

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOMES OF  
HOMOPHOBIC DISCOURSE ON GAY MEN:  
A NAMIBIAN STUDY**

**BY**

**EDWINA E. MENSAH**

**JANUARY 2006**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
(CLINICAL/COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY)

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

EDWINA E. MENSAH

SUPERVISOR:

DR. S. R. WHITTAKER

EXTERNAL EXAMINER:

PROF. S. H. VAN DEVENTER

JANUARY 2006

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to provide insight into the nature of homophobic discourse and how it manifests itself in Namibia. Therefore, the first objective of the study was to explore homophobic discourse in Namibia. The second research objective was to examine a few gay men's awareness and experience of the homophobic discourse in Namibia. The third objective of the study was to investigate the psychological outcomes of homophobic discourse on gay men in Namibia.

The literature review provided insight into the current and historical situation in Namibia with respect to homophobic discourse. Literature indicated that homophobic discourse presents itself in Namibia in themes of homosexuality as unnatural, un-African and un-Christian. Unstructured interviews were done with five homosexual men.

The analysis of the data and interpretation were done according to Parker (1992)'s method of Discourse Analysis. The results of the research showed that gay men are experiencing significant homophobia in Namibia. Homophobia led to gay men being the primary targets of discrimination and abuse.

The study found that homophobic discourse in Namibia can have detrimental psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depression for gay men. It is important to note that a positive psychological outcome of homophobic discourse on gay men, namely, assertiveness, was found in this research.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**A special word of thanks to the following people:**

**All praise to GOD my creator.**

**To my mentor, Dr. Shaun Whittaker, for his indispensable investments in me.**

**To The Rainbow Project for their cooperation.**

**To the gay men who shared their personal experiences.**

**To my husband, Goddard Husselmann, for his love, being a source of strength and comfort.**

**To my father, Edward (Corrie) Mensah, for being my idol and my pride.**

**To my mother, Gloria Mensah, who is my inspiration, support and source of endurance.**

**To my sisters, Hazel and Brumilda Mensah, for believing in me.**

**To my brother, Edward Mensah (jr.), for bringing joy.**

**To the Husselmann family for their valuable support.**

**To Dr. G.D. Kober for sharing her knowledge with me.**

**To Prof. I.E. Plattner for her significant contributions.**

**To Dr. H.A. Raath for his interest and reassurance.**

**To Miss Helen Vale for her support and editing.**

**To my friend and colleague, Nikki P. Meiring, for her noble efforts and assistance.**

## **DEDICATION**

**To my husband and family.**

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls.”  
~Edwin Hubbel Chapin~

## **DECLARATION**

I, Edwina E. Mensah, declare hereby that this study, at the University of Namibia, for the degree of Master of Arts (Clinical/Counselling Psychology), is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or a part thereof, has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Edwina E. Mensah

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Background and rationale of the study**

Homosexuality is a phenomenon that is detested worldwide and homosexual acts are considered taboo in many cultures. Understanding the ban on and dislike of homosexuality, one should keep in mind that “modern attitudes toward homosexuality have religious, legal and medical underpinnings” (Corsini, Wiley & Sons, 1994:152). The dislike of homosexuality has evolved throughout history into what it is today.

Homosexuality was generally accepted or ignored in Europe until the Middle Ages. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, hostility towards homosexuality started and spread throughout religious and state sectors and institutions. “Condemnation of homosexual behavior as ‘unnatural’, which received official expression in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and others, became widespread and has continued through the present day” (ibid). Soon this ‘condemnation’ or dislike of homosexuality was incorporated in religious doctrines.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, homosexuality was classified as a sin, a crime and a pathology. Homosexuality was then condemned by all world religions and was illegal in the United States and Europe. “In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hostility towards homosexuality reached a tragic climax in Nazi Germany, where thousands of

suspected homosexuals – most of them men – were imprisoned in concentration camps, forced to wear an inverted pink triangle as a badge of identity. Between 5, 000 and 15, 000 of those prisoners are estimated to have died in the camps” (Corsini, Wiley & Sons, 1994:152).

Since the 1980’s, societies became aware of the violence against homosexual people and reports were written on such violent acts aimed towards gay people. Hostility towards homosexuals steadily rose in Western countries. This led to research on the dislike and abuse of homosexual people (Corsini, Wiley & Sons, 1994).

Public discourse about homosexuality increasingly focused on the dislike thereof and contained a hostile undertone. Discourse is generally described as a certain way of expression in speech and writing. It is closely linked to the use of language (including its social and ideological contexts); moreover, “Foucault saw a discourse as a system of ideas or knowledge, inscribed in a specific vocabulary and statements” (Google, 2005:1). Most importantly, Foucault thought that ‘discourses were used to legitimate the exercise of power over certain persons by categorizing them as particular types’ (ibid).

The dislike, condemnation, prejudice and hostility regarding homosexuality gave birth to the concept ‘homophobia’. “The word ‘homophobia’ was first coined by psychologist George Weinberg in his book ‘Society and the Healthy Homosexual’

in 1972” (Liberty, 2005:1). Since then, numerous academics attempted to define the concept. In one of those definitions, homophobia is described as “a fear of, prejudice against, or hatred of members of the same sex; or relating to sexual activity with a member of the same sex” (Magill, 1996:809). The discourse of homophobia became publicly popular. Pressure from human and gay rights activists mounted, which forced world communities to address homophobia and the rising abuse of homosexuals that usually accompanied it. It also meant that the taboo of homosexuality, its illegal status and the consequences thereof in the majority of countries, needed to be re-visited. Today, discussions of homophobia regularly take place in societies, including Namibia.

Namibians have been plagued for decades with discourses of discrimination. For instance, in the recent past, a racist discourse left several emotional scars on Namibians. However, the homophobic discourse is of particular interest to this current study and focus is placed on homosexual Namibians who were exposed to many years of marginalization, whether publicly or not. This research project interweaves different homophobic discourses in Namibia with the actual testimonies of a few gay men about issues regarding their sexual orientation.

Homosexuals are often subjected to myths and stereotypes, based primarily on half-truths or lack of knowledge. This creates enormous prejudice and places undoubted psychological strain on those involved. Intolerance and fear of

homosexuals (known as homophobia) encourage pervasive negative attitudes in this regard, which is rooted within the homophobic discourse.

It is difficult to provide a precise account on the history of homophobic discourse in Namibia. Gay men were not very visible in the past and existed in an 'underworld' or 'in the closet' where 'outcasts' like them had a place. There was the exception of a few who were, even then, open with regard to their sexuality or sexual orientation. Few members in society accepted those gay men; however, this was not a guarantee that they were exempted from mobbing, victimization, discrimination and abuse. There have been various cultural sanctions against homosexuals and numerous methods have been applied to control sexual conduct and identity in several countries. "In 1990, Iran imposed death under Islamic law for anyone found to be homosexual. As a consequence, three men were publicly beheaded and two women stoned to death" (Scarpitti & Anderson, 1989:4). This is an extreme example of societal means to regulate behaviour. In the past, power was usually seen in quite physical and brutal ways. In the case of homosexuality, people were publicly killed in some cultures for engaging in homosexual acts.

Although power may be an aspect of practically all relationships, homosexuals, in particular, are oppressed in subtler ways nowadays. They are not necessarily attacked physically (although such incidences have been reported), but they are controlled by power through different types of institutions. One method of

exercising power is through speech, which is why a discourse analytical approach seems appropriate to explore this matter.

Discourses usually become apparent when certain members of a society have to fight for their social position, power and self-worth. In pre-independent Namibia, gay men were 'in the closet', their existence was denied and they were considered an odd or rare mistake of society. For some peculiar reasons, homosexuals were referred to as 'moffies', which is an Afrikaans word used to describe males who portray feminine gestures and who are considered homosexual. The public considered 'Moffie' behaviour (homosexual mannerisms) entirely deviant and any 'type' of gay man was mocked because of that. Namibian men took great pride in their manhood and ability to dominate. While gay men were made fun of in public, heterosexual men might have experienced a sense of pride in not being associated with them.

In post-colonial Namibia, it appears as though homosexuals have become more assertive and would openly reveal their sexual preference. Therefore, others might perceive them as having no shame. Some individuals may perhaps consider homosexuality as a sign of moral decay in Namibian society after political independence. Gay men are still regarded as perverse because the belief exists that they use their sexuality irresponsibly to engage in immoral activities. This conceptualization of homosexuality as a taboo has encouraged homophobia



in Namibia. A further contributing factor that caused the homophobic discourse to develop was the continental anti-gay campaign in Africa.

Magill (1996) asserted that the fear, hatred and disgust of homosexuals could be attributed to the myth that most homosexuals are child molesters. In addition, “another source of homophobia is the fear of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)” (Magill, 1996:812). It is well known that the African continent, with Namibia being one of the main countries, is troubled with this killer disease. Many believe that homosexuals are responsible for HIV/AIDS because the disease was discovered among a group of gay individuals in the U.S. and was first known as Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID) (American Psychological Association, 2002; Whiteside & Sunter, 2000).

It is often difficult to encapsulate the essence and patterns of homophobic discourse, since little knowledge exists on concepts such as human sexuality, homosexuality and homophobic discourse in Namibia. There is basically no Namibian frame of reference to consult in order to describe and interpret homophobic discourse and its psychological impact on gay men. Research on such matters has to rely primarily on African literature, in order to draw parallels that could be applied to the Namibian context.

## **1.2 Research question and objectives**

This study explored the psychological impact of homophobic discourse on gay men in Namibia. Such an investigation is important because it addresses the sensitive and controversial nature of homophobia and the discourses in which it is embedded. There exists a need in Namibian society to highlight the powerful effect of societal attitudes on gay men. This research project emphasizes the psychological outcomes of homophobic discourse on gay men as it marginalizes homosexuals. The aim of this study is to provide insight into the nature of homophobic discourse and the way it manifests itself in Namibia. The research aspires to point out how gay men experience and perceive homophobic discourse. Thus, one could explore how gay men make sense of, and how they are psychologically influenced by the homophobic discourse in the country. The study can make a valuable contribution to studies on human sexuality in Namibia because it creates awareness in this area of research.

Considering the above, the first objective of this research was to explore the homophobic discourse in Namibia. This goal focuses on the definitions of homophobic discourse and attempts to describe the phenomenon. The second research objective was to examine gay men's awareness and experience of the homophobic discourse in the country. An understanding of the concepts 'experience' and 'awareness' is provided in the literature review of this study. This attempts to determine how gay men perceive and make sense of the

Namibian homophobic discourse that they encounter. The third objective of the study was to explore the psychological impact of homophobic discourse on gay men. This goal investigates the need to know the psychological consequences of homophobic discourse on gay people in the country.

### **1.3 Summary of chapters**

The chapters are set out as follows: In Chapter 2, the literature review captures, revises and summarizes all available literature on the topic of homophobic discourse and other related topics in Namibia and world-wide. The aim of this chapter is to elaborate on available literature about the research topic. It provides insight into the current and historical situation in Namibia with respect to homosexuality and the homophobic discourse.

The plan and design of the research project is explicated in Chapter 3. The chapter outlines the methods employed to collect data, as well as the data evaluation process and procedures. This chapter also includes the methodology used in the study, which is a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methodology is explained to provide background information and a broader understanding of the analytical section of the study. Furthermore, this chapter explains why the method of discourse analysis was selected to analyze the homophobic discourse in Namibia. It also refers to discourse analysis and its underlying principles. This chapter includes the sampling procedures, as well as

how the interview guideline was constructed. It briefly describes the concepts of reliability and validity and their relevance to the study. Lastly, the limitations of the study are also given.

In Chapter 4, the five participants chosen for the research study are discussed as well as the data gathered during the interviews. Thereafter, the method of Discourse Analysis by Parker (1992) is used to evaluate the data collected in the study. The documented results are interpreted and discussed in terms of available literature on the topic. It contains a detailed discussion of the results, their meaning and interpretations. The focus is on the discourses that were identified in the data analysis process. Interpretations are made regarding the psychological outcomes of the Namibian homophobic discourse on gay men.

In Chapter 5, the main aspects of the study were reviewed from the given results and concluding remarks are provided. This last chapter gives recommendations for possible future studies.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature on homophobic discourse is scarce. Namibian homophobic discourse often consists of reports on public hate speech or acts toward gay men. It is also sometimes the publication of debates that are formulated in religious circles. Generally, opinions by important Namibian public figures (such as church leaders, political leaders and others) on the issues of homophobic discourse are highlighted by the media. Available information on homophobic discourse exists in the form of isolated articles or letters written about homosexuality in national newspapers, magazines and programs on national television. However, in recent years, there has been a proliferation in media articles and debates around homosexuality since some Namibian political leaders advocated hate speech towards homosexuals. Politics permeates the homophobic discourse in Namibia and homosexuals are frequently blamed for social problems (for instance, HIV/AIDS). Articles on homosexuality carry a homophobic message, encouraged by political and religious beliefs.

The gay community often responds to homophobic onslaughts in the media. The Rainbow Project, the representative organization of the homosexual and transgender community of Namibia, takes most of the responsibility to air the views of homosexual and transgender people in order to address the question of equal human rights for this community. The Rainbow Project fights injustice and makes the voices of homosexual people heard; however, the gay community also participates actively to counter homophobia. In recent years, gay individuals courageously responded to

homophobic messages through the media and highlighted certain unflattering issues about this matter.

Articles in newspapers often report on the inhumane treatment of gay men, their suffering and the violation of their human rights. These articles would then compare the situation of gay men in different countries of the African continent. There have also been reports on the arguments used against gay men and their freedom to exist. With regard to this, newspaper commentaries noted the groundbreaking progress made by gay men in terms of their rights and legislation on homosexuality. However, these commentaries are mostly accompanied by appeals for zero tolerance of gay men and the rights that they claim. The debates around homosexuality are rarely objective and generally homophobic in nature. It seems as though many do not consider alternative beliefs and lifestyles regarding human sexuality.

