle childhood, Early adolescence, Later Adolescence, Early adulthood, Middle adulthood, Later adulthood, Very old age*. Newman and Newman separate Erikson's *Puberty and Adolescence* into two distinct stages, *Early adolescence* and *Later adolescence*, and differentiate between group and individual identity in terms of the psychosocial crises to be resolved. They furthermore separate adulthood into early, middle and later adulthood. These three stages coincide with Erikson's stages of *Young adulthood, Adulthood* and *Maturity*. Newman and Newman also add a stage titled *Very old age* with the psychosocial task of *Immortality vs. Extinction* that does not bear any resemblance to any of Erikson's stages. Newman and Newman also add to psychosocial theory by identifying central processes through which crises are resolved and skills are obtained. Table 1.1 shows these stages, crises, and central process (Wait, 2004). Wait further states that although the life stages occur in chronological order, this does not mean that an individual only experiences and deals with the task of the specific stage he/she might be in. Crises of other stages may be experienced earlier on (Wait, 2004).

Table 1.1

Psychosocial life stages, crises, and central processes according to Newman and Newman (1999)

Life stages (in years)	Psychosocial crisis	Central process
Prenatal (conception to birth)		
Infancy (birth to 2)	Trust vs. Mistrust	Mutuality with caregiver
Toddlerhood (2 to 4)	Autonomy vs. Shame and doubt	Imitation
Early school age (4 to 6)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Identification
Middle childhood (6 to 12)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Education
Early adolescence (12 to 18)	Group identity vs. Alienation	Peer pressure
Later adolescence (18 to 22)	Individual identity vs. Identity confusion	Role experimentation
Early adulthood (22 to 34)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Mutuality among peers
Middle adulthood (34 to 60)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Person-environment fit and creativity
Later adulthood (60 to 75)	Integrity vs. Despair	Introspection
Very old age (75 till death)	Immortality vs. Extinction	Social support

This study is focused on young males, a collective term which refers to the male participants who participated in this study and who were between the ages of 18 and 24. When looking at identity development, this study is therefore concerned with two life stages as identified by Newman and Newman, namely *Later adolescence* and *Early adulthood*. A discussion of these two stages will include Erikson's stages of *Puberty and adolescence* and *Young adulthood* (Erikson, 1968).

2.2. Identity development through the late adolescent and early adulthood years.

As mentioned previously, this study is specifically concerned with the identity development of young males and will therefore focus on *Later adolescence* and *Young adulthood*, two life stages identified by Newman and Newman (1999).

Later adolescence, a term used by Newman and Newman (1999), refers to the ages of 18–22 years. This stage, to a certain extent, coincides with Erikson's *Puberty and adolescence*, although it does not specify an age and refers to adolescence as a whole. This is in contrast with Newman and Newman who identify two stages for this age: *Early adolescence* and *Later adolescence*. According to Meyer (2004a), the following developmental tasks must be completed during late adolescence: Autonomy from parents, Career choice, Gender-role identification, Internalised morality, and Development of an own identity. For the purpose of this study, only the last three of these tasks will be discussed.

Gender role identification: It would seem that in recent years the views of gender role have become increasingly similar, and men and women do not necessarily act as was traditionally expected of them. Men are, for example, becoming more emotionally involved in relationships as opposed to traditionally being more interested in the physical relationship (Meyer, 2004a).

Internalised morality: Adolescents are confronted with aspects of morality and need to make a decision about, for example, sexual behaviour, religion, substance use and abuse, their place in society, and so on. It is important that adolescents integrate a value system based on moral principals that will direct their behaviour (Meyer, 2004a).

Development of an own identity: As previously mentioned, adolescents are faced with the psychosocial crisis or *Identity vs. Identity confusion*. This crisis must be successfully resolved in order to establish a healthy sense of self. In order to establish an own identity, adolescents need

to choose a career path, integrate a moral code by which to live, and successfully develop a sexual identity (Meyer, 2004a).

Erikson (1968) states that during this psychosocial crisis, adolescents experience a moratorium where they experiment with culturally conflicting roles and identities that stem from their environment. A new sense of self is established when these conflicting roles and identities have been successfully coped with. If adolescents do not successfully resolve this conflict, they experience *Identity confusion* which may lead to the integration of a negative identity that does not meet the social and cultural requirements. Failure to resolve the crisis might also lead to *Identity foreclosure* where adolescents prematurely and wrongly base their decisions about their identity on other's opinions (Meyer, 2004a).

Identity work during the adolescent years is especially relevant to this study and is one of the most important stages of identity development because although it does not only take place during the adolescent years, the integration of the previous stages of development is crucial during adolescence.

Beyers and Çok (2008) state that adolescence is a period during which changes in identity are very distinct. It is also a period during which the development of a stable identity is “a central developmental task” (p. 147). Adolescents have to establish their place in society, restructure social relationships, and make choices concerning their future. Identity development during the adolescent years can be viewed as a “process of person-context interactions” (Beyers & Çok, 2008, p. 147). Although different contexts have seldom been taken into account in research regarding identity development, research shows that school and future occupations are considered to be some of the most important contexts in the identity development of mid- and late adolescence (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006).

Erikson (1968) emphasises that adolescents will have to work through previous crises, and that the conflict between identity synthesis and identity confusion must be resolved during adolescence. When this conflict has been resolved, the individual's sense of self should be integrated and coherent (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). To develop a stable identity, adolescents need to be able to function on their own and be independent. They should also integrate a new body concept as that of an adult and their behaviour should be guided by morals and not needs. Adolescents need to set goals and ambitions and their sexual identity must be rooted in their gender, how they are seen in the larger society, and the gender they are sexually interested in (Lucente, 1996).

In summary, late adolescence is a pertinent time for developing an own identity. Part of establishing an identity, is establishing a sense of sexual self. Failure to do so will influence subsequent life stages.

Early adulthood (22–34 years), as used by Newman and Newman (1999), coincides with Erikson's stage of *Young adulthood*. Meyer (2004b) states that the following developmental tasks should be completed during early adulthood: Parenting, Work, Lifestyle, and The establishment of an intimate relationship.

Parenting: Parenting styles are influenced by how as children parents experienced their own parents (Meyer, 2004b). However, since none of the respondents in this study are parents yet, this development task is not relevant to the current study.

Work: One's daily schedule, status, level of income, and social contacts are influenced by one's work (Meyer, 2004b). For the purposes of this study, the relevance of work as a development task and its influence on identity during early adulthood is limited, since only one participant was working and only started doing so in the year of this study.

Lifestyle: Marriage, having children, and one's occupation are only a few things that could influence one's lifestyle (Meyer, 2004b).

The establishment of an intimate relationship: This refers to a person's readiness to commit to a long-term relationship and to be intimate with another person. To establish intimacy, one must share feelings, thoughts, and experiences with another person. This must be done mutually and will lead to a sense of deeper self-knowledge (Meyer, 2004b). *Intimacy vs. Isolation* is the psychosocial crisis that, according to Erikson (1968), must be resolved during early adulthood. This crisis refers to one's ability to form a relationship based on support and openness with another, without fearing the loss of one's own identity. Once personal identity has been fulfilled and an individual identifies as valued, competent, and meaningful to others, intimacy can be established. Once a sense of individualism and independence has been established, a person may experience feelings of isolation from others. These feelings may be experienced for only a short period of time, as being connected to a specific situation, or for a longer period of time. To resolve the crisis of isolation, one needs to establish a sense of intimacy (Meyer, 2004b).

To summarise, establishing an intimate relationship is a key developmental task during early adulthood. If a person is successful in doing so he/she will gain deeper self-knowledge and a sense of intimacy.

In conclusion, psychosocial crises must be resolved successfully in order to establish a healthy identity. If one stage is not successfully completed, it will have a negative impact on future stages. A sense of sexual identity must be established during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009) and individuals should be able to establish an intimate relationship during early adulthood (Meyer, 2004b). In the researcher's experience as a teacher, young males may struggle to integrate a healthy and stable sense of sexual identity. In addition,

in the process of acquiring a sense of sexual identity, young males often experiment with and engage in same-sex behaviour. The participants who participated in this study were between the ages of 18 and 24 years and therefore form part of two psychosocial stages: Later adolescence and Early adulthood (Newman & Newman, 1999). All of the participants engaged in same-sex experiences during their adolescent years. Before a discussion concerning same-sex experiences can commence, sexual identity and how it is developed must first be contextualised within this study.

3. Contextualising Sexual Identity

Exploring identity and establishing a sense of sexual identity is a key developmental task during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Russell et al., 2009). The development of a sexual identity is especially important during the adolescent years and sexual behaviour plays an important role in establishing a sense of sexual identity. Sexual identity is not fixed and it may take many forms in later years. Even though a part of sexual identity is biologically determined (i.e. gender), society and culture play an important role in how masculinity and femininity are perceived. Sexual identity is also influenced by personal characteristics, interpersonal experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and convictions. (Lucente, 1996)

Kroger (2000) states that a person's sexual self consists of three elements: *sexual or gender identity*, *sex or gender role*, and *sexual orientation*. *Sexual or gender identity* refers to feelings of masculinity, femininity, being genderless, and being undifferentiated; *sex or gender role* refers to how one expresses his/her biological gender according to the norms and stereotypes of society; and *sexual orientation* refers to the sex to which a person is sexually attracted and interested in (orientation categories are heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual) (Kroger, 2000).

There appear to be discrepancies in the literature concerning the correct terminology used in describing the different elements of one's sexual identity. These discrepancies are most prevalent in the differing views of authors regarding sexual identity, sexual orientation and sexual preference. It would seem that through an attempt to define and distinguish these terms authors often view different terms as similar, or they differ on specific terms.

According to Yarhouse, Tan, and Pawlowski (2005c), sexual identity includes one's *biological sex* (male or female), *gender identity* (a psychological sense of being male or female), *sex role* (how one adheres to social expectations of one's sex), *sexual orientation* (the sex to which one is sexually attracted), and *intention or valuative framework* (how a person reacts on desires considering one's beliefs and values) (Yarhouse et al., 2005c). Altof (2000) states that sexual identity can be viewed as a substructure of sexual functioning and refers to *gender identity* (being male or female), *object choice* (which sex one is sexually attracted to), and *intention* (how one wants to react to sexual impulses). Yarhouse and Tan (2005b) view sexual identity as the manner in which individuals think about themselves and how they communicate their identity to others.

The terms sexual orientation and sexual preference are used interchangeably in the literature and are therefore discussed together here. Sexual preference refers to being heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. How people label themselves is influenced by the sex they are attracted to (male or female or both), whether they are male or female, their gender identity (masculinity and femininity), their moral framework, and their sexual behaviour (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b). Sexual orientation reflects the sex to which a person is sexually attracted. Sexual orientation can be established early on, but identity develops over time and is changing (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b). According to Worthington, Savoy, and Dillon (2002), sexual

orientation refers to the object of one's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction, with the recognition, acceptance, and identification thereof being classified as one facet of sexual identity.

For the purposes of this paper, sexual orientation or preference will refer to the object of one's sexual attraction or lack thereof (i.e. heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual) (Zucker, 2002), and sexual identity will be taken to be one aspect of identity which includes (but is not limited to) how individuals make meaning of their sexual attractions and desires, and how they form a sense of self within social contexts (Frankel, 2004).

3.1. Sexual identity development.

Sexual identity development is vital to the healthy development (Shtarkshall, Santelli, & Hirsch, 2007) and stable identity of an adolescent (Lucente, 1996; Kroger, 2000). According to Tasker and McCann (1999), a number of contexts have an influence on the process of sexual identity development. Adolescents are aware of discrimination and prejudice against the so-called minority sexual orientations and being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual is seen as undesirable. Tasker and McCann (1999) are of the opinion that the knowledge of homophobia and the anxiety over how others perceive homosexuals can also have an influence on sexual identity formation and may cause adolescents to integrate a sexual identity based on what is 'more acceptable' by society. On the contrary, feelings of not being accepted and low self-regard can cause adolescents to identify with the minority group and again may lead to the incorrect integration of a particular sexual identity. Bisexuality is sometimes seen as more acceptable by society and might be integrated by adolescents who have same-sex interests and experiences.

Relationships with parents and peers are critical in sexual identity formation. Parents play a significant role in the development of an adolescent's identity because they are part of the

adolescent's social context and provide self-relevant feedback that supports the adolescent's psychosocial development (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Sexual identity formation is significantly influenced by how parents respond to a number of different situations, including physical affection, appropriate physical contact with others, and childhood masturbation. The relationship between the parent and the adolescent and the parental monitoring of the adolescent's social activities strongly influences the sexuality of adolescents (Shtarkshall et al., 2007). As adolescents become more aware of sexual interests, they move further away from their parents and their relationships with friends and peers became increasingly important.

Models for sexual identity development have changed considerably over the past 30 years. Most stage models are based on the theory that sexual identity exploration will lead to the integration of a stable LGB-identity. Many classic models, like those of Cass (1979, 1984), Troiden (1988), and Fox (1996), describe a linear process of moving from being aware of sexual attractions to sexual identity confusion and engagement in sexual behaviour, to the disclosure of one's sexual identity to others, and finally to the integration of a sexual identity. These models are valuable in describing developmental stages of identity development, but are limited because they only include typical sexual identities (i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual). More recently, sexual identity is understood to be fluid and changing and the emphasis is now on developmental milestones and not on stages (Russell et al., 2009).

Very few research projects have focused on heterosexual adolescents experiencing same-sex attractions or going through a stage of confusion (Rose, Rodgers, & Small, 2006; Morgan, Steiner, & Morgan Thompson, 2010; Reback & Larkins, 2010). Very little attention is given to heterosexual identity development because it is assumed that it develops "naturally" (Frankel, 2004, p. 3). Most studies and models on identity development see a stage of confusion as a step

in the process of becoming LGB. According to Yarhouse (2001), a person moves towards an integrated LGB-identity through normal same-sex identity development. It would therefore seem that there is disagreement in the literature. On the one hand, resources state that a person does not necessarily identify with an LGB-identity when they experience same-sex attractions (Tasker & McCann, 1999:32; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b). On the other hand, according to existing models of identity development, a state of confusion is usually followed by identifying with an LGB-identity. These models do not accommodate adolescents who experience same-sex attractions but do not identify as LGB (Yarhouse, 2001).

Hoffman (2004) notes that there are significantly fewer models on heterosexual identity development than there are of homosexual identity development – a consequence of the assumption that heterosexuality is believed to be from birth and that it is a ‘natural’ experience (Morgan, 2012). Rose et al. (2006) suggest that future research should investigate heterosexual adolescents who are confused about their sexual identity.

In response to the relatively little research on heterosexual identity development, Worthington et al. (2002) propose a multidimensional model of heterosexual identity development. Although this model has not been widely assessed from an empirical stance, it provides a theoretical framework that betters the understanding of heterosexual identity and its variants (Morgan, 2012). According to Hoffman (2004), Worthington et al.’s model is founded on a broad literature foundation and it includes “biopsychosocial influences and dimensions of individual as well as social identity” (p. 276), which are usually left out of other models on identity development. The following section will focus on Worthington et al.’s model and its five identity development statuses: *unexplored commitment*, *active exploration*, *diffusion*, *deepening and commitment*, and *synthesis*.

3.2. The Worthington, Savoy, and Dillon model.

Worthington et al. (2002) define heterosexual identity development as an individual and social process through which heterosexually identified individuals acknowledge and define their sexual values, needs, preferences for sexual activities and sexual orientation, mode of sexual expression, and the characteristics of one's sexual partners. This model is based on the assumption that individuals understand that they are part of an oppressive majority group who share attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding sexual minority groups. Worthington et al. propose a multidimensional model of heterosexual identity development and hypothesise that the process of sexual identity formation is influenced by social, biological, and psychological factors. The model draws a distinction between two parallel, corresponding processes.

The first involves an individual sexual identity process where the individual must recognise and accept his/her *sexual needs* (internally experienced instinct, desire, appetite, biological necessity, etc.), *values* (moral evaluations and standards of what is appropriate, acceptable, and desirable sexual behaviour), *orientation and preferences regarding activities* (behaviour based on sexual provocation, sexual satisfaction, reproduction, holding hands, kissing, masturbation, sexual intercourse), *partner characteristics* (physical, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, economic, social, spiritual, etc.), and *modes of sexual expression* (verbal and non-verbal communication, direct or indirect signals that conveys one's sexuality, such as flirting, eye contact, touching, etc.). The second process concerns a social identity that involves recognising one's membership in a group that shares the same beliefs and attitudes towards sexual minority groups.

Worthington et al.'s (2002) model consists of five development statuses: *unexplored commitment*, *active exploration*, *diffusion*, *deepening and commitment*, and *synthesis*.

Unexplored commitment refers to when individuals identify as heterosexual without actively exploring their sexual identity. They assume a heterosexual identity based on societal assumptions and normative development and they do so mostly subconsciously. Active exploration is when individuals actively explore their sexual desires, principles, orientation and preferences for activities, characteristics of partners or modes of sexual expression. A three-way distinction is drawn between active exploration and behavioural experimentation: 1) exploration can be cognitive or behavioural, 2) exploration tends to be goal directed as opposed to experimentation that can be random and dangerous, and 3) experimentation can be seen as a normal, uncontrollable occurrence whereas exploration must be entered into through cognitive and behavioural exploration. Diffusion is often the result of a crisis and occurs when individuals do not commit or explore. During this stage, individuals can experience identity confusion and a lack of awareness and understanding. Deepening and commitment is when individuals move towards committing to their identified sexual desires, principles, sexual orientation, preference of activities, and modes of sexual expression. Synthesis occurs when individuals can agree with all the dimensions of their identity. These stages should be seen as fluid since the opportunities for revisiting statuses throughout life exists (Morgan et al., 2010; Worthington et al., 2002).

Morgan et al. (2010) state that although the model has theoretical potential, it is supported by very little empirical evidence. However, the researcher views this model as a starting point for looking at heterosexual identity development as it is, to date, still one of the only models on heterosexual identity development. According to the model, heterosexual identity is not necessarily always stable or consistent with regard to sexual attraction and behaviour – which lends support to individuals who engage in same-sex experiences, but still identify as heterosexual.

The active exploration of an individual's sexual identity may take many forms and could be cognitive, behavioural exploration, or in the form of conscious experimentation with same-sex partners while still identifying as heterosexual (Morgan et al., 2010; Worthington et al., 2002). The status of active exploration is especially relevant to this study as it is during this status that adolescents may explore same-sex attractions or engage in same-sex behaviour which can lead to either deepening and commitment or diffusion. People experiencing diffusion may be confused about their identity and lack self awareness and understanding. People who experience same-sex attraction may also experience a stage of identity confusion in response to the same-sex attraction (Floyd & Stein, 2002).

Worthington et al.'s model provides for a stage of confusion or same-sex experimentation that does not necessarily lead to an LGB-identity. This is in contrast to the models on homosexual identity development, where confusion is viewed as a step towards the integration of a homosexual identity (Yarhouse, 2001).

The following section will briefly discuss sexual identity confusion and same-sex experiences. These two terms are often interlinked in the sense that sexual identity confusion can lead to individuals engaging in same-sex experiences, or that experimenting in same-sex experiences can lead to sexual identity confusion.

3.3. Same-sex experiences.

Same-sex experiences are far more prevalent than is thought. Alfred C. Kinsey, who is considered a pioneer of sex research (Brown & Fee, 2003), together with his associates, concluded in 1948 that a substantial number of men have had some form of same-sex experiences between the years of adolescence and old age (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948,

2003). Although Kinsey et al.'s views were widely criticised (Brown & Fee, 2003) they have been re-evaluated in recent years.

Sexual behaviour affects how adolescents make meaning of same-sex attractions since they may see this attraction as reflective of their true identity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b). Same-sex attraction can be experienced as a crisis when it is in contrast to one's beliefs, values, or socio-cultural context (Yarhouse, 2001; Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005a). Although there are many possible reasons for same-sex attraction, Yarhouse (2001) is of the opinion that arousal can occur while watching a movie or wrestling, or even in a locker room at school. Rose et al. (2006) argue that adolescents in a state of moratorium, who have not yet made a commitment to a sexual identity, experiment with different beliefs, roles, and sexual identities. Confused adolescents may take longer than non-confused adolescents to integrate a sexual identity because of the stigma surrounding sexual identity and a sense of discontinuity.

Same-sex attraction can be the result of curiosity or temporary experimentation and does not necessarily have significant implications on one's life. Young people may not integrate an LGB-identity when they are comfortable with and aware of the same-sex experiences they have had and do not feel the need to change their heterosexual label (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2010). Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2010) also note that most reports of same-sex attraction seem to be among adolescents and young adults, and that this might be because young people are more open to expressing and exploring their sexual needs and desires. In the opinion of Yarhouse et al. (2005c), it is possible for a person to experience same-sex attractions and still have a heterosexual sexual identity, because sexual orientation is only one dimension of sexual identity.

Research shows that heterosexual men who later identify as homosexual came to this identification by first experiencing same-sex attraction, then becoming confused about their

sexual orientation, and then integrating an LGB-identity, whereas homosexual men report feeling different from peers before integrating a homosexual identity (Morgan et al., 2010; Yarhouse et al., 2005c; Yarhouse et al., 2005a).

Yarhouse (2001) is of the opinion that people who experience same-sex attraction make sense of these attractions by assuming that they are LGB, especially if this is supported by the socio-cultural context in which the person lives. The stage of confusion will be less severe when the culture the person lives in is accepting of such an identity. Depending on how well people integrate their sexual behaviour with their values and beliefs, they may reconsider the identity they have chosen. The culture and community, family, peers, professionals, and social environment are all important factors in identity development.

A study on men who have sex with men by Reback and Larkins (2010), found that many participants do not see their same-sex experiences as inconsistent with their heterosexual sexual identities. Many participants experience guilt and shame and disregard these experiences because they were infrequent, accidental, or recreational. These participants also distanced themselves from same-sex partners and places associated with homosexuals. Most participants considered themselves to be heterosexual, although they had sex with both males and females and should therefore be viewed as bisexual. It would appear that there are inconsistencies between the individuals' sexual identity and their sexual behaviour, because the participants strongly identified with a sexuality even though their sexual behaviour suggested a different sexuality. Although many participants experienced feelings of guilt and shame, this did not influence their heterosexual sexual identity (2010).

The findings of a study by Udry and Chantala (2002) show a correlation between individuals who engage in same-sex experiences or have same-sex interests and a higher

occurrence of emotional problems and victimisation. Dickson, Paul, and Herbison (2003) agree and state that individuals who identify as homosexual are more susceptible to suicide related to social pressure, victimisation, and lower self-acceptance.

In conclusion, the occurrences of same-sex behaviour seem to be more common than one would think and can be traced back to the study by Kinsey et al. (1948). Same-sex experiences may be the result of curiosity, being confused about one's sexual identity or they may be in reaction to same-sex attractions. Same-sex behaviour and same-sex attraction do not necessarily lead to the integration of an LGB-identity, although the integration of an LGB-identity is often what individuals perceive to be the only result of having same-sex experiences.

4. Conclusion

This study is concerned with the same-sex experiences of young males and how they make meaning of those experiences. It also looks at how young males understand their sexual identity with regard to their same-sex experiences. In an attempt to better understand young males and their sexual identity, the researcher has discussed sexual identity and sexual identity development as part of identity and identity development.

In terms of sexual identity, a distinction was made between sexual identity and sexual preference – two terms that will be used throughout the present study. Confusion about one's sexual identity and experimentation with one's sexual preference are factors that contribute to adolescents engaging in same-sex experiences. Same-sex experiences may cause further confusion and prevent adolescents from integrating a sexual identity, and consequently failing to integrate a healthy identity. It is therefore paramount to explore how same-sex experiences are

experienced and handled so that ways to help young males cope with these difficulties can be further explored and researched.