“Research done in Namibia on the relationships in pre-colonial times also shows that homosexuality was known and practiced in many societies and that there are words for such practices in most of the indigenous languages” (Womenwatch, 1999:1). Further studies done in the north of the country support the view that homosexuality is not entirely foreign or unknown to the Namibian people. “Homosexual behaviour exists in the Ovahimba and Ovaherero community, leading in extreme cases to transvestite homosexual individuals. Even if homosexuality is probably not as rare as most people claim, it may not be that prevalent either. Thus, although contingent homosexual relations may occur, absolute homosexuality is rather rare; there are in

fact no publicly homosexual couples, in the sense of two overtly male or female individuals having a lasting relationship. Even if an individual man felt strongly attracted to other men, the communities' cultural beliefs would prohibit him from living with the object of his desire" (Talavera, 2002:62). Gay men in Africa cannot openly have loving relationships, they may not openly form a committed relationship and are prohibited to be a couple or to marry. No form of gay relationships is publicly allowed in Africa and African tradition has structures in place that do not recognize homosexuality and therefore do not provide the space for homosexual relationships.

Despite efforts to do studies related to topics of gender and human sexuality in Namibia, qualitative research on homosexuality is virtually non-existent. Considering the sensitive nature of these topics, it is indeed a challenge to approach such research. Current debates regarding homosexuality make it even more challenging. Other factors to be taken into consideration when doing investigations could be cultural differences and religious backgrounds. The following sections examine homophobia as a phenomenon, both in an African context as well as in the Namibian setting.

## 2.1 Homophobic Discourse

A person's choice of words can determine whether the people one speaks to perceive one as accepting and affirming or rejecting and hostile. "Individuals are judged by their adherence to written and unwritten rules and norms. Normalizing judgment imposes homogeneity across individuals, but also individualizes people by measuring gaps between individual behavior and collective rules, thereby demarcating differences among members of a society" (Foucault, 1984:197, as cited by Veri, 1999:358). This beautifully describes how discourses can be seen to operate. In describing discourse as spoken or written statements that serve as symbols of knowledge, Foucault pointed out the power of communication and language in regulating behaviour and influencing psychological well-being (ibid). Messages of beliefs, rules and judgments are formed and carried over by discourse. Thus, discourse has the power to define, to create and to cause awareness as well as to govern and endorse human consciousness and behaviour. More importantly for this study, discourse influences and shapes a person's thoughts. In turn, thoughts influence the psychological well-being.

Discourse, as argued above, can never function independently because it is a social construct. Discourse, according to Foucault (cited in Veri, 1999), is historically contingent and can never be isolated from the social practices within which it is embedded. Hence, a particular discourse should always be viewed and analyzed in relation to its context. The context within which a discourse operates has a central



role in understanding such discourse. It is only the context that can inform how discourse came about, how it is constituted, how it functions and most importantly how the discourse “help(s) legitimate oppressive social practices” (Halperin, 1995; Veri, 1999).

How does discourse legitimate oppressive social practices? Discourse, the carrier of information, is very powerful. It is common sense that knowledge empowers people, especially those who own and control knowledge. Decisions, judgments and laws are all based on knowledge. Knowledge, as well as the judgments it informs, is passed on via discursive speech in the form of ‘written or unwritten’ language.

On the other hand, Foucault (cited in Veri, 1999) explained that although discourse carries, generates and reinforces power, it also undermines, exposes and renders power vulnerable to possible critique and opposition. In the case of homophobic discourse, the very public resistance and protest against homosexuality and homosexuals can raise awareness of the phenomenon it criticizes. It can be argued strongly that when the process of homophobic discourse takes place, it not only spreads the message of anti-gay attitudes and its justification but also messages about the discourse itself. Consequently, homophobic discourse informs about power and the influence it has on people.

As noted already, discourse is always viewed in relation to something. This implies that homophobic discourse raises consciousness and informs about counter discourses such as human and gay rights, as well as supportive discourses such as racist discourse. In sum, one way to understand homophobic discourse is to discern what it is not. Another way is to define what it is and to draw on parallel discourses to find more information on the discourse under investigation.

“Silences are significant elements of discourse, conveying meaning and power as effectively as more obvious spoken or written statements...” (Veri, 1999:359). Silence contains a repressive power. This component of silence is readily used by oppressive discourses. Silence serves as a strategy to prevent exposure and possible critique or opposition, as was argued above. However, when the broader public remains unaware or ignorant regarding homophobia and its psychological repercussions, homophobic discourse may not expand. Needless to say, silence empowers homophobic discourse. It is therefore important for this study to look at as many aspects of the homophobic discourse as a whole in order not to lose information on it and its possible psychological outcomes.

The discourse of homophobia gained momentum in Namibia over the past few years. As mentioned earlier, “the term homophobia was coined in 1972 by Weinberg to signify irrationally negative attitudes toward homosexual people” (Lock & Kleis, 1998:425). Similar to other concepts, meanings of the term “homophobia” evolved throughout history and numerous definitions are available, which of course serve

various functions in understanding anti-gay attitudes. “Although the term “gay”, as it applies to sexual orientation, can be traced back as far as the thirteenth-century in France, it entered mainstream language in the 1970’s and was often used in reference to the gay liberation movement” (Francoeur, Perper & Scherzer, 1991:5, as quoted by Cornelson, 1998:2). The word “gay” was chosen by homosexuals to describe them and has a positive connotation to describe people of homosexual orientation. Possible reasons for the choice could be because it initially meant being “light-hearted, sportive, mirthful, showy, (and) brilliant” (Sykes, 1978). The term “gay” is readily used in the fight for homosexual rights and is used interchangeably to describe sexual minorities (gays, lesbians, transvestites, bisexual and questioning persons).

Returning to homophobia, the term “homophobia” is not always preferred to denote an anti-gay stance, behaviour or attitude. There are alternative concepts that could substitute the word “homophobia” such as “sexual prejudice”. “Sexual prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward an individual because of her or his sexual orientation” (Herek, 2000:19). This is a broader and more inclusive definition and classification of discrimination against sexual minorities. In addition, sexual prejudice indicates three principal features: “It is an attitude; it is directed at a social group and its members; and it is negative, involving hostility or dislike” (Herek, 2000:20). Sexual prejudice indicates the socially-reinforced prejudice, whilst homophobia indicates an individual psychopathology of anti-gay attitudes. Sexual prejudice, unlike homophobia, does not make pre-conceived assumptions about

etiology and motivational factors of anti-gay attitudes. For this study, however, the term 'sexual prejudice' is not ideal because the word 'homophobia' is common in the discourse about homosexuality in Namibia. Thus, the word homophobia is preferred in this study.

Homophobia is a belief system that fails to value gay life and that discriminates against homosexuals based on their sexual orientation. "Homophobia is an irrational fear of homosexuality, usually coupled with a hatred of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning persons. This fear or hatred is often expressed as negative attitudes, discrimination, stereotyping, or other actions against LGBTQ persons" (Psychological Services Centre, 2004). It is a phenomenon that has several implications for the lives of gay men. It is kept in place by ignorance, prejudices and the reinforcement of stereotypes as well as the absence of positive ideas or images of LGBTQ people.

Homophobia is established and spread by many social structures and agents. It is a form of violence (referred to as gay-bashing) that marginalizes differences and, as a result, limits individual expression. "Gay-bashing is an instance where gays and lesbians are punished for subverting the taken-for-granted heterosexuality of the public. The majority of gay-bashing incidents occur in the public realm" (Dirsuweit & Reid, 2002:100). Gay-bashing is a regular occurrence due to homophobic discourse. Verbal and physical abuse in public places serve to 'warn' or to be an

example to other gays. It reveals masculine and heterosexual normality and discursive practices.

Namaste, (cited in Dirsuweit & Reid, 2002) did a study on the relationship between gender subversion and gay-bashing. She found in her research that men and women who assume signifiers of the opposite gender, for example through dress and speech, are at increased risk of gay-bashing. Victims of gay bashing experience further humiliation, discrimination and abuse. Dirsuweit & Reid (2002) found that medical and police staff often mocked gay-bashing victims and made derogatory comments about their homosexual orientation. "Homophobic violence is, hence, formulated in relation to the subversion of norms, particularly norms around masculinity" (ibid). Homophobic acts and/or speech can be enormously damaging to those subjected to them for the reason that these challenge their self-concept and identity.

Homophobic violence is sometimes secondary and very subtle. It is important to note in this study that second-order homophobic violence is considered more dangerous as it is often ignored or overlooked. This type of homophobic violence is more powerful since it is readily accepted and allowed because it fits heterosexual reality and its masculinity discourse. This secondary form of homophobic violence is difficult to detect and its psychological outcomes are not readily observed due to the reality that this type of violence has become normal. Gay men might not even recognize that silence on homophobia, the mockery of victims of homophobic abuse and the homophobic hate crimes are secondary homophobic violence that can have

adverse psychological outcomes for them. “Many of the victims show a lack of awareness of the psychological effects of the trauma they have experienced. In the interviews, however, these effects were apparent...” (Dirsuweit & Reid, 2002:115). Gay men often do not understand what is happening to them. Due to the fact that homophobia and its abuse is normalized in an anti-gay society like Namibia, the gay men do not always realize that they are being psychologically harmed. Though it could often be detected in the symptoms that gay men describe such as fear or thoughts of self-harm, that their psychological well-being is compromised by homophobia.

“Psychologically defined, homophobia serves to bolster a male identity, disintegrating in the face of rising demands from women and other marginal social groups” (Hartmann, Du Pisani & Steakly, 1995:17, as quoted by Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:30). Heterosexual males have dominated the world for much of the time. They exclusively possessed all the power and ruled over women. Today, the patriarchal powers of heterosexual men are perceived to be under threat by pressure groups such as gay men claiming their rights. Sexuality, sexual acts and sexual roles in post-independent Namibia seem to be perceived as patriarchal and the illusion exists that it has always been this way in ‘African tradition’. Hartmann et al (1995) tried to make the reader aware of the power men enjoy because sexual freedom and pleasure are frequently considered to be the sole right of heterosexual men in patriarchal societies. If others such as gays or women, claim sex for their own pleasure and expression of self, heterosexual men could feel threatened.

Consequently, in contemporary discourse, some dominant heterosexual male groups conceptualise sex in terms of differences such as heterosexual (normal, traditional) versus homosexual (unnatural, un-African, sin). This could possibly be out of the fear of loss of power.

Black homophobia within the homophobic discourse in Africa is supposedly "...a co-constitutive construction that holds the products of black oppression and the hallmark of colonialism: the negative deployment of race, sexuality, gender, identity and power" (Kornegay, 2004:33). This means black homophobia is the product of years of oppression of black people through colonisation. It implies that black people could not resolve racism and sexism positively and the end product is reverse discrimination, namely, black homophobia. This conceptualization suggests that black men in Africa still carry the scars of colonialism that stripped them of their pride and humanity. In colonial times, they were degraded to a similar status like women, in the sense that they were called "boys" and treated as weak. This theory of black homophobia reasons that black men in post-colonial Africa are trying to reclaim and re-identify themselves as powerful by means of oppression or reverse discrimination. It is believed that they do not know how to address the former powers of their oppressor in constructive ways, and aim at those who are considered 'soft' or 'easy' targets. The implication is that 'black homophobia' is a fear of loss of power and not of homosexuals per se.

Skelton (cited in Dirisuweit & Reid, 2002) referred to the subject of black masculinity and its linkage with a lack of power within racist/sexist societies. Here it is argued that black homophobia is a need by black men to exercise power through masculinity. Black homophobia summons up the condemnation and elimination of homosexuals to reconfirm and endorse its masculinity. Black heterosexual men fear power that cannot be controlled; which is similar to what they experienced during the colonial era. Those who are perceived to be a threat to power are gays, the poor, the sick and the imprisoned. In other words, “black homophobic discourse is created in defense of the perceived ability to proclaim any type of prototypical identity that might be considered righteous, normal and beyond the constructed ‘other’ of blackness” (Kornegay, 2004:34). This implies that black people try to regain their humanity and strive to achieve an identity that they and others can be proud of. They attempt to be respected, recognized and valued by constructing an ‘other’, gay people, which could be less respected than black people could. In creating a bad ‘gay identity’ that is despised, the better are the chances that black persons would appear more acceptable.

Homophobic discourse in Africa is characterized by the assertion that homosexuality belongs solely to some cultures. The leaders of anti-gay campaigns in Africa seem to share a common belief that homosexuality is somehow ‘un-African’ and a sign of European colonialism. “The belief that homosexuality is a choice is maybe a more influential predictor of heterosexual blacks’ sexual prejudice...” (Herek & Capitano, 1995, as quoted by Herek, 2000:21). Some Africans believe homophobia is inherently not from Africa and that gay Africans choose to follow foreign examples of



homosexuality. Homophobia is generally based on notions and belief systems such as these and has become the latest form of intolerance to sweep across the African continent. It causes prejudices and stereotypes that are communicated to people.

Homophobia amongst Namibian individuals is perpetuated through propaganda, hate speech, anti-homosexual reporting in the media and the teachings of churches condemning homosexuality. The primary function of homophobia is to 'protect' the carriers of its message. "Homophobia means the fear of being less-than-a-man, whatever this means; in a more narrow sense the term has come to mean a fear of everything that seems to be or looks homosexual" (Hartmann, 1998:163). It is a possibility that people become homophobic because homosexuality is a strange phenomenon that they do not understand or because they perceive it as a threat to their concept of sexual normality. The growth of homophobic discourse can be attributed to ignorance, illiteracy and cultural beliefs on the topic. Heterosexual men could feel threatened by homosexuality for they perceive gay men as a threat to their manhood, their identity and the stability of their family and community. "...Studies of male college students found that an endorsement of traditional masculine roles was related to homophobia..." (Pilkington, 1995, as quoted by Lock & Kleis, 1998:427). Clearly, there is a strong link between the so-called protection of masculinity and homophobic attitudes toward gays. "A recent study of gay and lesbian youth found that those who were viewed as more gender atypical are at more risk for victimization" (ibid). Males (especially those who do not act within their prescribed masculine/gender role) become targets of homophobia. They become vulnerable to

homophobic attitudes when they act in a feminine way or are perceived to portray feminine behaviour.