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Section B: Article

Sexual Identity: Same-Sex Experiences of Young Males

H. Elizabeth Joubert

Centre for Child, Youth and Family studies, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South
Africa

Mrs HE Joubert

29 Van de Graaf Street

Welgemoed

Bellville

7530

South Africa

hepunt@gmail.com

Tel. +27 72 465 9802

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Abstract

Engaging in same-sex experiences can have a great influence on sexual identity and development. A comprehensive literature study showed that same-sex experiences can be both the cause and result of sexual identity confusion, which may have a negative effect on identity synthesis. Identity development was qualitatively considered from a psychosocial perspective, taking a phenomenological approach into account to better understand how young males experienced their sexual identity after engaging in same-sex experiences within their socio-cultural context. Participants were initially selected through non-probability (convenient purposive) sampling, but snowball sampling was also included. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 24 years and included males with different sexual preferences, from different races, who speak Afrikaans or English, and were from the Western Cape province in South Africa. Data were collected through two semi-structured interviews which consisted of a discussion and the making of collages, which were analysed by means of content analysis. In conclusion, all the participants experienced confusion about their sexual identity at some time in their lives. This confusion was often caused by or resulted in same-sex experiences. Same-sex experiences were perceived by the participants as both positive and negative, and in some cases led to participants not being able to integrate a sexual identity.

Introduction

Same-sex attractions and/or experiences may lead to individuals integrating a sexual identity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b) which may not necessarily be a true representation of their sexual identity. Same-sex experiences can be experienced as a crisis and in contrast to one's beliefs or socio-cultural context (Yarhouse, 2001; Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005a),

which can lead to feelings of shame and guilt. Same-sex experiences may also be as a result of not being able to commit to a sexual identity (Rose, Rodgers, & Small, 2006), as individuals may experiment with different sexual identities in order to determine and integrate a sexual identity. Individuals may incorrectly integrate a sexual identity or become confused about their sexual identity. Same-sex attractions and/or experiences may therefore have a negative influence on identity synthesis.

Most existing models on sexual identity development view a stage of confusion or having same-sex attractions or experiences as a step in the process of identifying as homosexual or bisexual (Troiden, 1988; Kroger, 2000; Yarhouse, 2001; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009). Very little research has focused on heterosexual identity development, a consequence of the assumption that heterosexuality is ‘the norm’ and is therefore assumed to be in place from birth and not as something that develops (Morgan, 2012). To look at sexual identity development holistically, the development of a homosexual or bisexual identity as well as a heterosexual identity must be taken into consideration – there is clearly a distinction between homosexual and bisexual identity development on the one hand, and heterosexual identity development on the other. The concept of sexual identity development is therefore not viewed as unified.

Yarhouse, Tan, and Palowski (2005c) state that same-sex attractions and/or experiences do not necessarily lead to individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (hereafter referred to as LGB). Worthington, Savoy, and Dillon (2002) propose a multidimensional model of heterosexual identity development in reaction to the relatively little research on heterosexual identity development (Hoffman, 2004). Their model consists of five identity development stages which include *unexplored commitment* (individuals identify as heterosexual based on societal assumptions), *active exploration* (individuals actively explore their sexual needs, orientation, and

values), *diffusion* (individuals can experience identity confusion and a lack of awareness and understanding), *deepening and commitment* (individuals move towards committing to their identified sexual orientation, values, and needs), and *synthesis* (when individuals agree to all dimensions of their sexual identity) (Worthington et al., 2002). This model supports the idea that a heterosexual identity is not always stable or consistent with sexual attraction or behaviour (Morgan, 2012).

An individual needs to establish a sense of sexual self in order to successfully develop a stable identity. For the purpose of this article, sexual identity is viewed as one aspect of identity, and includes how individuals form a sense of self within social contexts (Frankel, 2004) and make meaning of their sexual attractions and desires. Sexual orientation or preference refers to the object of one's sexual and romantic attraction, and therefore whether a person identifies as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual (Zucker, 2002).

Establishing a sense of sexual self or developing a sexual identity is especially important during the adolescent years (Salmela-Aro, 2011) and for a person's healthy development (Shtarkshall, Santelli, & Hirsch, 2007). According to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, if an adolescent should fail to solve the psychosocial crisis of *Identity vs. Identity confusion* subsequent stages of his or her life will be influenced. Early adulthood (Newman & Newman, 1999) is therefore also included as a developmental phase in this study, which looks at the sexual identity development of young males. Young males is a collective used to refer to *Later adolescence* (18–22) and *Early adulthood* (22–34) (Newman & Newman, 1999).

Identity is influenced by biological, psychological, and societal circumstances (Kroger, 2000). Identity develops out of intra-psychic characteristics as well as interaction with society (Koepeke & Denissen, 2012), and is concerned with how individuals think about themselves and

the world (Chrysochoou, 2003). From a phenomenological perspective, individuals cannot be separated from the world they live in and in order to better understand individuals, their context must be taken into account (Louw & Edwards, 2008).

In conclusion, having same-sex experiences is not indicative of or a prerequisite for integrating an LGB-identity, nor does it mean that individuals who engage in same-sex behaviour or have same-sex attractions cannot be heterosexual. Adolescents may be confused about their sexual identity due to same-sex attractions or engagement in same-sex behaviour. As a result, many adolescents incorrectly identify as LGB or nurture feelings of shame and guilt, all of which may have a negative influence on identity synthesis. Same-sex experiences may cause further confusion and prevent adolescents from integrating a sexual identity, and consequently also fail to integrate a healthy identity. It is therefore paramount to explore how same-sex experiences are being experienced and handled by young males, so that ways of helping them cope with these difficulties can be explored and researched. By exploring the same-sex experiences of young males, the meaning that they attach to these experiences can be reformulated in order to help them develop a healthy sexual identity. This study investigates how young males experience their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences.

Method

Sample and Participants

A qualitative approach, as described by Fouché and Delport (2011), was followed in order to investigate how young males understand their sexual identity after having had same-sex experiences. A phenomenological design focused on how the participants understood their experiences within their socio-cultural context (Fouché & Schurink, 2011; Williams, Unrau, &

Grinnell, 2005). The participants were selected through non-probability (convenient purposive) sampling (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2005; Strydom & Delpont, 2011), which included geographical and economic considerations (Sarantakos, 2000). Snowball sampling (Strydom & Delpont, 2011) served as an additional method later on. The participants were initially recruited by means of a Facebook group for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students at a local university. Willing participants could contact the researcher. The criteria for the inclusion of young males were that they had to be young males (irrespective of their sexual identity, culture, race or language), who have had same-sex experiences, and who were willing to participate in a two-part interview. The final sample included: males between the ages of 18 and 24 years; who have had same-sex experiences; who identified as homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual; who were from different racial groups; who were Afrikaans and English speaking; and who, at the time of the study, lived in the Boland and Northern suburbs of the Western Cape in South Africa.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a two-part semi-structured interview in order to get detailed information about the participants' experiences (Greeff, 2011). The first interview comprised four main questions that focused on how participants' experienced their sexual identity, sexual preference, same-sex experiences, and their support system. Participants were allowed optimal speaking time to discuss their own experiences in their own words, in accordance with the phenomenological method of conducting research (Louw & Edwards, 2008). The second interview focused on member checking (Koelsch, 2013) and triangulation (Strydom & Delpont, 2011) by means of a collage that participants were asked to make. The collage had to

demonstrate how the participants viewed their sexual identity with regard to their same-sex experiences.

Data Analysis

Recordings of the first and second interviews were transcribed and compared in order to ensure that the data gathered during the two interviews were consistent. When the data from the two interviews had been collaborated, the data were analysed by means of descriptive content analysis (Sarantakos, 2012). Data were identified by means of latent content coding (Stark & Roberts, 2005) and were organised into four main categories that correlated with the four main questions that were asked during the first interview. Although sub-categories were also identified, the main categories and sub-categories were integrated due to the small sample size.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

In order to establish trustworthiness, the researcher employed the four constructs that are identified by Lincoln and Guba (cited in Schurink, Fouché, & De Vos, 2011). The credibility of the method was ascertained by asking all the participants the same questions. A rich and detailed description of the research findings contributed to transferability. The participants were given the opportunity to object to the researcher's understanding of their experiences in order to obtain dependability. Confirmability was ensured because the researcher kept field notes of her observations and assumptions that may have had an influence on the research findings.

This project fell under a bigger project that was approved by the Ethics committee of the North-West University: "Developing sustainable support to enhance quality of life and wellbeing

for children, youth and families in South Africa: A trans-disciplinary approach” (NWU-00060-12-A1).

Results

Data were organised into four categories that corresponded with the four main questions that were asked during the first interview and confirmed in the second interview. Two of the participants (P 2 and P 3) were Afrikaans. Their transcripts were translated into English, and are presented here. A discussion of the results will follow.

Category 1: Young Males’ Experiences of their Sexual Preference

After explaining what is meant by sexual preference, the researcher asked the participants to describe their sexual preference. This category emerged from participants’ responses on how they viewed their sexual preference, whether they experienced confusion about their sexual preference, and to what extent they were comfortable with their sexual preference. Two participants identified as homosexual and were sure of their sexual preferences.

OK, sexual preference I would say homosexual. Because I can’t see myself being intimate with a woman. So I see myself as homosexual because ultimately I see myself with a guy. (P 5)

I’m gay. Uhm, because... well, for me it is about who you are in love with and sexually attracted to.
(P 2)

One participant identified as bisexual although he thought that it would be easier to refer to himself as homosexual since he believed bisexuality is less accepted by society than

homosexuality. In his opinion, society views bisexuality as a transitional phase towards homosexuality and when he tells people that he is bisexual, they say that it is only temporary and that he will later identify as homosexual.

Uhm uhm, I see myself, or I identify myself as a bisexual. Uhm, but I have had times where I said to myself I would much prefer to be classified as gay... (P 1)

Another participant felt he was heterosexual but with bisexual experiences. He was confused about his sexual preference and was not comfortable with it.

And so, that is why I would define myself as, my sexual identity as probably heterosexual, but with bisexual experiences. Mmm... I wouldn't say I'm comfortable, because it is not always comfortable. (P 3)

One participant couldn't identify with a sexual preference and said that he was somewhere between bisexual and homosexual. He felt emotionally attracted to women but was physically attracted to men.

Uhm... I guess... it's somewhere between... bisexual and homosexual in the sense of... I'm primarily attracted to men... but if... I meet a girl on a social level... a friend... as a friend...uh, I can actually become romantically attracted to her. (P 4)

The abovementioned participant further stated that he would be able to identify as bisexual because of his definition of bisexual – which is that he is first physically attracted to men and then to women, and first emotionally attracted to women and then to men.

I'm more physically attracted to men and then the emotional thing will follow, and with women uhm... it's an emotional thing and then a physical thing. (P 4)

This participant, who identified himself as bisexual, reported that he tells people that he is homosexual because he feels that homosexuality is more accepted by society than bisexuality, even though he is ashamed to tell people that he is homosexual. He also mentioned that homosexuality is at least talked about, whereas bisexuality is completely taboo. He further mentioned that he understands this taboo, because he would not want to be in a relationship with a male who has previously been involved with women and vice versa. At the time of the interview he was in a homosexual relationship, although he had never told his partner that he identifies as bisexual.

I'm more ashamed to tell people I'm gay – because that's what I eventually just tell people, you know it's... it's far more complicated to go through this whole thing of what am I. (P 4)

All participants experienced confusion about their sexual preference at some time in their lives. At the time of the interview two participants were still confused about their sexual preference and had not integrated a sexual preference. The confusion they experienced was for different reasons. One participant experienced confusion about his sexual preference throughout his high school years.

Yes, throughout my high school years (laughs). Uhm, ja... that...ja, it again just comes down to, I think, the type of environment you are in, the people you are interacting with. It makes it difficult to pin point. I mean, I can't even pin point it today, so ja, I think I am still unsure. (P 3)

One participant said that he doubted whether he will ever be sure about his sexual preference.

I don't think I'll ever be sure about my sexual orientation. I don't think any amount of talking will ever sort this out. It is something that I'll have to sort out myself. (P 4)

Another participant wondered whether a relationship with a woman was more suitable, specifically with regard to society's views, and felt that it would not be possible for him to have children one day if he were to be in a homosexual relationship.

...it does crop up in my mind... sometimes... wouldn't a relationship with a girl fit in better in life? Uhm, I think a lot of it fits my personality type... Uhm, I guess I also want to have kids one day and raise children and I also have a need to... to fit in... in that sense. (P 4)

Two participants felt that they have become more comfortable with their sexual preferences.

I've come along way from my first year at [university]... from like complete denial and almost not even being able to say the word 'gay' to now being... being more or less comfortable with it. (P 5)

Uhm, I've actually gotten much more comfortable with it over the past two years. (P 1)

One participant accepted his sexual preference and was relatively positive about being homosexual.

I would say that I am relatively positive about it. I have accepted it and all that. (P 2)

Category 2: Young Males' Experiences of their Sexual Identity

The researcher explained to the participants what the term sexual identity meant, and then asked the participants how they understood their sexual identity (i.e. who they are) in terms of their sexual preference. The discussion on sexual identity brought about the following topics: the participants' views on sexual identity, confusion about their sexual identity, and influences on their sexual identity. The participants' sexual identities were influenced by societal views on sexual identity, having lived in a school hostel or having attended an all boys' school, and their religion. When asked how they viewed their sexual identity in terms of their sexual preference, three participants emphasised how they viewed their gender and masculinity based on societal perceptions.

And then sexual identity I would say I am a man, I see myself as a man. I don't see myself as a woman in a man's body or anything as such. ...I'd say I'm... or what I feel I am, rather masculine. I don't know, I don't see myself as all sparkly and all that. (P 5)

Well, I see myself... as a... uhm... very close to the normal [referring to straight acting]... (P 2)

Uhm, personally I kinda... in a gay world I view myself as a straight acting male. So, I like dressing nicely and look after my skin and so on, but I don't consider myself to be effeminate. (P 4)

One participant could not explain his sexual identity at all even though the researcher explained to him what was meant by sexual identity. When asked how he understood his sexual identity, the participant said:

And ja, so I would say... uhm I would say the way I see my sexual identity is that, I perceive myself: all right, I don't know, I'm a bisexual man and I'm in... and in society... in societal bracket I am maybe in a sense a no-man's-land, ja. (P 1)

One participant confused sexual preference with sexual identity and found it difficult to describe his sexual identity even though the researcher explained sexual identity to him. He said in the first interview that he would one day meet the right person – male or female – who would determine his sexual identity for him. He did not think it was important to integrate a sexual identity because he was still young and had a lot of time to think about it. He did not want to define himself as bisexual, homosexual, or heterosexual.

I don't actually want to define myself as bisexual or homosexual or heterosexual... And so, I would define myself, my sexual identity probably as heterosexual with bisexual experiences. Uhm... I think it's because I'm young, that is my biggest reason. I feel that I am still young and there are other things that I need to focus on now but that is how I feel now. (P 3)

During the second interview, the researcher asked this participant about the confusion he experienced. The participant answered that he had thought about it and that he wanted to make a decision about his sexual identity and that he was willing to go for counselling.

I think after last week's interview it, uhm... it sunk in that like... a person can't really go on that. You can't... (sigh)... wait for another person... what happens in the mean time? Who are you then until someone determines you sexual identity for you? So I... I would like to determine my own sexual identity. (P 3)

Participants felt that society discriminates against homosexuality and bisexuality. This influenced their sexual identities in various ways. As mentioned previously, two participants stated that they would rather say that they are homosexual than bisexual because bisexuality is considered less acceptable by society than homosexuality. One participant did not want to disclose his homosexual identity when asked about it as he feared where such a conversation might lead. One participant did not even want to socialise with homosexuals as he feared the association with homosexuals would result in people viewing him as homosexual. The participants were aware of discrimination towards homosexuality and bisexuality even though they had not always experienced this discrimination themselves.

So... on an individual level I haven't had problems, but society as a whole... (P 4)

Uhm... not directly, no, Uhm... obviously indirectly you see it a lot more but it is not just focused on me. I am lucky in that sense. (P 2)

I understood it as, you know, this isn't abnormal, it is something that happens. It's just people that are anti-it... (P 5)

One participant said that bisexuality was perceived by society as a transition phase towards integrating a homosexual identity and that bisexuality cannot exist because one person cannot be equally attracted to both men and women.

...I would see how that a lot of people would be like OK well, that they used to say: it's either black or white, either you're straight or you're a gay. And then for me it would be like, OK well,

I'm not actually completely straight, but at the same time, I'm not completely gay. So it was just now this whole idea of that I do apparently fall in between, into this grey area. (P 1)

Another participant felt that homosexuality was more acceptable than bisexuality. He also felt that people accepted him for who he was despite his sexual preference.

Ja, I think... there's a whole cultural view it's not accepting. People accept me as being gay, but they don't accept [gays]. I think part of my problem or my dilemma, uhm, with girls this thing with that it's more socially unacceptable to be bisexual... There's a lot of pressure from society. (P 4)

Three participants wondered to what extent being in an all boys' school, living in a school hostel with other boys, and not being in contact with girls (due to being in an all boys' school) had on their sexual identity. One participant said that same-sex experiences were subtly expected in all boys' schools, even though it is considered to be against the norm to engage in same-sex behaviour.

...at the same time it was fun and in the set up it was in, for example in an all boys' school, it is subtly expected. (P 1)

One participant became aware of his attraction towards males while living in the school hostel of an all boys' primary school. He later went to an all boys' high school although he did not stay in the school.

Uh, I would perhaps look at guys in boarding house bathrooms while we were showering... So I think that was perhaps my first realisation of a gay sexual preference. Uhm... at the time when I

was in [an all boys high school], I would see a girl on Sunday. That was the only time I would see a woman – that is true. I have wondered... would my... would my identification... with girls be different if I was in a co-ed school. (P 4)

Another participant became aware of his same-sex attractions while staying in the hostel of a co-ed high school and sharing a shower with other boys.

I think my first like experience thereof was very early in high school like with the whole shower-with-other-men idea, I think, my sexual awareness began, that wow, that may be, you know, why you look at men in the shower for example. (P 3)

Two of the participants viewed their religion as having an influence on their sexual identity, because they experienced their same-sex encounters as wrong and in conflict with their religious beliefs. According to one participant, although he had already integrated a homosexual identity, he was still experiencing conflict and he said that he could not be completely comfortable with his sexual identity because of its conflict with his religion. He felt guilty about his sexual identity and the same-sex experiences he engaged in because the Bible says that having same-sex experiences is wrong. Another participant reported that he has feelings of self-blame, guilt, and shame after every same-sex experience because, according to the Bible, premarital sex is wrong.

I'd say the... the fact that the Bible says it's wrong to... or for a man to lie with another man. Ja, ja that was basically it. (P 5)

What you learn in church about sex before marriage being wrong. (P 3)

Category 3: Young Males' Experiences of their Same-sex Experiences

The participants were asked to discuss their same-sex experiences. The researcher also asked the participants how their same-sex experiences made them feel, what emotions or feelings they had after their same-sex experiences, and how they handled their same-sex experiences. The participants experienced their same-sex experiences in both positive and negative lights, and had different reactions towards their same-sex partners. They also reported different reasons for engaging in same-sex experiences. One participant explained that he was curious about same-sex experiences and had wanted to see what would happen. He felt a thrill in going against the norm.

Uhm ja, the first time, I would say that...uhm... I actually decided I actually want to see what happens. ...I saw one of my family members who were just watching something and then I just thought: OK well, if it's on TV, if two guys could kiss, OK what... what does it mean? Is it actually real? Does it actually happen? And uhm, so for me doing that was more of getting a thrill instead of necessarily, you know, doing it for, you know, getting pleasure out of it. (P 1)

One participant said that he had wanted to experiment with same-sex experiences.

Uhm... ja, I had... in the beginning it was just experimenting, or experimenting the first time... uhm... I opened myself up to that side of me, allowed it to happen. (P 2)

Another participant knew his same-sex partner for about a year before they engaged in a same-sex experience.

...no physical contact other than just... and just seeing each other and then that was for about a year before it actually happened. (P 5)

One participant reported that he masturbated with his friend while they were still in elementary school and that he saw this as something that friends do. This participant viewed same-sex experiences as a normal and common occurrence for young boys, and he still believes this today.

I guess in a boys' boarding school guys talk about girls even at this ridiculously young age and they get up to shit and stuff. Uhm... oh then one night I was staying over at his place and we masturbated together one night and that was it... (P 4)

All of the participants felt both positive and negative emotions about their same-sex experiences which, at times, seemed to be contradictory. Positive emotions included excitement, a manly or macho feeling afterwards, a sense of euphoria, and feeling sexually satisfied.

It was good. I enjoyed it. Uhm... I felt very macho – funnily enough – afterwards and I felt macho every time after that ... I felt very... I felt good. That euphoric moment lasts for a while, and that is, I think, what made me keep doing it. (P 3)

Ja. Definitely. Especially one of uhm of, you know, happiness... we just stepped out of the moment where everything was completely right, it was perfect. It didn't matter what happened on the outside, so ja. That sense of euphoria was also there. (P 1)

Negative emotions included feelings of depression, anxiety, being angry with oneself, self-blame, guilt, confusion about sexual identity, awkwardness, and being uncomfortable.

In the beginning, very guilty (laughs), because as you can see from grade 9 to second year at university was quite a time of denial and fighting against it.... So in the beginning very guilty. (P 2)

No, I didn't enjoy it. It felt dirty. It felt uncomfortable. Perhaps I even felt ashamed a little bit. (P 4)

The participants reacted differently towards their same-sex partners. One participant felt positively about his first same-sex partner and said that they had continued to be friends after they had shared a same-sex experience.

Well, what was nice is, I was also with my first time insecure and unsure and the guy was... he was very nice. He just went with the flow and ja... like helped me along. So it was all a very good experience. (P 5)

One participant said that he was uncomfortable when his same-sex partners wanted to have a relationship with him because he only engaged in the same-sex experiences for sex. He also felt bad for making his partners feel like he was using them for sex and regretted hurting them.

Uhm, I think where it started to get difficult was when the other person told me they wanted more than that, which I wasn't prepared to give at that stage of my life, or I didn't want to and that made it more difficult to have that experience again. (P 3)

One participant reported that he had had a same-sex experience with a male who was unsure of his sexual identity and preference. The participant did not want to feel as if he had influenced his partner's decision regarding his sexual identity.

I didn't want to have that – I don't want to say burden – but that maybe label of, OK, I was a deciding factor: if you were to be gay, I was a deciding factor. (P 1)

One participant said that he had wanted to have a relationship with a same-sex partner after they had engaged in a sexual experience. The partner did not feel the same way and the participant was left feeling disappointed.

Uhm... I kind of liked the first guy that something happened with and so there was basically a longing for something more from that person... like a relationship or whatever and, but... the person never came to that acceptance so it obviously didn't happen. Uhm... I would say in the beginning it was a disappointment for me, uhm, because I couldn't get what I wanted. (P 2)

Category 4: Support Systems for Young Males who have Same-sex Experiences

The participants were asked to talk about their support systems before, after, and during their same-sex experiences and whether they could talk to someone or wanted to talk to someone about their same-sex experiences. Four of the participants agreed that their friends were their support system and that they could talk to their friends about their positive and negative feelings.

I would say it's a lot better. I have some of my old school friends that didn't know, they also know now. But my close friends know and they're supportive and that means a lot to me. (P 5)

...I became friends with my neighbour and she was friends with gay people and then I became friends with them and they basically became my circle of friends, and that's when, I think that is why things changed so quickly, because I then actually had friends who I could talk to... (P 2)

And in university – I actually have... I actually have a group of friends that... are... I know are, OK, they are the people that if I feel that... I then feel comfortable and I can actually go and talk to them about it and I know, OK, they are the support structure that I have. (P 1)

My grandfather... he's fine with it and ja, he also... what... what made it for me, he said: "I still love you. I still like you. You're my grandson" ...And then a bit later that same December my aunt and her husband came to visit and she said to me: "OK, the actual reason I've brought you here is I want to talk to you. I know you are gay...but I want you to know it doesn't matter to me or to your uncle." So that was also awesome having some family members that were also supportive and then also having my friends. (P 5)

When first asked about his support structure, one participant replied that he did not have a support structure when he started dealing with his sexual identity. He felt that his parents did not offer him support, even though they accepted him as gay.