The Democratic Coalition of Namibia (DCN), a local political party, seems to agree with this view that gay men are viewed as a threat to heterosexual men's manhood. The DCN declared in its manifesto during the 1999 Namibian Election process that "homophobia is a characteristic of dictators and culturally insecure and intolerant characters" (The Namibian, 1999:2). The discourse of homophobia can be considered the art of manipulation of facts to cause hate and fear of homosexual people. Oppressing the other can therefore be a strategy to empower and feel better about oneself in the process. Homophobia is not only limited to certain countries and is experienced all over the world, as will be seen in the next section.

## **2.2 Global review of homophobic discourse**

"The discursive form of violence has put a seal of silence upon the discourse of homosexuality, which is ostracized and under-represented in Chinese literature and history" (Zhang, 1999:108). Violence and hate crimes against homosexuals in China are not strange phenomena although homosexuals are not visible in the Chinese culture, even today. In China during "...1924 to 1977 homosexual men met the worst injustice and violence during that terrifying history" (Zhang, 1999:108). This evidence demonstrates that China is not prepared to compromise on cultural

homophobic attitudes that 'castrate' and 'dismember' homosexuals. Homosexuality is a taboo and is not given any consideration to be classified otherwise.

In Australia, "the 1950's were perhaps the darkest decade of the twentieth century for Australian lesbians and homosexual men" (Willet, 1997:5). Gay men in Australia did not only experience homophobia, but were persecuted because of it. Homosexuals were strictly censored and measures were reinforced to regulate and control them. According to Willet (1997), during the 1950's there was a sharp increase in the number of homosexual people charged and convicted and the statistic peaked at 350 convictions of homosexuals in 1958. These figures are clear indicators of the extent of homophobia in Australia during those years.

Dirsuweit & Reid (2002) stated that in Canada a total of 60 000 hate crimes were reported for the year 1998. They also reported that 11 % of these hate crimes were committed against gay men and lesbians.

In England, the most significant statistics are reported. As maintained by Dirsuweit & Reid (2002:101), the London Free Press published a report on gay men which stated that, 83% of respondents (aged 14-25 years) reported that they had been gay bashed. This shows how devastating the effect of homophobia can be. "Anna-Marie Smith, a lesbian, social and political discourse analyst, has produced a penetrating study of racism and homophobia in late twentieth-century Britain to support the contention that a politically-driven, homophobic discourse is firmly embedded within

the British social and political life” (Smith, 1999:89). This study challenged the perceived silence on racism and homophobia in Britain. In her study, Smith found that British churches displayed little tolerance toward homosexuality and continued to oppress and exclude homosexuals from the church (ibid). The British churches are prepared to accommodate ‘good homosexuality’, though Smith (1999) argued that this is reverse discrimination. Discrimination against homosexuality has only been re-written in order to seemingly appear more tolerant and inclusive of homosexuals. This approval by the British church of ‘good homosexuality’ was found to be even more degrading and discriminative. It is considered discriminative because “what is meant by good homosexuality is a homosexual who is ‘law-abiding, self-closeting and disease-free” (Smith, 1999:100).

Cornelson (1998) stated that homophobia is negative judgments, attitudes and behaviour to people who are attracted to members of the same sex. He also argued that this type of prejudice is so popular that it is still tolerated in the United States that is supposedly the world’s model in terms of democracy. Indicators of homophobic discourse are that “most adults in the United States hold negative attitudes toward homosexual behaviour, regarding it as wrong and unnatural” (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Yang, 1997, as quoted by Herek, 2000:20). There is a lot of confirmation that homophobia thrives in the US. “Levitt & Klassen (1974) found that 70 % of their sample considered homosexuality wrong...” (Cowan & Devlin, 1985:467). This study served as a national census in the US to gauge Americans’ attitudes toward homosexuality. In another study, it was proven that “the majority of Americans

believe that homosexuals are sexually abnormal, perverted, and/or mentally ill” (Weinberg & Williams, 1974, as quoted by Cowan & Devlin, 1985:467).

To provide more evidence on traces of homophobia in the US, reference is made to a study on gay and bisexual Latino men in the United States. The study done by Ayala, Bein, Diaz, Henne & Martin (2001) assessed the relation between experience of social discrimination such as homophobia and psychological distress such as anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation in the US. The sample of the study consisted of gay and bisexual men who were more vulnerable because they experienced multiple social oppression, and in addition to homophobia, these men were faced with racism and poverty. The study showed “...high prevalence rates of psychological symptoms of distress in the population of gay Latino men during the 6 months before the interview, including suicidal ideation (17% prevalence), anxiety (44%) and depressed mood (80%)” (Ayala et al., 2001:927). Furthermore, it was found that experiences of some sort of social discrimination were strong predictors of psychological symptoms. The research suggested that gay and bisexual Latino men in the US possessed a high frequency of symptoms of psychological distress. In addition, social discrimination and poverty increased the prevalence of psychological distress in these gay men. The mental difficulties experienced by the gay and bisexual Latino men in the United States were directly related to a social context of oppression that leads to low self-esteem, social alienation and psychological distress (Ayala, et al., 2001).

## **2.3 Review of homophobic discourse in Africa**

### **2.3.1 Indicators of homophobic discourse in Africa**

Until recently, there were little public comments on homosexuality in Africa. Homosexuality, like sexuality, was considered a private matter that should not be openly discussed. “What public commentary there has been on homosexuality, has been almost uniformly hostile” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:24). Negative or homophobic messages are leading in debates about homosexuality. The public attack on gays at the 1995 Zimbabwe International Book Fair propelled a vigorous debate on the acceptance of homosexuality. This was followed by an international public outcry against homophobic discourse and the accompanying treatment of gay men.

The pro-gay tendency advocated the idea that a natural percentage of human population consists of homosexuals and that they are found in every community of the world. “Homosexuals and homosexuality are found in nearly all cultures of the world. Existing and emerging evidence on homosexuality in Africa finds that it is part of many traditional and current African cultures” (Roberts, 1996:1). This research shows that homophobia was not historically alien to Africa. The belief that homosexuality is not and was never part of African tradition is therefore questionable. Moreover, “a word that is often used in stigmatizing homosexuality in Africa is ‘tradition’ – the argument being that homosexual relations are incompatible with traditional African social practice” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:24). Africans seem to ignore evidence that prominently shows that homosexuals form a certain part of every

population group. Many Africans are convinced that homosexuality is a western influence that is adopted by African gay people because they are for some reasons susceptible to it. It is argued today that homosexuality is un-African and should be banned from African countries, since it is directly in contradiction to African tradition and customs. Homosexuality as a taboo and the ban on it are seriously implemented in most African countries.

There are countries in Africa that "...do not have any laws against homosexuality on their books, for example, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland" (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:41). This can indicate the degree of controversy that surrounds homosexuality and gay rights. Arguments on homosexuality frequently leave Africans with ambiguous feelings about the status quo of homosexuality on the continent. There is often a call for explicit protective laws for homosexuals. "South Africa stands alone in Africa in terms of its constitution, which expressly protects the rights of lesbian and gay citizens" (Dirsuweit & Reid, 2002:99). The rest of the African countries either have anti-gay legislation or no clear specific legislation on homosexuality. "In Africa, homosexuality is illegal for gay men in 29 countries..." (Afrol News, 2005:1). Included in this statistic are countries like Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Angola and Tanzania. This can be indicated by the widespread homophobic attitude thriving on the African continent. "Across the continent, millions of gays and lesbians find themselves increasingly under threat and are pointed to as a source of Africa's ills" (The Namibian, 2004:10). In short, what is being proposed here is that gay men are blamed for social ills in Africa. Namibian

politicians in particular, describe gay men as the outcasts who are a burden to society and have the potential to sabotage Namibia's prosperity.

Although the debate on homosexuality continues in most African countries, in an effort to resolve this problem, "much of this debate remains homophobic, with the inherent paradox that the expression of homophobia by African politicians and others seem often to amount to saying that 'homosexuality doesn't exist in Africa - but don't do it anyway because it is rotten'" (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:25). Homosexuality in Africa is not recognized, Africans deny its existence and attempts are made to prevent it. It seems that most African people are not sure about the authenticity of arguments that homosexuality is not true to 'African culture'. However, in Namibia it has become popular to say Africans do not condone homosexuality. Through this, African leaders are trying to proclaim an 'African identity', which they would like to define on their terms; one being that homosexuality was and is not part of the 'African' identity and tradition. This illusion of 'Africanness' can have severe consequences for the marginalized (homosexual) groups, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Human Rights Watch, in conjunction with the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, investigated human rights abuses in seventy countries worldwide. This study included research that was done "...between 1998 to 2002 on discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia" (Dentlinger, 2003). The focus of



the study was to investigate so-called 'state-sponsored homophobia' in these countries. Widney Brown, one of the researchers of the project, affirmed that "...homophobia has become a 'politicised' topic in the region" (ibid). The former president of Namibia ensured that homophobia has become a political issue in the country by making controversial statements about homosexuality and launching a national public attack on gays. According to Brown (cited in Dentlinger, 2003), Namibia's civil society can be applauded because it openly contested homophobic discourse as opposed to countries such as Zimbabwe where people are too scared to protest. The research found that homophobia is still rife in countries such as South Africa where homosexuality is legalized.

Homophobic discourse is promoted and established by politicians who are responsible for legislation in their African countries, though it may not necessarily be representative of the public opinion in those nations. However, documented opinions show that "in no African country does more than a minority approve of gays" (The Economist, 2004:44). It might be that those who air their opinions do so in a professional capacity and are forced to formulate a politically correct opinion. Others might simply fear being subjected to discrimination if they support gays. Institutions and individuals are either for or against gays and publicly demonstrate such a decision.

In Southern Africa, “a national survey of nearly 5 000 adults, conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC), has mapped social attitudes among South Africans” (Behind the Mask, 2004). The results of this study showed that most South African citizens oppose “...same-sex adult relationships” (ibid). Although policies concerning gay rights are progressive in South Africa, most of the country’s citizens have not changed their homophobic attitudes toward gays. This is substantiated by another study done by the HSRC that revealed an overwhelming homophobic attitude in white respondents in this country (Glanz, 1987; Isaacs & Mckendrick, 1992). Over 70% of the respondents in this study felt that homosexuality should not be legalized. This statistic represents an ethnic group that is often considered more Western than African because of skin colour, culture and tradition. The statistical evidence is also important for this study as it shows that a particular group of South Africans still engages in homophobic discourse even though that country’s laws do not permit it. Thus, it can be seen that even though laws and theories change in South Africa, people’s attitudes and values about gay people can remain the same.

Zimbabwe is one country in the southern part of the continent that is infamous for its homophobic stance, human rights violations and audacious attacks on gay men. In Zimbabwe, “...some individuals have been prosecuted and convicted for their sexual orientation, including the country’s first president, Canaan Banana” (Afrol News, 2005:1). There exist a vast number of reports of gross human rights violations, including those of gay men in Zimbabwe. This country and its president is known

world-wide for their conservative policies that are based on prejudice and discrimination. Minority groups such as gay men suffer violent attacks under the Mugabe regime.

“A public debate on homosexuality had started in Zimbabwe in 1994 after Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) had put an advertisement in *The Daily Gazette* for its counseling services” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:8). As mentioned earlier, the debate was further encouraged by the Zimbabwean government’s ban on GALZ to participate in the 1995 Book Fair. The incident became news headlines in southern Africa and the rest of the world. It angered the gay community and caught the attention of human rights activists. Zimbabweans, as well as the international community, were appalled by their President’s homophobic campaign.

President Mugabe “...claims that homosexuality is not an African phenomenon but rather a Western decadency” (Afril News, 2005:1). The president of Zimbabwe denied that homosexuality is found in traditional Zimbabwean ethnic groups and cultures and disregarded any trace of homosexual practices in black men. Homosexuality is described in the Zimbabwean homophobic discourse as “...an alien import of sick habits, as unnatural, against the will of God and the need of reproduction” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:13). In Zimbabwean press the notion of homosexuality was dismissed as a threat, once again, to African ‘traditional values’. The existence of homosexuality in Zimbabwe is apparently found only in jails. Robert Mugabe “was the first in the area to identify gay people as a useful national

enemy...” (The Namibian, 2000:1). President Mugabe, like the former Namibian president, profusely lashed out at the gay community.

The debate continues in other parts of Africa as well. In West Africa, one finds that “homosexuality is illegal in Sierra Leone” (The Economist, 2004:44). The author of this article elaborated on the confusion surrounding anti-homosexual legislation in Sierra Leone. The writer suggested that it is rather the ‘vigilantes’ than the police who would enforce a law that forbids homosexuality (ibid). Sierra Leonean law is not clear on homosexuality – whether to legalize it or not. Not surprisingly, a local journalist in Sierra Leone commented that ‘gays in his country know they have to do their thing in the dark’ (The Economist, 2004:44). This statement emphasizes the power of homophobic discourse in Sierra Leone. It seems that African journalists, especially when employed by state-owned media, side with the anti-gay propaganda of numerous African governments.

Signs of homophobia can be observed in religious circles as well. Bates (2004) referred to Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria, “who said in an angry statement that homosexuals are lower than beasts” (pg.1). Akinola is the head of the largest Anglican Church in Africa, a denomination consisting of seventeen million members. Reference is made to the Anglican Bishop, as this statement can be a relative indicator of the magnitude of homophobia in the African church and members of the Anglican denomination represent a large number of Christians in Africa.

In East Africa, the situation seems to be the same. Questions also exist regarding the ‘Africanness’ of homosexual practices. Kenyan president Daniel arap Moi “has claimed that ‘words like lesbianism and homosexuality do not exist in African languages’ ” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:24). This president implied that homosexuality is not African because it is not visible in a cultural force such as an indigenous language. It is obvious that this African leader does not identify with an African identity that includes same-sex love as one of its aspects.

Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda and gays are constantly being persecuted. Violence against gay men in Uganda has reached unprecedented heights. It is reported that “...gay activists have been raped, beaten and a member of Lesgabic, a lesbian and gay alliance, has been murdered” (Afol News, 2005:2). Homophobic discourse in Uganda has caused the victimization of gay men and it appears gay men in the country have become targets of violence and abuse.