Ja, pfft the first thing I thought is what support structure? There was no support structure. There was no one to talk to about those problems. My mom was there. I guess you can view my mom in a sense as a support structure I didn't know I have because she's the most... you can't rely on her do anything, you just can't. (P 4)

Two participants joined discussion groups for homosexuals and bisexuals which helped them cope with their sexual identity.

I made friends, I went to a discussion group – two girls and two guys that are LGBT.... people like me who are prudish like me. I still see my shrink sometimes now... so that is my support structure. (P 4)

I actually have been part of a support group at university. I had where a psychologist sat in and she listened to us interact. (P 5)

Two of the participants thought of themselves as their own support structure. At the end of the second interview, the one participant agreed to go for therapy, and the other participant was already seeing a psychologist and psychiatrist.

I have these alter egos with whom I regularly communicate and I, like take myself out, who I am, in another person and then I can talk about it. And it helps, it really helps. Uhm, I make sense of a situation, which is, even if I only talk to myself for example, I will still make sense of a situation and realise but that is why it happened and it's fine, hold on, but remember you should maybe change this or do this... (sigh) it makes it better for yourself and for the other person. So yes...I (sigh)...yes... I am my own support system. (P 3)

I've come to a point as well where the support structure is myself. I've gotten to a point where I rely on myself. I'm my own support structure. (P 4)

When asked about the need for professional help, one of the participants said that he had needed to talk to someone about his sexual identity when he was younger, but that he does not need to anymore. Another participant was seeing a psychologist and psychiatrist at the time of

the interviews. He saw them as his support structure. He also felt that his psychiatrist was like a father figure to him.

I think between my psychiatrist and my psychologist, I had a good relationship with both. I see them much less now; I just don't have the need. ...but that was my support structure, I could talk to them about anything. [My psychiatrist] was like a father figure to me at times. (P 4)

At the end of the second interview, the researcher recommended that two of the participants see a therapist. They both agreed to go for therapy.

Discussion

The participants had varied perceptions of their sexual identity after engaging in same-sex experiences. Similarly, the participants had varied understandings of sexual identity. To investigate how young males experience their sexual identity after engaging in same-sex experiences, the researcher looked at how they viewed their sexual preference and sexual identity and how they experienced their same-sex experiences. From a phenomenological viewpoint, participants experienced various socio-cultural influences on their sexual identity. Their support systems also played a role in how they made sense of their sexual identity and same-sex experiences. The following discussion will focus on the results from each category.

Young Males' Experiences of their Sexual Preference

Two of the participants struggled to identify as homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual based on the same-sex experiences and conflicting sexual attractions they have had. This supports the study by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (2003) who state that the focus should rather be on the

extent to which a person identifies as heterosexual or homosexual, as opposed to being exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. One of the participants identified as heterosexual, but with bisexual experiences, which is in line with the findings by Yarhouse and Tan (2005b) that it is possible to engage in same-sex behaviour, but still have a heterosexual sexual identity. Savin-Williams and Vrangalova (2013) suggest that future research should look at alternative sexualities that include heterosexually identified individuals who engage in same-sex experiences. The two participants, who were confused about their sexual preference, seemed to experience other emotional problems too. This is supported by the study by Udry and Chantala (2002) that found a correlation between individuals who engage in same-sex experiences and a higher occurrence of emotional problems. The confusion the participants experienced may have a negative effect on their development (Rose et al., 2006; Shtarkshall et al., 2007). They seemed to be in a state of moratorium which may lead to them experimenting with different sexual identities (Rose et al., 2006; Kroger, 2000).

One participant made a distinction between physical and emotional attraction, and said that he would be able to identify as bisexual if bisexuality meant that he could be physically attracted to men and then to women, and emotionally attracted to women and then to men. A study by Lever, Kanouse, Rodgers, Carson, and Hertz (1992) emphasises that a distinction should be drawn between sexual behaviour and sexual identity because not all bisexual individuals have had an equal number of sexual experiences with males and females.

Young Males' Experiences of their Sexual Identity

When considering the model by Worthington et al. (2002) it would seem as though three participants have worked through the stages of active exploration and into deepening and

commitment, while two participants, who have actively explored their sexual identity, have moved to diffusion and have not yet committed to a sexual identity.

Two of the participants who had integrated a sexual identity, experienced their sexual identity as much more positive than the participants who had not yet integrated a sexual identity. The two participants, who had successfully integrated a sexual identity, were both 24-years old and seem to have successfully moved on to young adulthood after resolving the psychosocial crisis of *Identity vs. Identity confusion* (Erikson, 1968; Meyer, 2004a, 2004b). One participant who had integrated a bisexual sexual identity felt conflicted about his sexual identity, a feeling which was based on society discriminating against bisexuality and viewing bisexuality as less acceptable than homosexuality (Tasker & McCann, 1999).

Discrimination towards homosexuality and bisexuality was a prominent topic in each interview and the participants were aware of their membership in a minority sexuality group. Two of the participants felt that it would be easier to identify as homosexual instead of bisexual because homosexuality is, according to them, considered to be more acceptable than bisexuality. Individuals may incorrectly integrate a sexual identity based on what is perceived as more acceptable by society (Tasker & McCann, 1999).

All of the participants were conflicted and confused about their sexual identity at some point in their lives and mostly experienced confusion while still at school, which is in line with the notion that a sense of sexual self should be established during late adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Salmela-Aro, 2011).

Three participants wondered to what extent living in a school hostel or being in an all boys' school influenced their sexual identity. Two of the participants became aware of their attraction towards the same-sex while showering with other boys in the school hostel's bathroom, which

supports Yarhouse's (2001) reasons for same-sex attraction. These same-sex attractions may have been experienced by participants as suggestive of their true sexual identity and could have led to same-sex experiences (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b).

Two participants experienced their same-sex experiences to be in contrast with their religious beliefs and values – specifically from the Biblical viewpoint that sex before marriage or that sex between two men is wrong. This contrast of same-sex experiences with religious beliefs and values lead to conflict (Yarhouse, 2001; Yarhouse et al., 2005a) and made participants question their sexual identity and religion. They found it difficult to integrate their sexual identity with their religion which, from a phenomenological viewpoint, may have an effect on identity synthesis and consequently on identity development (Yarhouse, 2001).

Young Males' Experiences of their Same-sex Experiences

The participants mentioned various emotions when asked how they felt about their same-sex experiences. All of the participants experienced both positive and negative emotions. The negative emotions included feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, self-blame, guilt, and shame. Shame and guilt were prominent emotions and were experienced by all of the participants at one time or another. A study by Reback and Larkins (2010) found that same-sex experiences may lead to feelings of shame and guilt. These negative feelings may have had an influence on identity synthesis (Erikson, 1968).

The participants mostly started engaging in same-sex behaviour during adolescence which is also when the establishment of a sexual identity is a key developmental task (Erikson, 1968). The possibility exists that if intervention – whether educational or therapeutic – happened at an

early stage in the lives of the participants, they may have had less difficulty integrating a sexual identity.

Support Systems for Young Males who have Same-sex Experiences

Participants' support systems included family members, friends and professionals. Four of the participants viewed their friends as their biggest support system which is in line with the findings by Koepke and Denissen (2012) that peers form an important part of individuals' social context. The participants also found it easier to confide in their friends about their sexual identity, confusion about their sexual identity, and same-sex experiences because their friends were very accepting and non-judgmental. Yarhouse (2001) states that individuals will experience confusion less severely and will more easily accept a homosexual or bisexual sexual identity, if their socio-cultural context is supportive. It is important for individuals to find their place within the broader community as it contributes towards reaching optimal identity development (Kroger, 2000). Context must be kept in mind when trying to understand individuals from a phenomenological viewpoint (Valle & King, 1978), because individuals are influenced by their context. Society plays an important role in the formation of identity and a support system is therefore very important in establishing an identity.

One participant was, at the time of the interviews, seeing a psychologist and psychiatrist, while two participants agreed to see a counsellor. Their emotional problems may be an effect of their same-sex experiences or the confusion they experienced with regard to their sexual identity (Rose et al., 2006; Udry & Chantala, 2002).

Conclusion

This study investigated how young males experience their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences. How individuals understand their identity is based on how they perceive themselves within their socio-cultural context. It is therefore apparent that each individual will experience his or her identity and sexual identity differently, as is the case with this study. One participant only felt comfortable with his homosexual identity after he had struggled with it and felt confused by it for a long time. Another participant was sure of his homosexual identity, but was still not completely comfortable with it since it was in contrast to his religious beliefs. A third participant identified as bisexual and wanted to identify as bisexual, but doubted whether he should call himself bisexual since bisexuality is seen as unacceptable by society. Two participants were so unsure about their sexual identity that they could not integrate an identity at all. The one participant felt that he might never be able to integrate an identity since there was no sexuality that completely included him. The other participant enjoyed having same-sex experiences, but was so uncomfortable with the idea of a homosexual or bisexual identity, based on societal influences, that he did not even want to define his sexual identity. Although these experiences vary considerably they all have one thing in common – the development of a sexual identity cannot just be seen as something that naturally develops from birth, but rather is a complicated and difficult process.

When sexual identity is in contrast to individuals' socio-cultural contexts, it may have an influence on identity synthesis. Same-sex attractions or experiences were perceived by all of the participants to be in contrast to their socio-cultural contexts. Three of these participants did however find a way to deal with this and to accept their sexual identity even though it is in contrast to their socio-cultural context. The other two participants were still confused about their

sexual identity. In order to understand sexual identity, models of sexual identity development should be considered and most models on sexual identity see a stage of confusion as a step in the process of integrating a homosexual or bisexual identity. Very few models consider heterosexual identity development because of the assumption that it is naturally in place from birth. However, from the participants' accounts of their sexual identity, it is clear that, for all of them, their sexual identity did not develop naturally and they all, at one point or another, experienced conflict and confusion, whether they identified as homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual.

The process of sexual identity development became even more complicated when same-sex experiences were taken into account because they were the cause or effects of the participants' confusion. All of the participants pointed out that their first same-sex attractions, feelings of being different, or being confused started early on in their lives. This begs the question of the extent to which their process of identity development would have been different if there had been support or intervention at an earlier stage in their lives.

Future research could focus on the confusion individuals experience with regard to their sexual identity and the extent to which this confusion influences sexual identity. The development of programmes for therapeutic or educational intervention, that focus on the sexual identity and sexual identity development of adolescents, may also be a consideration for future research. This may address uncertainty about one's sexual identity during adolescence, which could help to establish a sense of sexual self and subsequent stages of this development will, therefore, not be influenced. Future qualitative studies, with a larger sample size and that deal with same-sex experiences may be valuable in obtaining a more general or representative idea of how young males experience their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences.

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Section C:

Summary, Evaluation, Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Introduction

This section presents a summary and evaluation of the research project as described in the previous sections. Specifically this section focuses on how the research problem was addressed and the aim of the research reached. Furthermore, this section focuses on the researcher's professional and personal experience of the research process. Limitations of the study are identified and recommendations for future research and practice are provided.

2. Research Problem

Same-sex experiences may be caused by or result in sexual identity confusion. Adolescents may incorrectly integrate a homosexual or bisexual sexual identity, or nurture feelings of shame and guilt as a result of their confusion, all of which may have a negative influence on identity synthesis. Engaging in same-sex experiences may prevent adolescents from integrating a sexual identity and which also results in the failure to integrate a healthy identity. According to Erikson's psychosocial development stages, if an adolescent fails to solve the psychosocial crisis of *Identity vs. Identity confusion* during adolescence, subsequent stages of his or her life may be affected. This study investigated how young males experienced their sexual identity after engaging in same-sex experiences. A phenomenological approach was followed in order to understand the experiences of the study's participants from a socio-cultural context. In addition, a psychosocial approach was followed in order to understand identity and identity development.

The problem was addressed by the formulation of a research aim and the completion of a research process that sought to fulfil the aim.

3. Research Aim

The aim of the study was to investigate how young males experienced their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences. The research summary below explains how the research aim was reached.

4. Research Summary and Evaluation

The research was conducted in a qualitative manner and aimed to understand how young males experienced their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences. The population included young males who had engaged in same-sex experiences and who, at the time of the study, lived in the Boland and Northern suburbs of the Western Cape. From this population a sample was selected through non-probability (convenience) sampling that was initially done purposively, but which later included snowball sampling. The study sample comprised five males between the ages of 18 and 24 years and who had different sexual orientations. The participants spoke either Afrikaans or English and were of different races. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and the participants' identities were protected by not including their names or any other identifying details in the study.

Data were collected through two semi-structured interviews. During the first interview, the participants were allowed optimal speaking time to tell the researcher about their experiences. The second interview focused on member checking and triangulation by means of a collage that represented how participants viewed their sexual identity with regard to their same-sex

experiences. The researcher clarified any uncertainties from the first interview and allowed the participants ample opportunities to correct any inaccurate understandings or assumptions of their answers. Audio recordings of the interviews were made and subsequently transcribed. The data from the first and second interview of each participant were collaborated prior to the content analysis of the data. Data obtained from the interviews were coded by means of latent coding, and organised into four categories with sub-categories. This allowed for an accurate and representative account of how the participants experienced their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences. The four categories were: Young males' experiences of their sexual preference; Young males' experiences of their sexual identity; Young males' experiences of their same-sex experiences; and Support systems for young males who have had same-sex experiences. Due to the small sample size, the sub-categories were integrated into the relevant categories and presented as part of the category.

The researcher concluded that each participant experienced his sexual identity and same-sex experiences differently, and that none experienced the development of his sexual identity as 'natural' or something that was present from birth. All of the participants experienced confusion and conflict regarding their sexual preference, because they described it as being in contrast to their socio-cultural context. Same-sex experiences were the result of confusion, but also caused confusion – which was experienced mostly in the earlier life stages. (Please refer to Section B for a more detailed description of this study's conclusion.)

In the researcher's opinion, the methodology that was applied in this study was effective and sufficient and was based on a thorough review of research methodology. Qualitative research aims to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences, and was therefore well suited to this study (which focused on the same-sex experiences of young males and how they

made sense of these experiences). A phenomenological approach, which focuses on how people experience and interpret the world, was also suitable for this study because its aim was to understand how young males experienced their sexual identity after having engaged in same-sex experiences. The semi-structured interview was chosen because it gave the participants optimal speaking time and was not limited to a particular interview schedule. The researcher could therefore explore certain comments in more depth, which was effective for the purpose of this study. Unfortunately the small sample size did not only limit the amount and variety of the data that were obtained, but also affected how the data were presented. Specifically, the sub-categories had to be integrated with the four main categories as the data that supported each sub-category were limited. Limitations of the study will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

5. Experience of the Researcher

The discussion that follows addresses the researcher's experience of the research process from a professional and personal point of view.

5.1. The professional experience of the research process.

The researcher has been interested in sexual identity and the same-sex experiences of young males ever since she was a teacher at a high school and had to work with adolescent males who struggled with their sexual identity because of their same-sex experiences. It is from this experience that the researcher concluded that same-sex experiences may lead to sexual identity confusion or may even be as a result of sexual identity confusion. The researcher therefore anticipated that the participants of this study would have contradicting feelings about their same-

sex experiences – which provide sexual pleasure, but at the same time result in confusion and negative feelings like shame and guilt. The researcher found each interview to be interesting and valuable as each participant's experience was different and therefore added to the study. In the researcher's experience, the participants were honest and open about their experiences and a good rapport was established between the researcher and the participants.

The researcher initially planned to conduct a quantitative study by means of a questionnaire that was specifically focused on adolescent boys living in high school hostels. However, due to ethical considerations, the study was adapted to adolescent boys who were 18 years and older and who were living in high school hostels. Due to resistance by headmasters of the different high schools, the study consequently shifted its focus to first-year university students living in university hostels. After lengthy communication with two different universities, one university agreed to participate in the study, but only on the condition that the questionnaires be emailed to the participants (to fill out) to ensure confidentiality. Unfortunately, by the time ethical clearance was obtained for the study, the university examinations had already started and the data collection process had to be postponed. When the researcher contacted the university hostels again at the beginning of 2013, she was asked to rather conduct the research by handing out questionnaires to students and to provide a box where questionnaires could be deposited in order to secure confidentiality. The researcher then contacted the different university hostels in order to arrange a date and time to hand deliver and collect the questionnaires, but reaction from the hostels was slow and many hostels were unwilling to co-operate. The second university suggested that the researcher advertise the study on their website and offer a reward to participants. The researcher, however, felt that this was unethical and, after taking into account the situation at both universities and the difficulties in gaining access to participants, the

researcher decided to change the research study to a qualitative approach and to rather focus on one-on-one in-depth interviews. The qualitative approach was not without its difficulties and the researcher found it challenging to recruit participants. As a result of this the study had a small sample size and therefore yielded limited information about the experiences of young males who have engaged in same-sex experiences.

The initial literature review was not an easy task because it quickly became clear that research on same-sex experiences was limited. Information on sexual identity development showed that there is a distinction between homosexual and bisexual identity development on the one hand, and heterosexual identity development on the other. The information on homosexual and bisexual identity development did not sufficiently explain the sexual identity development of individuals who engage in same-sex experiences or experience sexual identity confusion. In addition, the literature on these subjects was contradictory. While most models on sexual identity development view same-sex experiences or sexual identity confusion as a step in identifying with a homosexual or bisexual sexual identity, other sources disagree. The researcher, who has experience as a teacher and supervisor in a high school hostel and who has worked with adolescent boys who have engaged in same-sex experiences, knows that same-sex experiences or sexual identity confusion are not always steps in identifying with a homosexual or bisexual sexual identity. The researcher therefore researched heterosexual identity development in order to gain a holistic view on sexual identity development, but found that information on heterosexual identity development was very limited. The researcher postulated that this was a result of the fact that the development of a heterosexual identity is seen as a natural process and has therefore not been researched as much as homosexual or bisexual identity development.

5.2. A personal experience.

On a more personal level the researcher found the research process to be challenging and frustrating at times. The researcher felt frustrated by the various obstacles and had to adjust the sample and data collection method for the study more than once. The researcher struggled to get the headmasters of the high schools and the superintendents of the university hostels to participate, which delayed the research process immensely and eventually led to many changes to the problem statement and planned population. This meant that the focus of the study changed greatly, which in turn brought about difficulties in finding enough supporting literature. The researcher felt relieved when the interviews finally started and the data were collected.

The researcher found it difficult and somewhat unnatural to maintain an objective professional distance with the participants during the interviews and in particular struggled to suppress her previous training when it became apparent that some participants were struggling with emotional problems. It was the researcher's natural instinct to focus on feelings rather than experiences and research. The interviews were nevertheless very interesting and informative and the researcher felt that she treated the participants with respect and sensitivity.

The researcher regrets that the initial study could not be conducted, but is satisfied with the results and conclusions of the current study. It reassured the researcher of her chosen career and of her passion for working with adolescents.

6. Limitations of the Study

Because of the sensitive nature of this study, young males were somewhat hesitant to participate. The study was originally focused on adolescent males and intended to include high school learners who resided in the school hostel. The headmasters from various schools,

however, did not want to partake in the research as they felt this was likely to bring up issues that they did not want to come to light. Most of the participants were in high school when they struggled with their sexual identity and had same-sex experiences, and since the headmasters did not want to allow their learners to partake in the study, the study could not focus on the experiences of adolescent boys, as was the initial idea. The researcher feels that valuable information about same-sex experiences could have been gained if the participants, at the time of the study, were still adolescents who were having same-sex experiences or felt confused about their sexual identity. The data would have reflected recent experiences, as opposed to the recalled experiences of the study's participants (who were all older and therefore had to recall the same-sex experiences of their adolescence).

The number of participants may be viewed as a limitation of the study because the data were limited and could not be seen as representative or generalisable at all. The small sample size also led to data being integrated into categories, rather than being presented as sub-categories which may have detracted from the significance or importance of certain data.

7. Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

The researcher recommends that future studies should focus on heterosexual identity development, same-sex experiences, and how adolescents understand and make sense of their sexual identity. It may also be necessary to redefine sexualities to include heterosexuals who have engaged in same-sex experiences.

The researcher suggests the development of programmes for therapeutic and/or educational purposes that focus on the sexual identity and sexual identity development of adolescents. It is the researcher's wish that future research will demonstrate the importance of sexual identity

development education – not just in schools but at home as well. In doing so sexual identity confusion can be addressed earlier in life and the subsequent intervention can be planned to help adolescents successfully integrate a sense of sexual identity and move on to adulthood.

The researcher also suggests that quantitative studies with larger sample sizes be conducted in order to obtain more representative data of sexual identity confusion and same-sex experiences.

8. Conclusion

The participants' experiences of their sexual identity varied considerably and led to the conclusion that a study utilising a quantitative research method may give valuable information on the many individuals who engage in same-sex behaviour. This could be helpful in developing models on sexual identity development and programmes to better adolescents' understanding of their sexual identity and sexual identity development.

The study also concluded that same-sex experiences can be caused by or result in sexual identity confusion, and that this is often experienced during the adolescent years when individuals must establish a sense of sexual self. Adolescents may try to make meaning of their sexual attraction by engaging in sexual behaviour. From this study, it would seem that same-sex experiences cause confusion and internal conflict, which should be investigated in more detail.

Addendum 1

Interview Transcription

Excerpts from interview transcripts.

Participants:

P 1	18 years old	English	Bisexual
P 2	24 years old	Afrikaans	Homosexual
P 3	20 years old	Afrikaans	Heterosexual / bisexual
P 4	21 years old	English	Homosexual / bisexual
P 5	24 years old	English	Homosexual

Researcher: “Please describe how you see your sexual preference.”

P 1: “Uhm uhm, I see myself, or I identify myself as a bisexual. Uhm, but I have had times where I said to myself I would much prefer to be classified as gay because I thought it would be an easier way for me to explain to people what my sexual preference is. To rather say, OK that I prefer one over the other than to say I prefer both. But I have actually gotten to the point where I have gotten comfortable enough to say I am actually bisexual so I do prefer that.”

P 2: “Ek is gay. Uhm, want... wel... vir my gaan dit oor wie jy op verlief is en seksueel aangetrokke is.”

P 3: “Uhm, ek sal sê beide mans en vrouens. Uhm, ek het nou al ervarings met altwee gehad en aan die begin was dit, ek dink, uit my agtergrond uit en waar ek vandaan kom, die hele homoseksualiteit-ding *frowned upon*, maar uhm, dit was moeilik om dit af te skuif soos om, ek dink, die aandag wat ek gekry het daardeur, is, het ek nodig gehad en, ja. Ek het ervarings met vroue, met meisies ook gehad en dit is ook nie iets wat ek nie meer wil doen nie, of besluit ek wil dit nie doen nie. Dis iets wat, as dit gebeur dan is ek oraait daarmee. Dieselfde met mans.”

P 4: “Uhm... I guess... it's somewhere between... bisexual and homosexual in the sense of... I'm primarily attracted to men in the sense that if I sit in a café and a hot guy walks past then I'll be interested with a guy, not a girl, but if... I meet a girl on a social level... a friend... as a friend...uh, I can actually become romantically attracted to her but... through first becoming emotionally a friend... or through that... through that like channel. That's two very contradicting things for me. I'm more physically attracted to men and then the emotional thing will follow, and with women uhm... it's an emotional thing and then a physical thing. So I guess from there you can perhaps say I'm probably bisexual. Perhaps just not in a traditional sense of physically... I don't think physically. So I guess you can probably say bisexual in that sense.”

P 5 “OK, sexual preference I would say homosexual.”

Notes: Participants seem to understand what sexual preference means although they haven't all integrated a sexual preference yet. Some participants are still confused about their sexual preference.

Researcher: “How do you understand your sexual identity (i.e. who you are) in terms of your sexual preference?”

P1 “Uhm, I see it as... uhm... the same way that I would look at, ja, I would maybe, for example, look at a guy and say, OK he's attractive or he's got like these flaws... I would do the same to women and vice versa and that's basically how I see it. And then that's also, you know, sexual activities that I would actually do, you know, I would go that far.”

P 2: “Wel, ek sien my... seker as 'n... uhm... baie naby aan die normale... uhm... siening van 'n man wees of 'n Afrikaanse man wees en dat ek aangetrokke is aan mans, wat in die normale *whatever* val.”