Counter-arguments to the notion that homosexuality is un-African is provided in contemporary academic discourse. Academic research that same-sex attachments such as boy-wives were accepted or existed within the social practices of former African communities brought it forth (Lebeau & Gordon, 2002). Boy-wives were younger men who were taken in by older men as wives. The young men took the female gender role by cross-dressing, being responsible for ‘feminine’ household duties and offering sexual intercourse to the elder ‘husband’. The history of homosexuality is in disagreement with present day accounts of the past. African

culture is consciously or unconsciously being re-invented and re-constructed by the (homophobic) discourse that is at work in a particular African society.

### **2.3.2 Implications of homophobic discourse for gay men in Africa**

As mentioned, there are clear indications that homophobic discourse exists in Africa and that it has become a very powerful instrument. Available evidence was provided from the southern, eastern and western parts of Africa that homophobia is present and has established itself within African societies. Homophobic discourse can have adverse consequences on African people. “Homophobic victimization is endemic in violent, masculine cultures and has extensive implications for gay men and lesbians” (Dirsuweit & Reid, 2002:100). This section presents the possible outcomes of homophobia and the spread thereof in Africa. Homophobic discourse can affect people’s relationships, might influence laws that govern people’s lives and can possibly subject people to abuse.

An article in the Oprah Magazine of June 2005 shed light on the impact of homophobic discourse in South Africa. The author reported that gay men marrying women is a common phenomenon in South Africa. This written piece revealed that “...straight women married to gay men are particularly prevalent in South Africa, where being gay is often deemed “un-African”, and to come out may still result in social suicide” (Twiggs, 2005:104). Homophobic discourse in Southern Africa can “encourage gay men to seek to lead a ‘normal’, heterosexual lifestyle” (De Swardt, as

quoted by Twiggs, 2005:106). According to Twiggs (2005), the Triangle Project (where De Swardt is the manager of health services) is the oldest gay service organization in Africa. Considering this fact, South Africa can be regarded as the leaders in gay rights and counteraction of homophobic discourse in Africa. The information on gay men in South Africa confirms the above-mentioned by revealing that “the taboo on homophobia is lifting, albeit gradually” (Twiggs, 2005:106).

Increased tolerance of gay men in South Africa might be because gay rights are strongly protected in that country’s constitution. Even so, homophobia has not been completely eradicated in the country. Following hate speech and other forms of threats and attacks toward homosexual people, gay men are sometimes left with no choice but to remain in the closet. Even if laws are in place to safeguard the rights of gay people, it might not provide complete security for them. Cultural attitudes can still be homophobic and have negative consequences for gay people, such as abuse. “Patterns of torture and other abuses facing gay men are not well documented in most countries” (Amnesty International, 2001:49). Gay men who have undergone ill treatment and misuse do not give documented evidence of their personal experiences of discrimination and violence. In most countries, the failure of authorities to protect gay people against violence in the community might be a contributing factor to the escalation of homophobia in Africa.

The above-mentioned literature shows how homophobic discourse causes severe human rights violations on gay men. Few African countries have specific laws that protect gay rights. Even so, there is no guarantee that such laws would be implemented and adhered to on a practical level. This indicates that homophobia still persists despite efforts for law reform and improved social attitudes in Africa. Gay men in Africa continue to lead secret lives in order to protect themselves against persecution. This makes research on the topic even more challenging.

## **2.4 Review on homophobic discourse in Namibia**

### **2.4.1 Indicators of homophobic discourse in Namibia**

In the previous sections, homophobic discourse, together with its possible outcomes in Africa, was described broadly. Keeping in mind that one deals with a discourse, the focus should be narrowed to the specific context in which it occurs in order to give a valid account of the discourse. The method of discourse analysis requires that the context of a text or discourse be considered, as it is a primary contributor in the formation and continuation of a discourse. In order to have a sufficient understanding of the homophobic discourse in Namibia, one has to first investigate its history, how it came about, and the processes that shaped the discourse.

The editor of *Behind the Mask*, a gay website for homosexual Africans, believes “many homosexuals traditionally served as healers and spiritual leaders...” (The Namibian, 2004:11). One can safely argue that gay Africans previously enjoyed



more respect and were not excluded from African tradition. Therefore, homosexuality could not have been thought of as un-African since gay Africans held prominent traditional positions in their communities. Homosexuals in pre-colonial Africa were not considered wicked or abnormal within their communities. “Colonisers viewed sexuality from a moral lens and used classifications based on a distinction between morally good and morally bad (‘perverse’, ‘unnatural’) sex” (Lebeau & Gordon, 2002:128). Colonisers encouraged and endorsed homosexuality as wrong, uncivilized and un-Christian.

Namibia’s homophobic discourse intensified in 1996 after “a group of cross-dressing gay men” used the lavatory facilities during a meeting of the SWAPO party (ibid). The then president, S. Nujoma launched his first public homophobic speech a few days after this incident. “Human rights groups have described Nujoma’s homophobic stance as an attempt to turn his personal dislike into an ad hoc national policy which they say is unconstitutional and misguided” (Kuteeue, 2003:1).

The most infamous statement of former president Nujoma was when he said in one of his speeches to students at the University of Namibia that “the Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality, lesbianism here. Police are ordered to arrest you, and deport you and imprison you too...” (The Namibian, 2001:1). At another occasion on 20 October 2000, at a cultural gathering at Outapi in the Omusati region of Namibia, president Nujoma asked for “...traditional leaders and parents to ‘whip’ those who are unwilling to adhere to cultural norms” (Afrol News, 2000:1). This speech by

Nujoma and others support the idea that homosexuality is un-African. It is common, even in Namibia, that homosexuality is conceptualized as alien to African customs. Nujoma's speech referred to gay men and their 'diversion' from sexual norms as traditionally unacceptable. He made it clear that 'ethnic' groups in Namibia should not tolerate gay men and that he, in his capacity as the leader of the largest ethnic group in Namibia (the Oshiwambo speaking group), does not tolerate homosexuality. At the same gathering, a Namibian traditional leader, Chief Herman Iipumbu of Uukwambi, shared the same philosophy as Nujoma about gay men. Chief Iipumbu "...stressed that the traditional leadership will never tolerate the practice of homosexuality and lesbianism in Namibia" (Afrol News, 2000:2). He also remarked that homosexuals 'imported immoral practices from European countries'. The chief also expressed his dismay with those Namibians who call for gay rights in the country because it will cause Namibia to lose respect for its cultures.

"Same-sex orientation, is judged by some to be not 'normal', not natural" (Cornelson, 1998:263). In this instance, what is meant by not natural in the context of same-sex intercourse, refers to what does not lead to procreation. Former Agriculture Minister, Helmut Angula, supported his political counterparts by saying, "homosexuality is an unnatural behavioural disorder, which is alien to African culture" (The Namibian, 2004:10). In this statement, Angula highlighted the proposed 'unnaturalness' of homosexuality, which is another important theme in Namibian homophobic discourse. Namibian political leaders are in agreement that homosexuality is an unnatural, un-Christian and un-African phenomenon and are not hesitant to express

this homophobic viewpoint. SWAPO Councilor, Noah Tuhadeleni, added to the row on homosexuality during a debate on the Combating of Immoral Practices Amendment Bill in Namibia's National Council. Tuhadeleni felt homosexual couples, amongst other things, cannot be married and live like opposite sex couples. He said "homosexuality is total chaos" and "homosexuality is condemned by the Bible" (Angula, 2000:1).

Returning to the view that homosexuality is un-African, gay men are considered as outcasts in Namibia because they do not adhere to so-called African culture. The Administrative Director of the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) in Namibia "shot down claims that homosexuality was an un-African aberration" (Menges, 2000:1). The question then arises, 'What is African culture? Can one say that there is an African culture that was preserved and that still exists?' "...If we look at our society today, what is so African about it? We are westernized to every sense of the word" (SAHRYN, 2005). The opposing school of thought reasons that the possibility exists that homosexuality was part of 'African' culture and was accepted until it was demonized. Some people believe that "culturalists and historians need to prove to us that homosexuality or bisexuality did not exist in traditional Africa" (Karnuombe, 2004:5).

There are indications in literature pointing to the possibility that homosexuality did exist in ancient Africa. The National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) (2001) conducted a random oral survey amongst Owambo-speaking Namibians and found

that “interviewees prima facie regarded a male who wears earrings, braided hair or a ponytail as an eshenge”. ‘Eshenge’ is the common word used in the Owambo language to describe gay men. In spite of this evidence, some Namibians still believe homosexuality is un-African and strongly condemn it. At a rally in Oshakati, demonstrators shouted “Down with Gays and Lesbians...we are sick and tired of people supporting gays and lesbians” (NSHR, 2001:1). This type of public outcry is a sign of the dangers of homophobic discourse on gay men in Namibia. Not only can gay people be victimized, but also their supporters.

Still on the political scene, the SWAPO Women’s Council made a public announcement and called for a ban on the public practice of homosexuality (Maletsky & Smith, 2001). The group lashed out at homosexuals and stated that members of the Council would not like to witness the presence of homosexuals in Namibia. Homosexuals were instructed to keep their ‘affairs’ secret. The SWAPO Women’s Council continued to express “...concern that there would be a lack of sexual partners for women in Namibia if men are doing it man- to- man” (ibid).

On the un-African nature of homosexuality (Sibindi, 2004:14) wrote, “...homosexuality has always been regarded as shameful among Africans, which is why Portuguese came across the expelled community group of homosexuals...” He continued to discredit evidence or traces of homosexuality being previously an acceptable practice in African tradition and languages, such as in Zimbabwe. In conclusion, the letter posed a threat to the gay community, warning that the same

might happen to Namibian gays like in Zimbabwe if they continue to challenge public homophobic discourse (Sibindi, 2004). The author then concluded with the following homophobic remark of former president Nujoma: “Do your things in private, behind your closed doors and in your bedrooms and do not involve the nation and we will leave you alone” (Sibindi, 2004:14).

Contrary to homophobic letters, letters also appeared in the print media in support of gay men. Namibians, especially politicians, should be cautious in their public vendetta against gay men as it can “start off a vindictive campaign against people who differ from others in only their sexual choices” (Ombalantu, in *The Namibian*, 1999). She expressed her dismay that Namibian political leaders did not uphold the law as they promote homophobia in a country with a history of discrimination and violence (*ibid*).

The gay community defended themselves against ‘gay bashing’ in the media. “The Rainbow Project, which bills itself as an organisation committed to the promotion and protection of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Namibia, was established in early 1997” (Menges, 2000:1). This organisation was established in response to the former president Nujoma’s homophobic utterances in 1996. Evidently, the creation of such an organisation was seen as a necessity to address the adverse homophobic discourse in Namibia. The existence of The Rainbow Project is a call from a minority group for tolerance and protection of their human rights. The Rainbow Project stated that public attacks on homosexuality by

homophobes like the founding president "...is an attempt to silence critical voices in SWAPO and society..." (Namibian, 2002:1). The organisation called on the gay and lesbian community to openly express their sexual orientation. It continued to heavily criticise homophobic actions of politicians and their justification thereof in Namibia. "Informal research by the TRP indicates that both verbal and physical attacks on male and female homosexuals are daily occurrences which go largely unreported out of fear for further discrimination by health officials and the police" (Dentlinger, 2003:2).

A women's organization in Namibia (Sister Namibia) also publicly contested the homophobic stance of some Namibians. The offices of this women's rights and gender equality organization that support homosexual rights, were burnt down. Speculation has it that somebody broke into the office and deliberately set it on fire. Liz Frank, the editor of Sister Namibia's magazine, was of the opinion that this type of incident is instigated by political homophobic hate speech in the country. She said, "...three gay men were beaten up by people in Rescue 911 vehicles and charges were laid on the night of the same day last month that Nujoma verbally attacked gays and lesbians..." (Amupadhi, 2000:1). This case of arson prompted "the editor of the publication to blame gay bashers" (ibid). A spokesperson of Rescue 911 confirmed the incident but could not elaborate on the matter when The Namibian newspaper consulted them.

Deputy Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration, Theopolina Mushelenga, recently engaged in activities that could harm gay men in Namibia. A letter by Linda Baumann appeared in the newspaper stating that the Deputy Minister said that "...she rejects the so-called rights of gays..." and that gays "...are responsible for the HIV-AIDS pandemic and are an insult to the African culture" (The Namibian, 2005:14). This commentary is a clear indication of the type of homophobia existing in Namibia. Indeed, it can be strongly argued that many Namibians share the same sentiment on homosexuality and behave in a similar fashion toward gay men. Intense prejudice concerning gay men exists and gay men are judged or treated accordingly.

Mushelenga also warned the Namibian youth against the advocates of gay rights and she labelled them as 'false prophets'. Baumann (2005) expressed her dismay as she perceived these statements as irresponsible speech acts, such as accusing gays of spreading the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Since the onset of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, homosexuality has been branded as the cause of the disease and this particularly fuelled the homophobic debate in Namibia. "The first documented evidence of AIDS involved homosexuals in North America, where the virus spread because of a combination of multiple partners and sensitive membranes in anal sex" (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:46). The Deputy Minister was challenged to verify her facts before commenting on the issues of homosexuality by Baumann (2005). Not surprisingly, this author reasoned that homophobic utterances increased myths, prejudice and stigma against homosexual people. She also communicated that she felt she is being reduced to her sexual orientation and that she is not acknowledged for the person she

is behind the label attached to her. Baumann (2005) viewed it as dangerous to publicly deliver myths about gay men who already fear for their lives. These myths were instilled in Namibians' minds because they persisted in the country's homophobic discourse.

A second letter on Deputy Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration's statements appeared in a local daily newspaper. The author of the letter was concerned that the Deputy Minister "... incited hatred against and marginalised a section of the Namibian society she does not understand" (The Namibian, 2005:15). The writer maintained that gays were still imprisoned by 'puritan messages'. The source compared homophobic messages to that of racist messages that enunciated Africans as uncivilised and barbaric. This gay author questioned the ideology of African culture and stated that his personal experience of African culture was a very different conceptualisation of the term than the Deputy Minister expressed. The writer of this letter of complaint was upset that Mushelenga's blaming of gays could "...lead to acts of violence and even murder of innocent people who are perceived as gay..." (The Namibian, 2005:15). This letter highlighted the seriousness of the possible consequences and implications of homophobic discourse. It warned that efforts to contain the HIV/AIDS pandemic might prove futile because it was termed a gay disease.