P 3 “Ek wil my graag nie soos myself definieer as biseksueel of homoseksueel of heteroseksueel nie, uhm, maar ek dink 'n groot deel van my lewe en ook die tipe vriende wat ek maak, wat ek ook baie agterkom het ek maak nie rêrig maklik vriende met mense wat byvoorbeeld homoseksueel is nie, nie dat ek nie van hulle hou nie, uhm, ek weet nie of ek hulle bang maak en uhm hoe die storie werk nie, maar ons ek sal nooit vriende wees met sulke mense nie, so ek het baie – ek wil

nie sê aseksuele vriende nie – maar vriende wat nie regtig seksueel baie oop is oor hul ervarings en goed nie, en ook met my familie wat baie konserwatief is, volgens my. En, so daarom sal ek myself definieer as, my seksuele identiteit seker nou maar as heteroseksueel, maar met biseksuele ervarings.”

P 4

“Uhm, personally I kinda... in a gay world I view myself as a straight acting male. So, I like dressing nicely and look after my skin and so on but I don't consider myself to be effeminate. I'm actually mmm perhaps a little bit unpopular in the sense that I believe we should... we should... men should perhaps conform to more tradi... not traditional, like ja men are the head of the household. I don't believe men should act as fairies. I think uhm, but that's because I feel they interact with society better that way so, ja, I identify myself as a straight acting male.”

P 5

“And then sexual identity I would say I am a man, I see myself as a man. I don't see myself as a woman in a man's body or anything as such. Uhm... gender role... I'd say I'm... or what I feel I am, rather masculine. I don't know, I don't see myself as all sparkly and all that. I could say I'm not really a fan of sports. I know there's a big masculine stereotype of being a fan of sports. I like going to sports, I like arts, I like a mix of the culture, I also play piano so... that's also a big gay stereotype from school, you know, if you play piano, they are like: “Aah, moffie!” So ja, that, uhm sexual preference is homosexual. And then belief-wise I still see myself as a Christian even though the Bible is anti...”

Notes: Many societal influences on sexual identity. Participants found it hard to explain their sexual identity and some of them couldn't explain it satisfactory at all. Strong feelings towards being a 'normal' male even though participant is homosexual.

Researcher: "Tell me about your same-sex experience(s)."

P 1 "Uhm ja, the first time, I would say that...uhm... I actually decided I actually want to see what happens. It was actually, funnily enough, in high school, weird enough being in an all boys school. So uhm, for me there was, it was more of a thrill factor because of the fact that we're in a society where it is not necessarily wrong, but it is not the norm for, you know, a guy to have a sexual encounter with another guy. And uhm, so for me doing that was more of getting a thrill instead of necessarily, you know, doing it for, you know, getting pleasure out of it."

P 2 "OK, ek is in 'n langtermyn verhouding. Ek en my ou is al drie jaar saam. Uhm. ek het seker my eerste selfde geslag ervaring gehad toe ek 20 was, op universiteit. Uhm, ek dink ek het seker agtergekom dat ek nie *straight* is nie hier by standerd 7 (graad 9) rond in skool... of... dit die eerste keer toe *gelabel* as dit in my kop. Uhm... ja, ek het... in die begin was dit maar net eksperimenteer gewees, of eksperimenteer maar die eerste keer maar net... uhm... myself oopmaak tot daai kant van my, dit toelaat om te gebeur. Uhm... en daarna was dit maar net 'n

kwessie van dit stelselmatig aanvaar en verlief raak op ouens, soos wat ek sou sê, soos wat ek sou dink normale *straight* verhoudings gebeur – tipe van ding.”

P 3

“Uhm... dis lekker gewees. Uhm, die eerste keer was ongelooflik, ongelooflik stresvol. Ek het heelyd gebewe. Ek sal dit nooit vergeet nie. Uhm ja, en... dis nie die eerste keer soos in heeltemal ’n seksuele ervaring nie. Dit was basies... ons het... in die koshuis en die persoon het vir my gesê ek moet my klere uittrek en ek het my klere uitgetrek. Daai persoon het sy klere uitgetrek en ons het letterlik soos op mekaar gelê vir... 10 minute en die persoon het my heelyd gesoen in my nek... en toe’t ons op, toe’t ek gesê: “OK, ek voel nie gemaklik nie”, toe sê ek: “Ok, maar, dis Ok.” Toe staan ek op en toe loop ek en, ek weet nie, dit was baie, baie *awkward*.”

P 4

“So when I was in 6th grade... 13...13... 2006 I was turning 13 in that year... so I was still 12 when it happened, it happened maybe in June. Uh... I had a really good friend at school. I was in boarding school, he was in boarding school. My age, I’m like two months older than him. Uhm... we were... we were just good friends. I guess in a boys boarding school guys talk about girls even at this ridiculously young age and they get up to shit and stuff. Uhm... oh then one night I was staying over at his place and we masturbated together one night and that was it... uh...uh...”

P 5 “Uhm, well it’s kind of far and few between... so I’m a bit fussy and also very cautious. People can do... not be safe and do... go a bit loose, ’cause it’s like the whole, you know, you can’t get them pregnant type of mentality. But I’d say the choices I’ve made... the few people I’ve actually like... been with, I don’t regret it.”

Notes: Participants experienced a variety of emotions. In general same-sex experiences seems like were experienced as positive, although most participants mentioned feelings of shame and guilt.

Researcher: “Tell me about your support system before, during and after your same-sex experience.”

P 1 “Uhm... (long pause) I’d say... after... ja... after grade 10 when I actually came out to my best friend, and ja, after that... it was, it was a bit easier because I would know that, OK, even though he is straight, uhm, and even though it would make him cringe every now and then when I, when I described what happened, it’s nice to know that ,OK, even though he’s cringing, he’s kind of, you know, he’s not running away.”

P 2 “Wel... voor was daar nie rêrig enige mens wat ek dit mee kon oor praat nie. Uhm, maar kort na dit het ek vriende geword met my buurvrou en sy was vriende met gay mense en toe het ek vriende geword met hulle en toe het ek basies my

vriendekring wat weet van my ontwikkel en toe, toe dis, ek dink dis hoekom dit so gou verander het, is omdat ek toe *actually* vriende gehad het met wie ek kon praat en, ja.”

P 3 “Ek dink soos nou vandat ek al, vandat ek, vandat ek begin oop maak het, ek het ook nog nie regtig oop gemaak nie, maar vandat ek begin oop maak het daarvoor kom jy agter maar dit werk, ek dink ek het teenoor myself oopgemaak. Ek het hierdie *alter ego*’s met wie ek gereeld kommunikeer en ek dink soos ek haal myself uit, wie ek is, in ’n ander persoon en dan kan ek daarvoor praat. En dit help, dit help regtig. Uhm, ek maak sin van ’n situasie wat al is, al praat ek met myself byvoorbeeld, sal ek nog steeds sin kan maak van ’n situasie en besef maar dis hoekom dit gebeur het en dis OK, byt net vas en, maar onthou jy sal dalk dit moet doen om te verander of jy sal dalk dit moet doen om... (sug)... dit beter te maak vir jouself en vir die ander persoon. So ja... ek (sug)... ja.. ek self is die ondersteuningstelsel.”

P 4 “Ja, pfft the first thing I thought is what support structure? I moved schools, struggled to adjust at the new school, mother was really depressed... so, you know, there wasn’t a support structure. There was no support structure. There was no one to talk to about those problems. I think between my psychiatrist and my psychologist, I had a good relationship with both. I see them much less now; I just don’t have the need. Perhaps I feel, you know, if I don’t have to go, you know... someone else could... but that was my support structure, I could talk to them

about anything. [My psychiatrist] was like a father figure to me at times. My mom was there. I guess you can view my mom in a sense as a support structure I didn't know I have because she's the most... you can't rely on her do anything, you just can't.

P 5

"Hmmm... well, before I had my group of friends – it's changed over the years though – I'd say... my... some of them were supportive, they were like, you know: "Go for it, go and experience it!" Others were like: "Oh no! Don't be a slut." You know, that whole... judgment part of it. So I... it's also partly why I just didn't tell anyone about it because of that judgment element that was there, also... perhaps that also in hindsight made me feel a bit guilty about it because I knew that, you know, there is a friend that would not approve that would make a fuss, even though he himself has been in that situation, he feels hypocritical and wants to... tell me what to do and what not to do. So I think that's also perhaps why I felt guilty, because I haven't told him afterwards for... for a considerable amount of time... During, ja, it was just me and this guy. We had a good friendship, ja. And then I think about... was it three years ago? Maybe four? My grandfather asked me, but he asked me about – he was a magistrate so he has a way with words, he likes to look at a situation – he said to me: "Is there something in your life that is troubling you or holding you back?" So I said 'yes' to him and then we ended up discussing it and I told him and he was actually the one person in my life I thought I could never tell, because he's an older generation. He was... he's supposed to turn 92 this year... and I thought I could

never tell him and then I told him and he said to me: "I thought so." And he said the reason being is: "You never talk about girls and you've never brought a girl home with you." So he's fine with it and ja, he also... what... what made it for me, he said: "I still love you. I still like you. You're my grandson. Just be careful." So that was... I was very emotional. I was crying and all that. It was... a big thing for me. So it was... I had that support from him as well... So that was also awesome having some family members that were also supportive and then also having my friends."

Notes: Some participants did not have a support structure. One participant thought of himself as his own support structure. Friends seemed to be a stronger support system than family.

Addendum 2

Content analysis

Data from the first and second interview of each participant were collaborated. The interview transcripts were then read and re-read until the researcher could identify codes that were organized into four categories. The four categories were based on the four main questions that were asked during the second interview.

Participants:

P 1	18 years old	English	Bisexual
P 2	24 years old	Afrikaans	Homosexual
P 3	20 years old	Afrikaans	Heterosexual / bisexual
P 4	21 years old	English	Homosexual / bisexual
P 5	24 years old	English	Homosexual

The following table shows how data was coded and organised into categories and sub-categories.

Codes	Data	Discussion
Sexual preference	P1: “Uhm uhm, I see myself, or I identify myself as a bisexual. Uhm, but I have had times where I said to myself I would much prefer to be classified as gay because I thought it would be an easier way for me to explain to people what my sexual preference is.”	Identifies as bisexual, but finds it easier to say he is gay.

	<p>P 2: “Ek is gay. Uhm, want... wel... vir my gaan dit oor wie jy op verlief is en seksueel aangetrokke is.”</p> <p>P 4: “Uhm... I guess... it’s somewhere between... bisexual and homosexual in the sense of... I’m primarily attracted to men. So I guess you can probably say bisexual in that sense.”</p> <p>P 5: “OK, sexual preference I would say homosexual.”</p>	<p>Sexual preference is not just about sexual attraction, but a romantic attraction as well.</p> <p>Draws a distinction between emotional and physical attraction.</p>
<p>Sexual identity</p>	<p>P 1: “Uhm, I see it as...uhm... the same way that I would look at, ja, I would maybe, for example, look at a guy and say, OK he’s attractive or he’s got like these flaws... I would do the same to women and vice versa and that’s basically how I see it. And then that’s also, you know, sexual activities that I would actually do, you know, I would go that far.”</p> <p>P 4: “Uhm, personally I kinda... in a gay world I view myself as a straight acting male. So, I like dressing nicely and look after my skin and so on but I don’t consider myself to be effeminate.”</p> <p>P 5: “And then sexual identity I would say I am a man, I see myself as a man. I don’t see myself as a</p>	<p>Did not understand what sexual identity is at all. Answer did not make any sense in terms of sexual identity.</p> <p>Is not effeminate although he looks after his skin and dressed</p>