One possible consequence is that HIV/AIDS sufferers could be more stigmatised because the disease is linked to homophobia, causing preventative measures and strategies to be even more of a challenge. Homophobic discourse may be "...making life harder for law-abiding citizens who may be gay by encouraging and promoting the already rampant acts of discrimination, verbal abuse and physical assault on an already marginalised segment of the community to continue" (The Namibian, 2005:15). The article also consolidated the view that homophobia in Namibia is reflected in refusal of employment, physical and verbal abuse and disparagement of gay men by health providers on the basis of their sexual orientation. Moreover, the article expressed the emotional pain and psychological repercussions of homophobic discourse. It indirectly indicated that hate speech and homophobic acts could cause psychological problems in Namibian gay men. This awakened a great concern for the human rights of gay people in Namibia.

Various human rights movements developed a keen interest in the Namibian situation, especially with regard to sexual minorities such as gay men. They have increased their monitoring in Namibia and their reports and alerts are noted by international and gay rights activists (Afrol News, 2001). The close surveillance on the human rights of gay and lesbian people in Namibia, indicate the presence of a strong homophobic discourse in Namibia. Several human rights organizations are actively monitoring the situation in the country. Amnesty International is one of the human rights organizations, which not only noted the gross human rights violations of gay men in Namibia, but also actively condemned this negative trend. "On 9

March 2001, an Amnesty press release especially targeted ‘the persecution of individuals identified as lesbian or gay’ by the Namibian government” (Afrol News, 2001:3).

The European Union (EU) presidency expressed concern over the official statements and declarations against sexual minorities such as gay men. The EU was of the view that public homophobic hate speech and acts “...indicate worrying signs of increasing intolerance” (Afrol News, 2001:1). The EU was so concerned about human rights of Namibian gay men that an official statement in this regard was released. Being Namibia’s largest international donor, the “...European Union said in its 2002-2007 Country Support Strategy Paper and Indicative Programme that it was concerned about verbal onslaughts on...homosexuals...” (Hamata, 2002:1). This report follows observations of the EU after the former Namibian president insulted and denounced the legalization of gay marriages in The Netherlands, which is one of the European Union’s key members. In response to the European Union’s report, the Namibian Government denied the allegations and maintained that “no single case of persecution or exclusion of any minority group including ‘the so-called sexual minorities’...” was reported in Namibia (Hamata, 2002:1). In addition, the Namibian Government firmly believes that “a great majority of Namibians see the practice of homosexuality as not only alien to their cultures but also immoral” (ibid). This statement might imply that gays are not entitled to claim the status of a minority group and that gays have no rights since a large number of Namibians refuse to accept their existence.

Another infamous report on homophobic discourse in Namibia, came from the former Minister of Home Affairs in Namibia, Jerry Ekandjo. He ordered new police recruits at Ondangwa to “eliminate gays and lesbians – whose conduct he equated to ‘unnatural acts’ such as murder - ‘from the face of Namibia’” (The Namibian, 2001:1). Ekandjo also announced “...in the National Assembly that legislation would be tabled in Parliament to combat homosexuality” (ibid). Ekandjo received support for his homophobic perspective from community members at a public gathering in a Windhoek suburb called Katutura. Women spoke out against gay men, saying things such as: “there is no way we can allow gay and homosexual relationships to continue in this country we have fought for. Even the cattle are dying because of their ungodly practices...” (Hamata, 2000:1). Such sayings are markers of the belief system of some Namibians that homosexuality is un-Christian and against the will of God.

It is not surprising that homosexuality is termed un-Christian because Christian doctrine’s underlying assumptions are incorporated in patriarchal and heterosexual systems. “Most mainstream religions and religious institutions strongly promote heterosexual marriage while determinedly discouraging, same-sex behaviour and relationships” (Cornelson, 1998:265). Christianity is no exception and openly proclaims a place for the family, marriage and heterosexuality however, at the same time, disowning homosexuality in various ways such as opposing the legalization of gay marriage. Christian homophobic discourse is based on the “...premise that gay and lesbian people are sinners because of their sexual orientation, and must stop

engaging in this ‘sin of homosexuality’ before they can be accepted fully in the House of God” (Sister Namibia, 2001:19).

The notion that homosexuality is un-Christian is very popular in Namibia, even amongst those who could not be classified as homophobes. “ ‘Church’ may be defined variously as a community of believers; a building; an institution; the definitive authority on moral and ethical norms; a sanctuary; a seat of oppression...” (Smith, 1999:98). In the last decade, in almost all Namibian churches, fierce debates have raged on the issue of homosexuality. Namibia is predominantly a Christian country since morality is still largely based on Christian beliefs. “Church teaching on homosexuality, resting on traditional interpretations of Scripture, broadly divides the church into two distinct camps, those who accept current or orthodox understandings and those who consider established church practice teaching to be in error and in need of revision” (Smith, 1999:97). The church finds itself in an ambivalent situation of arguments for and against homosexuality in the church. There are Christians who feel that the church should abandon old-fashioned policies on homosexuality and the church should not condemn it any longer.

“Christianity, a ‘western’ religion, is used and has been used in attack against minority groups and what is generally seen to be weaker” (SAHRYN, 2004:2). As indicated, gay men are labeled by many Christians as sinners and are not formally recognized or accepted in their churches. Numerous church leaders criticize homosexual practices or persons. “...Traditional views are still widely held in

established Christian churches, where references to the Bible and an emphasis on ‘family values’ are used to condemn homosexuality” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:40). They are convinced that it is not God’s will and believe the Bible indicates that homosexuality is a sin. Some churches in Namibia wish to take on the role of ‘curing’ gay men. This means that they accept gay men as sinners who have to repent and change their ways (their sexual orientation). Therefore, it is a prerequisite for gay men to discard their homosexual orientation before being accepted as worthy Christians. References are made to “...gay pastors who married women in order to hide their sexual orientation and become ordained, or lesbian students of theology who have not been ordained because of their sexual orientation” (Sister Namibia, 2001:19).

Often, gay men would become estranged from their churches as they are judged and sometimes convicted by their fellow Christians. Christians opposing homosexuality in the church base their arguments on Biblical texts and interpretations thereof. “The majority of interpreters do believe or assume that the Bible quite clearly opposes homosexuality” (Scroggs, 1983:7). Biblical texts that are used to demonstrate a criticism of homosexuality may in fact not have been written with that in mind. These texts “...reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current” (Seow, 1996: 87). Christians should take into consideration that Biblical texts do not stand alone or apart from the world in which they were written. Biblical texts like any other should be carefully reviewed in the light of history and language. Texts from the Bible can so often be manipulated to fit current-day ideologies. For this

reason, interpreters often disagree in their conclusions about verses in the Bible that might refer to homosexuality.

Research showed that "...heterosexuals who identify with a fundamentalist religious denomination and frequently attend religious services typically manifest higher levels of sexual prejudice than the non-religious and members of liberal denominations" (Herek & Capitanio, 1995, as quoted by Herek, 2000:20). Several Christians do oppose homosexuality but argue that it is no different from other sins. Khaxas (2001) said that more conservative sections of the church still push the idea of homosexuality as a sin whilst the rest of the church is serious about keeping dialogue open in order to build common ground and understanding on the issue of homosexuality. Previously, the church was totally against homosexuality. Traces of the ban of homosexuality in Christianity are still visible in the church today. These include policies such as the church not allowing homosexuals to be ordained or allowed to practice as pastors. Homosexuals are not permitted to administer sacraments in certain churches. In some churches, homosexuals, (if 'exposed'), are expected to resign and undergo pastoral counselling. Thus, homosexuals are expected to change and reform their 'deviant' and 'sinful' behaviour.

"Many gay priests battle courageously on, maintaining a remarkable integrity in the face of prejudice, ignorance and lack of institutional or pastoral support..." (Gill, 1998:119). Gay priests are frequently obliged to hide the true status of their sexual orientation in order to follow their vocation. Others have been brave enough to

‘come out of the closet’. Some have given up the very profession that betrayed and victimized them. Very few succeeded in altering the traditional view of Christianity.

Today, the church took on an ambivalent stance on the contemporary issue of homosexuality. It is as though the church is more lenient on the matter, allowing homosexuals to be members of the church, as long as they do not ‘openly’ practice their sexual orientation. The position of the church, with regard to homosexuality, causes more confusion among Namibians. This discourse is significant because Christianity dictated moral conduct in Namibia in the past. It still serves as a compass in legislative decision-making processes.

Literature suggests that the church’s opinion on homosexuality is changing. “The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) has defended the rights of gays and lesbians while maintaining that the anti-homosexual position of the Bible be followed” (Namibian, 2001:1). The Council of Churches in Namibia consists of at least 50 different church leaders. This is a representative sample of the churches in Namibia. These leaders are thought to represent the ideologies of their particular church denominations. The leaders “...rejected any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation” (ibid). However, it is not clear how radical the CCN will be in its effort to reform current anti-homosexual views. No conclusion on the matter of homosexuality has been reached in the church despite numerous attempts to discuss it.

Several letters appeared in local print media, arguing against homosexuality. A letter rejecting homosexuality appeared in the local newspaper, The Windhoek Observer. Dr. Abisai Shejavali argued in favour of the un-Christian homophobic discourse. He mentioned that there is "...no biblical theology that supports homosexuality" (Shejavali, 2001:22). To validate his argument, he quoted several Biblical texts such as Leviticus 20:13; Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:21-27, to demonstrate that the Bible forbids homosexuality. The mentioned texts apparently deal with the condemnation of homosexuality. No direct interpretation was made by the author about these texts, as it is often interpretations of Biblical texts that contribute to the homophobic discourse. Thus, the texts are presented as they are and are open to interpretation and analysis. He continued to air his opinion on homosexuality by implying the following:

- a) God hates it (homosexuality); it is a shame and an impure thing to practise.
- b) Homosexuality is a horrid thing.
- c) Their acts (homosexual acts) are contrary to nature.
- d) Gay marriage is a horrible, shameful and evil act.
- e) Homosexuality is equal to social evils such as rape, murder, theft and prostitution.
- f) Homosexuality is bestial, a crime, a horror and is sodomy in the sight of God.



g) Those who practise homosexuality deserve God's present and eternal judgment.

Shejvali (2001) insinuated that those who are not against homosexuality are out to deceive Namibians, by promoting homosexuality as human rights. He recommended that homosexual supporters should be apprehended and should not 'cause decay of morals' in the Namibian nation. He also said that the Namibian Constitution does not promote homosexuality since it does not explicitly condone it. He added that even if the constitution made provision for protection of gay rights, the Bible ('the constitution of the world') should be adhered to firstly, above any other constitution. He declared "lawmakers should enact laws that repudiate homosexuality and protect our youth from becoming gays" (ibid).

Certainly many politicians agree that the practise of homosexual orientation should be banned. Former Justice Minister, Albert Kawana, stated in Namibia's National Assembly that "homosexuality is illegal and criminal" (Dentlinger, 2004:1). Kawana continued to say that sexual orientation is not really accepted in any Namibian law or policy. According to Kawana, the Supreme Court of Namibia considers homosexuality and similar acts illegal and criminal (ibid).

A letter entitled 'No sin is greater than another' written by The Rainbow Project in a local newspaper, states that "Leviticus 18:22 and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah are two biblical passages commonly misused to promote hatred against homosexuals" (The Rainbow Project, in The Namibian, 2004:9). The Rainbow Project brought this

to the public's attention to create awareness on homophobic discourse that utilises religion, especially Christianity, and negative interpretations of Biblical texts that are employed to promote homophobia in Namibia. In this specific article, The Rainbow Project, addressed existing myths about homosexuality in Namibia. Some of the myths spread, are that homosexuality is unnatural, un-African and un-Christian.

A letter was written by Z. Sibindi, in response to this article, and presented numerous counter-statements and arguments to those provided by The Rainbow Project. Sibindi (2004) stated that the Bible is deliberately misinterpreted by gays and pro-gay people in support of their arguments. He too referred to certain Biblical verses such as 1 Corinthians and Romans 8, to condemn homosexuality and the legitimacy thereof. In addition, misinformation is fed to Namibians in support of gays and facts are not presented in the appropriate context to enable one to discern the truth (Sibindi (2004). For example, on the unnatural nature of homosexuality, the writer mentioned the findings of a study that was quoted by The Rainbow Project. The study focused on homosexuality in animal species. Only 10 000 of animal species were investigated in this study, whilst millions of species exists (ibid). The author reasoned that this is not a very reliable study to use to justify homosexuality and homosexual rights.

Furthermore, he based his opinion on the procreation theory and, like many, argued that humans' very existence is based on the ability to procreate. This is the purpose of one's life and if it is not the case, then such a human is considered unnatural.

Nonetheless, he could not conclude for certain whether homosexuality was a choice or as a result of a hormone deficiency, as he puts it (ibid).

#### **2.4.2 Implications of homophobic discourse for gay men in Namibia**

Traces of homophobic discourse in Namibia are visible in the media, religious practices, and the country's legislation and politics. It is not difficult to familiarize oneself with Namibian homophobic discourse since it is highly publicized due to the political interest in the matter. Open homophobic practices can have serious consequences for gay men. "...Homophobic attacks are dangerous as violent words from a popular leader may lead to violence against innocent citizens" (NSHR, 2001:1). The power of homophobic rhetoric is the controversy it creates in Namibia. Homophobic discourse is supported by the power and status of its speakers, influencing the ideology of ordinary Namibian citizens who rely on the judgments of leaders in the community. Sonia Maffeis, a Namibian lesbian activist, explained that "comments made by people who are regarded very highly in the country have a great impact on the way people think and act..." (New Era, 1998:20).

The most significant repercussion of homophobic discourse for gay men is that gay rights are not recognized in Namibia. "Namibia has not yet altered old laws against certain homosexual acts..." (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:30). Sodomy is still illegal in Namibia and no effort has been made to change this legislation to accommodate homosexuality. There are also no specific provisions in Namibian laws, except in the Labour Act of 1992, for equal rights based on sexual orientation. "In Namibia, the

legal situation is ...confusing” (Afrol News, 2005:2). Judges relied on ‘popular’ public opinions to formulate judgments surrounding homosexuality because there is no existing legislation on the matter. Needless to say, non-existent gay rights and protective legislation for homosexual orientation cause human rights violations of gay men. “Views on and legislation against homosexuality have always been significantly informed by discourses other than legal considerations of law and order” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:40). Homophobes refer to Namibian legislation to substantiate their argument that homosexuality is unnatural, un-African and un-Christian.

Liz Frank, a German citizen, applied for permanent residence with Namibia’s Immigration Selection Board. The major motivating factor of her application was her long-term relationship with a Namibian citizen. The Ministry of Home Affairs turned down her application. Frank felt that this was unfairly done because of current anti-homosexual statements by politicians and turned to the court. The Supreme Court of Namibia ruled that “...gay and lesbian relationships cannot claim to have the same legal status in Namibia as heterosexual unions...” (Menges, 2001:1). One of the judges deciding on the court ruling, Acting Judge of Appeal (O’Linn), commented that “...the trend, norms, values and aspirations of the Namibian nation” had to be taken into account in such a judgment (ibid). The Judge quoted ex-President Nujoma and Jerry Ekandjo’s remarks in parliament as evidence of the above-mentioned, to substantiate his ruling on the matter. Judge O’Linn ruled that the Namibian Constitution was not written with intent to place a homosexual relationship on an

equal basis with a heterosexual one. Homosexual couples are also not considered as a 'family' before law.

As mentioned previously, homophobic judgments are often accompanied by actions of verbal attacks such as hate speech, discriminatory acts and other forms of violations of gay men's human rights. "Regular uninformed hate speech by political leaders creates a climate of intolerance and contributes to the violence enacted against lesbians and gays" (The Rainbow Pages, 2000:14). Homophobic comments by politicians may encourage homophobic feelings toward gay men in some members of the Namibian community, as they are often based on unfounded prejudices and stereotypes about gay men. This results in gay men being treated unfairly according to preconceived ideas about their sexual orientation.

"Verbal and physical attacks on male and female homosexuals are daily occurrences which go largely unreported" (The Namibian, 2003:9). This scenario occurs because people support the Namibian homophobic discourse or people fear for their own well-being or is because the country's jurisdiction fails the people it serves, especially minority groups.

There are numerous rumors and incidents reported of the country's civil servants disrespecting and violating Namibians' human rights. Members of the Special Field Force (SFF) in Namibia targeted two men wearing earrings in the street. Apparently, they removed or threatened to remove the earrings from these men. The SFF

members claimed that they were conducting an official routine operation. They continued by saying, “we will order any men to take their earrings off or will use force to rip them from your ear if you don’t want to comply” (Hamata, 2001:1). One of the victims confirmed that the SFF was prepared to use force because one of them allegedly pointed a gun at him (the victim). The journalists that were present also confirmed the violent behaviour of the SFF members who held them captive for hours because they wanted to report the incident. The SFF Commander denounced the incident and denied that the behaviour of the particular SFF members was part of the official SFF operations.

## **2.5 Psychological impact of homophobic discourse on gay men**

This research examined the consequences of homophobic discourse on the psychological well-being of gay men in Namibia. The psychological implications of being a target of discrimination, particularly homophobia, are considerably less researched and understood than the psychological issues relating to the perpetrators, for example the homophobes. “Homophobia in general and its Southern African variant at present, constitutes a grave threat to (...) the integrity of the individual...” (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:30). The possibilities of the psychological consequences of perceived homophobic discourse were investigated in the literature of the current study.

Homophobic discourse in Africa has a great psychological impact on a gay person's psychological well-being. The health and happiness of a person relies heavily on the social acceptance, respect and dignity given by his/her respective community. Gays, being outcasts in African societies, do not possess any of these and their status and accompanied treatment can have detrimental effects on their mental health. In order for gays to function as respectable citizens of African communities, they have to hide 'in the closet', hiding the true nature of their sexual orientation and identity. "Keeping quiet about one's sexual orientation can cause a great deal of stress and take up a lot of energy" (Psychological Service Center, 2004:2).

Besides having to cope with the pressures that daily life presents to people, gays have to face homophobia and its accompanying stressors. Araeb (2000) emphasizes that the constant fear that their homosexual status might become known prevents gay men from seeking health care and contributes to ill psychological health. Other scholars agree with this argument, and Isaack & Gunkel (2003:) argued that, "fear of discrimination will logically lead to concealment of true identity and this must be harmful to personal confidence and self-esteem" (pg. 8).

Gay men in Africa face many internal conflicts because of the constant attacks on their sexual orientation. These men might develop severe psychological disorders because of the distress they experience in their daily lives. Gay men might just as well live in isolation because their societies consider them outcasts and reject them as an integral part of an African society. Conservative African communities have the

ability to psychologically deplete a gay man of his worth through ongoing homophobic attacks.

Allport (1954) suggested that the target of prejudice can come to internalize others' negative views of the in-group. More often than not, homophobic discourse has an adverse effect on gay men's psychological well-being and acts of discrimination such as homophobia can injure people psychologically. Needless to say, this implies that homophobic discourse can be a contributor to psychological distress in gay men.

“Depression and anxiety were chosen as indicators of psychological distress because they are two of the most prevalent mental health problems of today” (Weary & Edwards, 1994:10, as quoted by *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 2005:259). Gay men are a vulnerable population and are at increased risk for psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, which might lead to suicide if it is not treated promptly. Depression is a symptom of a range of mental disorders, most being classified under mood disorders. Depression is “...a mood state of sadness, gloom, and pessimistic ideation, with loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities, accompanied in severe cases by anorexia and consequent weight loss, insomnia (especially middle or terminal insomnia) or hypersomnia, asthenia, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, diminished ability to think or concentrate, or recurrent thoughts of death or suicide” (Colman, 2001:196). This psychological disorder is clearly associated with a low self-esteem. Hence, the prevalence of depression in gay men must be quite high. If no successful intervention takes place with gay men who



constantly find themselves in a homophobic environment, it can trigger self-harm and ultimately suicide. Suicide is “the act of killing oneself deliberately” (Colman, 2001:719). If a gay person does not resolve his identity crisis and sees no hope for the future, he might decide to take his own life.

“...Cultural and social differences may alter the way a lesbian, gay or bisexual person manages her/his feelings and identity...” (Psychological Service Center, 2004:1). In a homophobic society, a gay man might feel anxious and could have poor coping skills because he is marginalized and perceives a multitude of threats by society. If not closely monitored, controlled and treated, this fear of perceived threat from homophobia can cause the person to suffer from anxiety. Anxiety is defined as “a state of uneasiness, accompanied by dysphoria and somatic signs and symptoms of tension, focused on apprehension of possible failure, misfortune, or danger” (Colman, 2001:46). He might decide to be ‘in the closet’ in order to protect himself from violent verbal attacks. Many homosexuals frequently struggle with issues around their sexual identity. The gay person may start to believe the negative messages he constantly hears about himself; and he might not be able to differentiate between his own ‘self’ and the one constructed through homophobic discourse.

“Individuals often experience much confusion about whether or not their feelings are genuine or healthy, as well as awareness that these feelings imply an ‘unacceptable difference’” (Psychological Service Center, 2004:2). The majority of gay men try to live lives that are more acceptable or they pretend to be heterosexual in order to be

accepted by others. Hate speech are public, social messages that “contribute to the development of very negative self-images, identities or low self-esteems” of gay men (Psychological Service Center, 2004:3).

Some gay people have grave difficulties to accept their own sexual orientation because there is such hate and opposition for whom they are. It is therefore not unusual for gay people to have internalized this hate, negative messages and devaluation about homosexuality. “Internalized homophobia: negative judgment about one’s own gay or bisexual orientation. Internalized homophobia is a major impediment to the coming out process and to the creation and maintenance of a healthy self-esteem” (Cornelson, 1998:265). The internalized homophobia or self-hate because of external homophobia can be highly destructive and not allow a gay person to resolve his internal crises and conflicts about his sexual orientation. Gay people are often not sure about their ‘gayness’ because of all the mixed messages they receive and all the misinformation about homosexuality that is passed on through homophobic discourse. “Internalized homophobia, or what some clinicians call ‘internalized homonegativity’, represents lesbians and gay persons’ internalization of negative attitudes and assumptions concerning homosexuality...” (Shidlo, 1994; Sophie, 1987:176,205, as quoted by Balsam, Chung & Szymanski, 2001:27). These men may start to believe that they are indeed ‘abnormal’, ‘sick’ or ‘evil’ human beings. These types of “negative self-concepts and low self-esteem can lead some people to engage in self-destructive behaviours such as abusing alcohol and/or drugs” (Psychological Service Center, 2004:3).

A study done by Balsam (et al, 2001) suggested that internalized homophobia could be a cause of psychological distress in many gays. Furthermore, the study found internalized homophobia in gay men positively associate with depression and somatic symptoms. The study clearly demonstrated that homophobia and one of its ripple effects could be detrimental to a gay person's psychological well-being. This study advanced one's understanding of internalized homophobia and its impact on homosexuals. However, its focus was more on the lesbian population. Thus, a critique of the study is that it cannot treat lesbians and gays interchangeably as they are faced with unique homophobic challenges. For example, lesbians face more 'corrective rape' than gay men do and this could have a distinct psychological consequence on its own.

Gay men constantly face fear and worry about rejection from others, especially significant others such as their families and friends. 'Coming out of the closet' poses many threats to gays in all domains of their lives. They could be personally rejected, they may experience family conflict, they could be threatened with unemployment, their safety might be compromised and they may be alienated from their faith (Psychological Service Center, 2004). Situations like these can be anxiety-provoking and might lead to depression in gay men. The above-mentioned factors are inherently stressful because they deal with a sense of loss and hopelessness. It can also be very humiliating and shameful when one is discriminated against on the grounds of a private matter such as sexual orientation. 'Coming out of the closet' can

be very traumatic and it can be considered a significant life event. Such a life crisis can have considerable psychological outcomes for a person.

Einhorn (2004) stated that if a person (gay man) who was discriminated against has a sound psychological structure and emotional stamina to withstand and cope with homophobia, then homophobic discrimination might not be psychologically damaging to such an individual. This argument links to the transactional model of stress and coping of Lazarus & Folkman (1984). According to the theorists of this model, meaning-making of stressful situations, as is the case with homophobia, determines the psychological impact such stressors would have on a person. Thus, the psychological impact of what happens to someone depends on what the experiences mean to him/her. "Experience is not what happens to us, experience is what we do with what happens to us" (Pelaez, 1970:1).

Returning to the issue of HIV/AIDS, Peter Aggleton, a researcher at the University of London said, "...hostility towards men having sex with men, and in some cases denial of male-to-male sex, leads to inadequate HIV-prevention measures" (Maletsky, 2000:1). Gay men became irresponsible and took unnecessary life-threatening risks such as engaging in unprotected, casual sex. According to one of The Rainbow Project's pamphlets, gay men experiment with casual sex and often use drugs while sexually active, which impose the risk of HIV infection and transmission among gay men. Aggleton presented a paper on men's role in HIV prevention and care. He further revealed that "in contexts where homosexual relationships were highly

stigmatized or even criminalized, open discussion can be difficult” (ibid). He encouraged broad discussions on homosexual sex as it is a measure for gay men to brace and protect themselves against Namibian homophobic discourse and its consequences. It was also said that men might have secret or rushed sex with other men in order to hide their sexual orientation in a homophobic society as Namibia.

In support of Aggleton’s argument, “quoting from a study conducted among hundreds of homosexual men, ‘the most important component of preventing HIV infection among gay men is their willingness to identify themselves as gay, and to become sexually-confident, well-educated gay men, who are sexually and socially engaged with community’” (Roberts, 1996:1). In sum, this research is convinced that a homophobic environment can be detrimental to a gay man’s health condition and consequently those of other people. This re-emphasizes the idea that gay men need a neutral, non-judgmental environment within which to be themselves.

A study by Ayala & Diaz (cited in Yoshikawa & Wilson, 2004) on Latino gay men found that social discrimination on gay men might impact their HIV risk behaviour and mental health. It seems there is a positive correlation between HIV infection and psychological distress in gay men. It is as if gay men become reckless and take unnecessary risks with their physical health because they experience psychological pain. The study by Ayala & Diaz indicated that experiences of homophobia are associated with higher levels of HIV risk behaviours (ibid). In support of this evidence, Dean & Meyer, (cited in Yoshikawa & Wilson, 2004) studied the impact of

internalized homophobia on HIV risk behaviours in gay men. They found that gay men find it difficult to cope with the stigma of being gay and this contributes to the sexual risk taking of gay men. The study also shows that homophobic discourse can have critical consequences for gay men's physical and mental health.

Currently, Namibian gay men are not able to avoid, escape or transcend homophobic discourse. Homophobia, specifically hate speech, constantly surrounds Namibian gay men, influences them on a daily basis and remains a real threat to them. They often do not have the psychological tools to manage homophobic attacks, as they simultaneously have to fight other forms of discrimination. The next chapter looks at how this current study was carried out by focusing on the research methods and methodology employed.

### **3. EMPIRICAL DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods used for the current study, and why they were selected. It focuses on sampling procedures and how the unstructured interview guideline was developed as a tool to collect data with. The method of analysis, Discourse Analysis, is also reviewed and issues regarding validity and reliability are discussed. Moreover, some of the difficulties encountered while doing the research are briefly mentioned.

The fundamental reason for the research study is to point out the psychological experiences and awareness of gay men amidst all the negative talk about them in Namibia. The first objective of the study was to explore the homophobic discourse in Namibia. Secondly, it was to explore gay men's awareness and experience of the homophobic discourse in Namibia. Thirdly, it was to explore the psychological impact homophobic discourse has on gay men in Namibia.

#### **3.1 Research methodology and methods**

##### **3.1.1 Qualitative research**

This study made use of a qualitative research design in order to address the research question. "Qualitative research is more idiographic in that case studies or relatively small samples are employed with few claims made regarding the wider representatives of the sample or the generalisability of the findings" (Struwig &

Stead, 2001:17). This study was concerned with a few cases or texts to provide information about gay men's awareness and experience of homophobic discourse and its consequent psychological impact on gay men.