	<p>woman in a man's body or anything as such.</p> <p>Uhm... gender role... I'd say I'm... or what I feel I am, rather masculine. I don't know, I don't see myself as all sparkly and all that. I could say I'm not really a fan of sports. I know there's a big masculine stereotype of being a fan of sports. I like going to sports, I like arts, I like a mix of the culture, I also play piano."</p>	<p>nicely.</p> <p>Strong focus on being a 'normal man'. Is nothing like the stereotype gay.</p>
Integration of sexual identity	P 3: "Ek wil my graag nie soos myself definieer as biseksueel of homoseksueel of heteroseksueel nie"	Does not want to identify with a sexuality.
Socio-cultural influences on sexual identity	<p>P 3: "Ek dink, uit my agtergrond uit en waar ek vandaan kom, die hele homoseksualiteit-ding <i>frowned upon</i>."</p> <p>P 4: "I don't believe men should act as fairies. I think uhm, but that's because I feel they interact with society better that way."</p> <p>P 5: "Gay stereotype from school, you know, if you play piano, they are like: "Aah, moffie!"</p> <p>P 1: "...a thrill factor because of the fact that we're in a society where it is not necessarily wrong, but it is not the norm for, you know, a guy to have a sexual encounter with another guy."</p>	<p>Homosexuality is not accepted in socio-cultural context.</p> <p>Homosexual men should integrate with society better.</p> <p>Guys who play the piano are gay.</p> <p>Experienced a thrill factor by going against</p>

		‘the norm’ – the norm being heterosexual.
Same-sex experiences	<p>P 1: “Uhm ja, the first time, I would say that...uhm... I actually decided I actually want to see what happens. It was actually, funnily enough, in high school, weird enough being in an all boys school.”</p> <p>P 2: “Uhm... ja, ek het... in die begin was dit maar net eksperimenteer gewees, of eksperimenteer maar die eerste keer maar net... uhm... myself oopmaak tot daai kant van my, dit toelaat om te gebeur. Uhm... en daarna was dit maar net ’n kwessie van dit stelselmatig aanvaar en verlief raak op ouens, soos wat ek sou sê, soos wat ek sou dink normale <i>straight</i> verhoudings gebeur – tipe van ding.”</p>	<p>Reason for same-sex experience: curiosity.</p> <p>Experimented at first. Gradually fell in love with men as a ‘normal’ (heterosexual) relationship should start.</p>
Positive feelings towards same-sex experiences	<p>P 5: “But I’d say the choices I’ve made... the few people I’ve actually like... been with, I don’t regret it.”</p> <p>P 3: “Uhm... dis lekker gewees.</p>	<p>Does not regret having same sex experiences.</p> <p>Enjoyed having a same-sex experience.</p>
Negative feelings	<p>P 3: “OK, ek voel nie gemaklik nie”, Uhm, die eerste keer was ongelooflik, ongelooflik</p>	<p>Felt uncomfortable Was very stressful.</p>

<p>towards same-sex experiences</p>	<p>stresvol. Ek het heeltyd gebewe.”</p>	
<p>Support system or lack thereof</p>	<p>P 3: “So ja... ek (sug)... ja.. ek self is die ondersteuningstelsel.”</p> <p>P 4: “Ja, pfft the first thing I thought is what support structure? I moved schools, struggled to adjust at the new school, mother was really depressed... so, you know, there wasn’t a support structure. There was no support structure. There was no one to talk to about those problems.”</p>	<p>He is his own support system.</p> <p>Didn’t have a support system.</p>
<p>Support from friends</p>	<p>P 1: “...after grade 10 when I actually came out to my best friend, and ja, after that... it was, it was a bit easier because I would know that, OK, even though he is straight, uhm, and even though it would make him cringe every now and then when I, when I described what happened, it’s nice to know that ,OK, even though he’s cringing, he’s kind of, you know, he’s not running away.”</p> <p>P 2: “Wel... voor was daar nie rêrig enige mens wat ek dit mee kon oor praat nie. Uhm, maar kort na dit het ek vriende geword met my buurvrou en sy was vriende met gay mense en toe het ek</p>	<p>Best friend accepted sexual identity</p> <p>Couldn’t talk to anyone about sexual</p>

	vriende geword met hulle en toe het ek basies my vriendekring wat weet van my ontwikkel en toe, toe dis, ek dink dis hoekom dit so gou verander het, is omdat ek toe <i>actually</i> vriende gehad het met wie ek kon praat en, ja.”	identity until he became friends with other homosexuals.
Support from family	P 5: “So that was also awesome having some family members that were also supportive and then also having my friends. My friends, yes. Not my family as much though.”	Has support from family and friends. Can talk to friends about feelings but not to family.
Professional support	P 4: “I think between my psychiatrist and my psychologist, I had a good relationship with both. I could talk to them about anything. [My psychiatrist] was like a father figure to me at times.”	Sees a psychologist and psychiatrist. Has a good relationship with both. Psychiatrist is like a father-figure to participant.

Codes were organized into categories and subcategories but due to the small sample size, data from sub-categories were integrated with the main categories.

The following table shows how codes were organised into categories and sub-categories and how these were integrated.

Codes	Main category	Sub-categories
Sexual preference	Sexual preference	Sexual preference
Sexual identity	Sexual identity	Integration of sexual identity
Integration of sexual identity		Socio-cultural influences on sexual identity
Socio-cultural influences on sexual identity		
Same-sex experiences	Same-sex experiences	Positive feelings towards same-sex experiences
Positive feelings towards same-sex experiences		Negative feelings towards same-sex experiences
Negative feelings towards same-sex experiences		
Support system or lack thereof	Support system	Support from friends
Support from friends		
Support from family		Support from family
Professional support		Professional support

Addendum 3

Collage: P 1

This is how I view my sexual identity with regards to my same sex experiences.

THINK

Struggling to figure out who you really are?

I am ?

FRIENDS

HAPPY

SEX

UNSURE

MEN AND WOMEN

ALONE

BISEXUAL

REJECTED

LOVE IS...

RELATIONSHIP

ENJOY

INTIMACY

I AM...

I ♥ & ♥ So what?

Don't assume I'm straight. Don't assume I'm gay.

Collage: P 2

This is how I view my sexual identity with regards to my same sex experiences.



Collage: P 3

This is how I view my sexual identity with regards to my same sex experiences.

LEKKER



EK HOU VAN...



BANG



WONDER



hoe dit moet wees...



DEURMEKAAR

EK IS...

UITGESORTEER

Ek voel nie **VERWERP**

& **ALLEEN** nie.



VERHOUDING



Collage: P 4

This is how I view my sexual identity with regards to my same sex experiences.

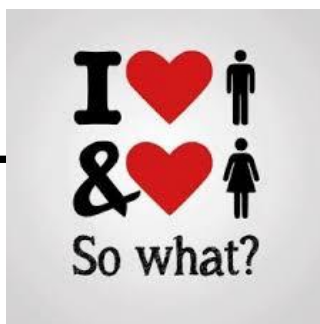
Then



ALONE UNSURE PERPLEXED



**HETEROSEXUAL
BISexual**



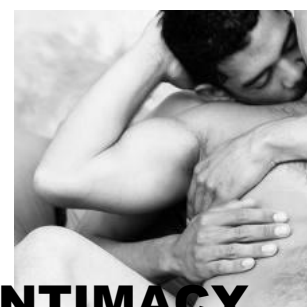
Now: current relationship

FRIENDS



RELATIONSHIP

**IN LOVE
LOVE IS... GOOD**



INTIMACY

I BELONG



I AM...



Collage: P 5

This is how I view my sexual identity with regards to my same sex experiences.



I AM CONTENT



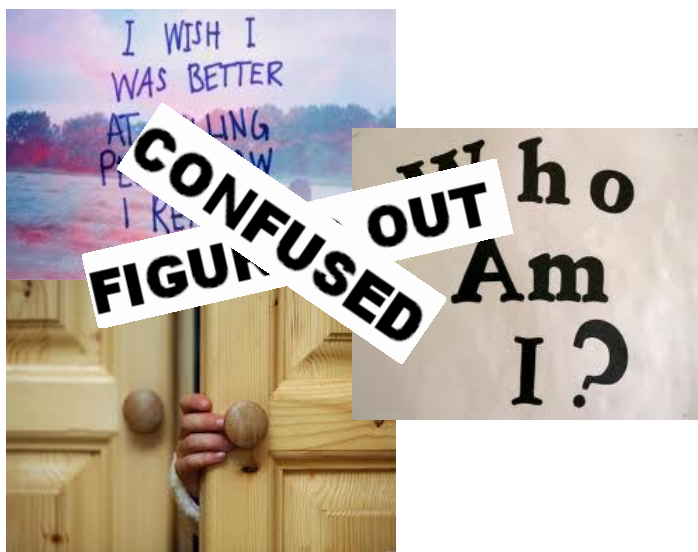
LOVE IS...



FRIENDS

support

Normal
guy who
happens to



HAPPY



GOOD

INTIMACY

I LIKE



Addendum 4

Consent Form for Research

1. Title of study

Sexual identity: same-sex experiences of young males

2. Aim of study

This study aims to investigate how young males experience having same-sex experiences and how they understand and make sense of same-sex experiences.

Participants undertake the following:

- **Consent**

I will take part in this study by participation in a two-part interview. I give consent that the information can be used for research regarding same-sex experiences of young males.

- **Benefits**

I understand that there will not be any benefits with regards to my participation in this study.

- **Participation rights**

I understand that I am not being forced to take part in this study.

- **Confidentiality**

I understand that my name will not be used and that it will be replaced with a pseudonym. I understand that, because my name will be replaced by a pseudonym, no-one can identify me or judge me because of my answers. The results of this study may be published in an academic journal and may be presented at a conference, but my name will not be used.

- **Financial compensation**

I understand that I will not get any money for taking part in this study.

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read it and understand it. I also confirm that I am 18 years or older.

Should you need any kind of support after participating in this study, please contact the researcher at hepunt@gmail.com

Participant: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Ingeligte toestemming vir Navorsing

1. Titel van studie

Seksuele identiteit: dieselfde geslag ervarings van jong mans

2. Doel van studie

Hierdie studie kyk na hoe jong mans dieselfde geslag ervarings ervaar en hoe hulle hierdie ervarings verstaan en daarvan sin maak.

Deelnemers onderneem die volgende:

- **Toestemming**

Ek sal deelneem aan hierdie studie deur aan twee onderhoude deel te neem.

- **Voordele**

Ek verstaan dat ek geen voordeel uit hierdie studie sal trek as ek daaraan deelneem nie.

- **Deelnemer se regte**

Ek verstaan dat ek nie gedwing word om aan hierdie studie deel te neem nie.

- **Vertroulikheid**

Ek verstaan dat my naam nie gebruik sal word nie en dat dit met 'n skuilnaam vervang sal word.

Ek verstaan dat, omdat my naam nie gebruik word nie, niemand my kan identifiseer of kan

oordeel oor my antwoorde nie. Die resultate van hierdie studie mag in 'n akademiese joernaal gepubliseer word en op 'n konferensie voorgelê word, maar my naam mag nie gebruik word nie.

- **Finansiële vergoeding**

Ek verstaan dat ek geen geld sal kry omdat ek aan hierdie studie deelneem nie.

Deur die toestemmingsbrief te onderteken, bevestig ek dat ek dit deurgelees het en dat ek dit verstaan. Ek bevestig ook dat ek 18 jaar of ouer is.

Sou jy hulp of ondersteuning benodig nadat jy aan die studie deelgeneem het, kontak gerus die navorser by hepunt@gmail.com

Deelnemer: _____

Navorser: _____

Datum: _____

Addendum 5

Technical Guidelines for Journal

Journal submissions guidelines

Journal of Sex Research

Aims and Scope

The Journal of Sex Research (JSR) is a scholarly journal devoted to the publication of articles relevant to the variety of disciplines involved in the scientific study of sexuality. JSR is designed to stimulate research and promote an interdisciplinary understanding of the diverse topics in contemporary sexual science. JSR publishes empirical reports, brief reports, theoretical essays, literature reviews, methodological articles, historical articles, book reviews, and letters to the editor. We do not accept personal narratives. JSR actively seeks submissions from researchers outside of North America. The JSR audience is researchers and practitioners in the fields of psychology, sociology, education, psychiatry, communication, and allied health.

Please note that *The Journal of Sex Research* uses [CrossCheck™](#) software to screen papers for unoriginal material. By submitting your paper to *The Journal of Sex Research* you are agreeing to any necessary originality checks your paper may have to undergo during the peer review and production processes.

Manuscript Submission

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Cynthia A. Graham, Ph.D., Editor

School of Psychology

Shackleton Building (B44)

University of Southampton

Highfield Campus

Southampton, UK SO17 1BJ

E-mail: C.A.Graham@soton.ac.uk

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