The processes that occur in relationships and the way humans interact with the world help them to construct meaning out of their experiences. In search of meaning, "qualitative research is more orientated to the interplay of individual and contextual factors and this is facilitated by the use of interview and observation methods" (Struwig & Stead, 2001:18). This type of research paradigm ensures that all aspects of the text are considered and its methods of enquiry should allow a research participant to reveal all relevant knowledge without any limitations. "Should researchers, however, be interested in understanding elements of a phenomenon, they would be forced to employ qualitative methodologies" (Mouton & Marais, 1996:169). This qualitative research paradigm was relevant for this study because it is an exploration of ideas and creates the possibility for theory-building.

Qualitative research intends to understand the phenomenon under investigation without imposing preconceived ideas or expectations (ibid). The intention of the study was not to generalize the data to the rest of the Namibian population. The goal was to use case studies, to create an understanding of the phenomenon of Namibian homophobic discourse with its psychological outcomes in gay men's contexts, frames of reference and experiences. Research was executed to explore, discover and capture the experiences and awareness of a few individual gay men. Each case was



unique because no unit is a replica of another. People and their perceptions of the world are essentially different, even more so their style of communication and their interpretations thereof.

Homosexuals are active in constructing the gay reality and the world they find themselves in. They are not merely passive receivers of homophobic discourse but partake in this particular style of communication. Discourses do leave their marks on people, as it is an interaction, a co-existence, a way of being and an interpretation of reality when meaning-making processes occur. It is the way these participants made sense of their particular realities that mattered in this study.

“Qualitative research is part of a debate, not fixed truth” (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1995:3). This study does not provide final answers on gay men, but can be the starting point for much-needed research on sexual orientation. This study arose out of the need to explore this area. There is a lack of such basic information on homophobia and its effects in Namibia.

### **3.1.2 Discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis was selected to evaluate the data obtained because it “...is a range of qualitative research techniques used to analyse recorded or transcribed conversations” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:237). Discourse analysis can give meaning to the raw data that was collected from the gay participants. It was the ideal method of

analysis for this research project because it is concerned with the social context in which the participants' responses were generated. The method of Parker (1992) was used to evaluate the data collected in this study. The first five criteria of Parker's discourse analysis, which were used for the data analysis, are: 1) Discourses are realized in texts; 2) Discourses are about objects; 3) Discourses are about subjects; 4) A discourse is a coherent system of meanings; and 5) A discourse refers to other discourses.

Discourse analysis enables one to understand the conditions behind the research problem that is under investigation. It can reveal hidden motivations behind the text under scrutiny. This is possible because discourse analysis makes use of deconstructive reading and is an interpretation of the problem or text. This suggests that discourse analysis is utilised in a study to deconstruct concepts and belief systems or record the social values and assumptions that are generally held about a phenomenon. Discourse analysis also aims to illuminate the effects of discourses. The broader (social) context in which a text or a gay man functions was assessed in this study. Discourse analysis can identify the patterns of interaction regarding this or whatever is relevant to gay men.

In order to trace the psychological components behind the social interaction that occurs in homophobic discourse, one can use discourse analysis that was developed to dissect discourse and its meanings. Thus, discourse analysis focuses on the significance and creative role language plays in the meaning-making processes of

understanding the world and understanding oneself in relation to the world. Discourse analysis becomes a process of evaluation, which encompasses ‘interpretation and debate’. Consequently, it can provide insight or knowledge based on continuous debate or argumentation.

A multitude of aspects such as the social, cognitive and interpersonal that can add to an individuals’ experiences, can be utilized by the range of perspectives in making sense of a given discourse or text. A text is defined as a multidimensional structure (Kaplan, 1990; Dellinger, 1995). Different dispositions of the world from ‘socially-situated speakers and writers’ are brought to a text. A text is considered to be layered with meaning that came about by a variety of processes such as interaction and world views. These mentioned processes influence one’s experiences and the way one talks about or reacts to it. One can argue that discourse analysis accounts for the production, internal structure and organization of a text. It also provides a critique in its theoretical and analytical interpretations of a text.

“Discourse analysis is used to show how certain discourse (ways of talking and behaving) can be employed to achieve certain effects in specified contexts” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:14). Discourses have a function and play a role in the specific situation that it is developed and employed. Different intentions of or meanings given by a person to a specific object, or a certain situation, at a specific time, inclusive of certain influences affecting it, can be represented in a given text and can be retrieved from it.

It is therefore critical to assume that there are different possible ways of talking about homosexuality and homophobia. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (cited in Struwig & Stead, 2001) highlighted the aim of discourse analysis as identifying discourses in the first instance. The different meanings, debates or themes of a text should be noted. The way the arguments or meanings are given is equally important in analysing a text. Wood and Kroger (cited in Kahn, 2005) seem to agree that the first step for discourse analytical researchers is to ‘ground themselves in ‘participants’ concerns, with the way that they themselves work out the issues at hand’. It is also critical that the researcher assesses his or her own contributions in presenting the text and considers it in the interpretation of the text.

The main goal of such type of studies “...is to find common themes to illustrate the range of meaning of a phenomenon” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:16). Discourse analysis satisfies this goal because in its first step of analysis, when a discourse is realized in texts, it specifically considers the ‘tissue of meaning’ of a given text and the retrieval of connotations. This network of ideas and associations of the subject can compose knowledge (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

“Knowledge can vary according to contextual, political and cultural factors” (Cuba & Lincoln, 1994, as quoted by Struwig & Stead, 2001:17). As suggested above, information does not appear in its ‘pure’ form, but is created, interpreted and presented. The information itself is embedded in a web of meaning-making

processes. This was the reason why emphasis was placed on the gay man's perspective of his beliefs, awareness and experiences.

### **3.2 Sample and setting**

The research was done in collaboration with the Rainbow Project. As mentioned previously, this is a non-governmental organization, which is a human rights organization for homosexual, bisexual and trans-gendered people. Since the study focused on a marginalized group, it was decided to involve a homosexual-friendly organization. This was done to establish trust, security and a suitable environment within which to do research. It was also a link with gay participants, who might have been skeptical of the research project because of its sensitive and intimate nature. The Rainbow Project therefore provided the ideal setting given the above-mentioned factors.

Initially, an opportunity sample of ten research participants was selected. This sampling technique forms part of a non-representative sampling process and methods. "An opportunity sample selects a group of participants based on the section of the population available at a given time" (Cross, 2001:14). In most psychological research the sample usually consists of people who are readily available and accessible to the researcher. Given the sensitive and private/intimate nature of a topic such as homosexuality, this method of sampling was considered most suitable. Respondents who were willing to participate in this study and who met all the

necessary criteria were chosen according to the set criteria. Although ten interviews were conducted, only five were used in the final text. The selection was made according to the following criteria:

The participants had to be gay males and should have been convinced of their homosexual orientation. No doubt should have been in the person's mind about his gay status, such as being bisexual or still questioning his sexual orientation. The study focused on gay men because they are more visible than lesbians in Namibia. It seems that the Namibian people are not concerned about women's activities; the focus is on masculinity and its power. This recognition makes gay men the priority sample for the investigation of this research.

Participants had to be twenty-one years or older. Levinson (1977) defined this period as early adulthood. He stated that this could be a time of rich satisfaction in terms of love, sexuality, family life and realisation of a person's major goals in life. A participant had to be a gay man who was content with himself, his identity and his place in the world. In other words, the persons under investigation must have matured and settled into their personhood.

Another criterion was that the individual had to be 'out of the closet'. He should be in a position to clearly reveal his views (in terms of the life experiences and awareness) concerning homophobia. A gay man's response might have been limited if he was still 'in the closet' because it would restrict him to share his true opinions.

The participants had to speak indigenous languages or come from indigenous Namibian language groups. Although it is not a large sample, the reason for the criterion is to make the sample more characteristic of the majority of the Namibian people. In addition, this type of sample addresses the main theme in the Namibian homophobic discourse, namely, that homosexuality is un-African.

Lastly, the subject had to be a Namibian citizen. This is imperative as there are currently no scientific records on the phenomenon in the Namibian context. Studies about homosexuals are rarely done. “Scientists have this irritating propensity to think of sex research as essentially unimportant and frivolous. This despite the fact that sex is one of the most important motivations of human existence” (Sailer, 2004:1). In Namibia, no studies have been done on homophobic discourse and the possible psychological outcomes for gay men. One of the possible reasons that this study was the first of its kind in the country might be because homosexuality is believed to be a foreign phenomenon. It would be valuable to see how homophobic discourse is perceived and how it has developed to psychologically influence a small marginalized group of Namibians.

### **3.3 Data generation**

#### **3.3.1 Unstructured interview**

The scientific method of inquiry that was employed for the research project was the unstructured interview. “The aim in qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework for a subject to speak freely in his or her own terms about a set of concerns which the researcher brings to the interaction and whatever else the subject may introduce” (Mouton & Marais, 1996:21). The unstructured interview was the most suitable type of interviewing for a study dealing with discourses. It was thought wise to select the unstructured interview amongst other methods of data collection, since the researcher wanted to get a broad understanding from the research participant on subjects such as homophobic discourse and personal experiences of its psychological outcomes. Since little knowledge exists on homophobic discourse and its psychological effects in Namibia, the research avoided too specific and closed questions in order to explore the matter. Even more so, due to the sensitive nature of homophobic discourse, the researcher opted for open questions, which could allow the participant to comfortably express his understanding about the topic in his own way.

“In an unstructured interview, the researcher presents broad questions or topics and the subjects are free to answer in any manner they wish. Unstructured interview formats permit the researcher to follow whatever comes up in response to the broad questions and go wherever it may lead, as long as it is relevant to the research



objective” (Maddi, 1989:28). The unstructured interview does not place limitations on the participant’s response. Furthermore, the participant is encouraged by this type of interview to freely communicate knowledge that comes to mind with regard to the research question. The participant plays an important role in an unstructured interview in determining what aspects of the topic will be covered. Unstructured interviews’ “...main advantage is that it provides in-depth data on the topic being investigated” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:99). Often, a rich and broad overview is given by the participant’s response. The unstructured interview is applicable to a qualitative study as this technique tries to capture exactly what the participant conveys to the researcher and what the participant experiences. It has great potential to contribute to existing knowledge on the topic.

### **3.3.2 Interview guideline**

Ten (eventually, only five were considered for the research) case studies were done based on the interview guideline. “An interview guide is the list of topics and sub-topics within an area of inquiry about which a researcher wishes to gather information...” (Mouton & Marais, 1996:213). The interview guideline was formulated according to the aims and objectives of the research. The interview guideline is based on three prominent themes that surfaced in the literature provided on homophobic discourse in Namibia. In developing an interview guideline, the definitions of discourse and homophobia (provided in the Literature Review) were taken into consideration. Thus, the guideline could target an understanding of

concepts such as homophobic discourse and psychological impact in the Namibian context. Finally, the aim was also to gain insight about what these phenomena meant to the research participants and how they perceived it to influence them psychologically.

The guideline consists of three main questions that could address further possible themes of homophobic discourse in Namibia. As mentioned before, homophobic discourse in Namibia is defined as unnatural, un-Christian and un-African. The first four questions and sub-questions addressed the first research objective to explore the homophobic discourse in Namibia. The questions were as follow:

1. Are you aware of the homophobic discourse in Namibia?
  - (a) Are you aware of the talk about homosexual people and the discrimination of homosexual people in Namibia?
  - (b) Are you aware of the talk, communication or speeches about homosexual people in Namibia?
  - (c) Can you tell me more about it?
  
2. Are you aware that people argue that homosexuality is un-African?
  - (a) What is your knowledge about this?
  - (b) What do you say about this?
  - (c) Can you say more or can you tell me more about it?

3. Are you aware that people argue that homosexuality is unnatural?
  - (a) What is your knowledge about this?
  - (b) What do you say about this?
  - (c) Can you say more or can you tell me more about it?
  
4. Are you aware that people argue that homosexuality is un-Christian?
  - (a) What is your knowledge about this?
  - (b) What do you say about this?
  - (c) Can you say more or can you tell me more about it?

These questions introduced the topic and aimed to elicit appropriate responses on homophobic discourse from the participants. For some, more clarification or probing of the alternative sub-questions were required.

The second objective of the study was to explore gay men's awareness and experience of homophobic discourse in Namibia. The following question addressed this research objective:

5. What are your experiences of homophobic discourse in Namibia?
  - (a) How did you personally experience homophobia?
  - (b) How do others around you experience this?

The third objective of the research study was to explore the psychological impact on gay men of homophobic discourse in Namibia. The questions that targeted information on this objective were as follows:

6. What has been the psychological impact of homophobic discourse on you?
  - (a) Can you say more?
  - (b) Can you give examples?
  
7. How has the Namibian homophobic discourse impacted on your thoughts?
  - (a) Can you say more?
  - (b) Can you give examples?
  
8. How has the Namibian homophobic discourse impacted on your emotions?
  - (a) Can you say more?
  - (b) Can you give examples?

The last question was aimed at giving the participant space to add any information to the interview that he feels is also important to share. The question was as follows:

9. Anything else you would like to say on the topic?

Finally, some questions were asked to target biographical information of the research participants. They are as follows:

10. What is your age?
11. What is your religion?
12. What is your language?

### **3.4 Reliability and validity**

This section focuses on the reliability and validity of the research methodology. Reliability “...refers to the extent to which observations from different sources are similar within a specified time period” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:134). In order to obtain reliability in this research project, the same interview guidelines were applied to all the research participants. “Reliability is a measure of whether replications would produce similar results” (Cross, 2001:195). The criteria that were stipulated in Chapter 3 for the selection of the sample of the study aimed to achieve reliable and valid results. For example, if the study were to include lesbian women the study would not be reliable because the research topic exclusively focuses on gay men. In addition, if the study were to accidentally include adolescents in the sample the exact results could not be reproduced in a twin study whose sample were entirely made up of gay men in their early adulthood.

All the responses of the participants were tape-recorded and transcripts were typed verbatim. The data of this research was transcribed to a set of rules in a transcription guideline and an example can be found in the appendices. The transcripts were checked by a qualified psychologist to ensure the gay men's responses have been accurately reported.

This research appears to be reliable as similar results on homophobic discourse from gay men in a previous pilot study were obtained. It is believed that the results of this research project are reliable because it is in agreement with other continental and international studies of homophobic discourse that was referred to in the literature. It is reassuring to know that a huge discrepancy does not exist between the findings of this research and that of other research done on homophobic discourse that was mentioned in Chapter 2.

The reliability of this research project was ensured when an effort was made in the data analysis and interpretation of results, to let the voices of the research participants speak to highlight the discourses that are present in the texts. This was done to provide a 'true' reflection of the data obtained of how a few gay men experience homophobic discourse and its psychological outcomes in Namibia.

Research findings were validated so that data was adequately analysed and interpreted. "The plausibility and credibility of research findings are essential" (Struwig & Stead, 2001:18). Only five of the ten interviews were considered for the

purposes of this study because the rest of the interviews did not provide sufficient information relevant to the research problem. The first few interviews were test interviews, to verify the interview guideline and were therefore not included. The rest were excluded owing to language constraints on the interviewees' part. Some interviewees could not express themselves well and failed to sufficiently relate their experiences.

“Validity refers to whether a technique can achieve the purpose for which it was designed” (Cross, 2001:193). The study did measure homophobic discourse, as participants described the topic, as given in the Namibian literature. Secondly, the psychological outcomes of homophobic discourse was evaluated because the gay participants shared their knowledge on this. “Face validity is simply whether the measure appears (at face value) to test what it claims to. Face validity is more worthwhile if an opinion is obtained from an expert” (Cross, 2001:193).

The validity of this study was contentious in the area of the definitions and clarity of the interview questions. Concepts such as ‘discourse’ and ‘homophobic discourse’ were not fully explained to the research participants beforehand. This could be meaningful in terms of determining awareness, but it was a challenge for some of them to answer the questions. Interview questions might have been somewhat complex and not entirely easy to understand for some of the participants. Some participants struggled with the English language and were often not very familiar with complicated English terms and were not always sure how to express themselves.

This might have influenced their responses. The solution was to explain the questions when participants communicated that they did not understand the questions or when it was perceived by the researcher that they were confused or misunderstood the questions. As mentioned, five of the ten research interviews were excluded from the study as they would have interfered considerably with the validity and reliability of this study.

Five of the ten interviews were selected because they addressed the research question and objectives. This guaranteed validity because the results of these texts did not divert from the research problem and the intentions of what the research project wanted to achieve. Secondly, it was assessed which of the ten interviewees' responses generally satisfied the five criteria of Parker (1992)'s discourse analytical technique. This process ensured that the research is valid because the research was successful in measuring what it was intended for. This study wanted to know more about homophobic discourse and if discourse analysis can strategically explore a discourse such as the one in question and can inform its description. The researcher aimed to consistently follow the method of discourse analysis in order to increase the reliability of the study.

Precautions were taken not to influence the responses. This study wanted to retrieve the information gays possess, as well as their awareness and experience, as this can indicate what homophobic discourse in Namibia is, as well as inform the discourse.



To ensure that the study is valid and reliable, the researcher guarded against allowing her own personal discourse to cloud the discourses of the research texts.

Bias was cancelled out in only focusing on what was found in the literature and what the texts of the research participants had to offer when the findings of the study were interpreted. The research report did not focus on anything that was outside the framework of the research question. For example, the aetiology of homosexuality was deliberately excluded to eliminate any possible bias. The focus of the study was constantly checked to find and delete any information that did not adhere to the research objectives and that did not fit the research question. This was done to nullify any unconscious bias that might have surfaced during the research process. Avoiding the manipulation of results augmented the reliability and validity of this research.

### **3.5 Difficulties of the study**

The search for available literature on the subject of homophobic discourse, especially in Namibia, proved challenging. Matters of human sexuality and in particular, homophobic discourse are not frequently documented and investigated in Africa. Secondary to this, a lack of resources such as monetary funds hampered the research. It limited the accumulation of literature to what could be found on the research topic in Namibia and what was freely distributed on the World Wide Web. The study

could have been more successful if there was an opportunity to internationally obtain more academic literature.

The controversial nature of the research problem under investigation and the possible threat a study of this nature poses, made some interviewees suspicious and at times defensive. This made it difficult to obtain a lot of information from the participants.

It proved problematic to stay focused on the research question and objectives as there are so many topics and concepts that interlink with homophobic discourse. The same difficulty was experienced with the exclusion of lesbians, as it is often written, interchangeably, about homosexual people (lesbian or homosexual).

## **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the texts were reviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of homophobic discourse. The study intended to explore gay men's awareness and experience of the homophobic discourse in Namibia. The awareness and experience of the five research participants were consequently highlighted. Lastly, the discussion explored the psychological impact of homophobic discourse on gay men in Namibia.

### **4.1 Brief biographical information**

***TABLE 1***

<b>Participant Identification</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>
Participant 1	23 years	Damara-Nama	Christian
Participant 2	22 years	Oshiwambo	Christian
Participant 3	21 years	Damara-Nama	Christian
Participant 4	24 years	Damara-Nama	Christian
Participant 5	25 years	Otjiherero	Christian

## 4.2 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using Discourse Analysis as the method of analysis. Owing to the fact that discourse analysis consists of so many different contrasting approaches, the guiding steps of Parker (1992) were selected to analyze the five texts. As mentioned, five criteria were taken into consideration in this process of analyzing the data. These criteria are: 1) Discourses are realized in texts; 2) Discourses are about objects; 3) Discourses are about subjects; 4) A discourse is a coherent system of meanings; and 5) A discourse refers to other discourses. These criteria will be individually described next, together with the themes that became apparent through the analysis. Responses are referred to as ‘Participant’ and the different cases are referred to by their numbers 1 to 5. For easy referencing, only the symbol appears, for example P-1 or P-5. The direct wording of the participants appears in italics and in inverted commas. Explanations by the researcher are given in brackets [ ].

### 4.2.1 CRITERION 1: DISCOURSES ARE REALISED IN TEXTS

The first criterion is the evaluation of the interview transcripts as given texts. The identification of ideas that were communicated were organised in themes. The first step of discourse analysis was “...treating our objects of study as texts which are described, put into words...” Parker (1992:7). The content or wording is of absolute importance in this method of analysis. That which is given in the interview with its possible underlying meanings is considered in the evaluation of the text. Discourse

analysis is also considered as "...a process of exploring the connotations, allusions and implication which the texts evoke" Parker (1992:7). The texts are deconstructed to find the fundamental meanings that are latent in the text. Certain topics or arguments can be derived from this "ripping apart" of a given text and can shed light on the subject of investigation. The second step is "exploring connotations through some sort of free association, which is best done with other people" (ibid).

## **A. HOMOPHOBIC DISCOURSE**

### ***Homosexuality as un-Christian***

Christianity plays a pivotal role in regulating a person's beliefs and the way he conducts himself. Christianity gives validation and approval to people and allows them to feel grounded in a particular faith. However, many church denominations are advocating celibacy versus homosexual relationships and intercourse. Nonetheless, religious faith often determines one's behaviour and outlook in life.

**P-1** *"Okay, my knowledge regarding it being un-Christian is that, uhm, you can be gay but you cannot practice sodomy...there's no penetration, there's no sodomy in that sense"*

**P-1** *“Because I was raised as a Christian child, you know. In a very Pentecostal atmosphere. And that was very hard for me to accept that I am gay and I have to live out my life as being gay. You know at one point I believed that I should just be, be a celibate and just uh, worship God...”*

Participant 1 experienced internal conflict during childhood when he suspected that he is gay. He experienced emotional turmoil because his faith, Christianity, condemned his sexual orientation. It was almost as though he had to choose between the two. He felt obliged to adhere to the commandments of Christianity, as it is his religion and he believes in it. Then he thought it might be better to live alone and to focus his attention on God only, not ‘practising’ his sexual orientation.

**P-1** *“Because we’re living in a new age where man and man fall in love and, and they have that bond with each other. So I think, as a Christian, the main thing should be based on love”*

Participant 1 argued that Christianity must accept gay people as part of its transformation to adapt to modern society. The argument is that the church evolved in so many other areas such as women’s rights and that it should be the same with the issues on homosexuality. Christianity is expected to be tolerant of all people, accept all people and welcome all people, since it is based on unconditional love.

**P-1** *“So I do, for me being Christian and being gay, I take it as a, as a personal relationship between me and God, you know, and not a social thing. Where it becomes social is when you have to go to church and you have to listen to somebody preach to you and you do listen to the input of others. Then it becomes a social thing. So I don’t take it as a social thing”*

Participant 1 adopted his own way of practising Christianity without the traditional Christian customs such as going to church. He believes that he should have a personal relationship with God and not to concern himself too much with what others do or say. Some of the other participants seem to agree on this matter:

**P-2** *“I mean, you won’t be standing next to me and God won’t ask, ‘Yeah, why did\*\*\*do this or what-what-what’. You know. But in fact, you’ll be judged alone. So let’s all leave the Christianity thing alone”*

**P-3** *“So, if you choose to be homosexual, then you are homosexual, whether it’s Christian or not. So you should accept it, don’t you think?”*

The above-mentioned quotes indicate that the participants feel that the practice of Christianity is a personal issue. How they practice their faith is not an issue to be judged publicly, but a personal decision.

**P-2** *“So I think the whole thing of taking out quotes or uhm, verses or whatever from the Bible saying, yeah, but this says homosexuality is against Christianity or whatever the case may be, is wrong”*

Numerous Christians criticize homosexuality because of interpretations of certain verses in the Bible that they believe make reference to the notion of homosexuality. However, there are some who believe this practise of using the Bible to validate arguments about homosexuality is subjective, unjust and is used as a tool to pass judgements. Interviewee 2 shares a similar view as can be seen in the above quote.

**P-4** *“I was told that as long as I’m gay, I’ll burn in hell no matter what”*

Homosexuality is often regarded as a sin, so if a gay person does not repent and change his ways, he will be punished. Sin is condemned by Christianity and requires punitive measures if Christians do not want to repent. Individuals are frequently threatened with comments that they will suffer in the afterlife, and that they will be eternally doomed as Participant 4 explained in the quote above.

**P-5** *“So, ---it doesn’t have to be treated like this is un-Christian. That’s not, that’s not fair, actually”*

Participant 5 reasoned that there is no need to classify homosexuality as un-Christian and to regard it as such.



Discussion:

Participant 1 grew up in an environment where the applicants of the Christian doctrine were strictly followed. Christianity's primarily homophobic stance seemed to create a sense of guilt and shame in Participant 1. He resolved his emotional turmoil by defying 'traditional' Christian rituals and beliefs that are employed by homophobic discourse to marginalise gay men. The constant bickering about his sexual orientation and the double bind messages he received from the church must have become too much for him. It might have caused him to experience confusion and to feelings of insecurity. As a result of this Participant 1 resorted to distancing himself from the institution of the church and to practise his faith in an alternative manner that works for him.

Christian inclusion in the church seemed to have become a privilege and depends on the adherence of the church's interpretation of the scriptures (rules) of the Bible. Participant 1 like others in the research cleverly used the same technique to create space for himself in the Christian world. He does this by focusing on Biblical texts that declare God's unconditional love. Participant 5 had the same interpretation about the message of homosexuality as un-Christian in homophobic discourse. These two gay men voiced that the Bible is relative and its interpretation is subjective. They argued that the debate for or against homosexuality could be substantiated through a process of selectively choosing and using certain Biblical texts. It is contestable though if they succeeded in securing a membership with the in-group of Christians.

Participants 2 and 4 are concerned with how the dominant group of Christians interpret and practise their faith. They do not agree that other Christians judge them and use the Bible to support their point of view. Participant 2 reasoned that he has to take responsibility for his own faith. He spoke of Christianity as a private matter and took on an individualistic approach to it. This provided an alternative for him, where the communal Christian society construct gay Christians as sinners who will not be allowed in the Kingdom of God if they do not comply with the rules of the church. These rules imply that gays repent their 'sins', to practise celibacy and so forth. This gay man feels unfairly judged by the church and is of the opinion that fellow Christians have no right to judge him and declare him as non-Christian.

Participant 3 does not seem so concerned about homosexuality being defined as un-Christian. He is convinced that God created him this way and confidently identified as a Christian. It may be this conviction that has put his mind to ease, or perhaps religion and Christian issues do not have a significant influence on him. This gay man does not compromise his faith by what others define as Christian. Admirably, he found that one has to be true to oneself and that it is possible to combine homosexuality (being gay) with Christianity.

### *Homosexuality as un-African*

Participant 1 seems to have a general awareness of the anti-homosexual political messages in Namibia. According to him, homophobic discourse was quite powerful in the past, though it is no longer the case.

**P-1** *“You know it was a hot topic then, you know... But now it’s no more a topic”*

**P-1** *“...it started like some years ago with the president uh, talking about deporting uh, some gays and lesbians to another place and things like that. With Jerry Ekandjo as well...Ok uhm, as I said with the Jerry Ekandjo thing, uh, it was a shock to me when, when the president talked about deporting uh, the gays and lesbians. And Jerry Ekandjo agreed to that. It was a big thing and for me it was scary to know that I had to go, whilst being a Namibian, I had to go to another place, you know other than Namibia”*

**P-1** *“...Because they believed that there aren’t any gay and lesbian people around”*

Public consciousness creates awareness about homophobic discourse in Participant 1 and possibly in the general Namibian population. Citizens pay attention to what is said by the country’s political leaders, as it is an indication of what is happening and what is done in the country. It is also a reflection of the laws, rules and regulations governing and dominating the individual’s behaviour. The statements above by Participant 1 show that gay men became conscious of the severity of the homophobic discourse in Namibia when politicians made public claims that homosexuality is un-African, challenged gay people and made plans to eliminate them.

**P-1** *“Okay, I don’t think that uh, being gay is un-African. It is not. It has been something that has been going on for a long time. Uhm, I read a book which focused on the contract workers and how they lived. Uhm, in the book it said that uh, the men had to work as labourers here putting the railroads and thing. And within that time when they were staying there as men together, they had boys which were acting as their wives during that time and they would have, have a relationship with them, sexual relationships with them. And many times the men refused to go back home to their wives and rather stayed with their partners, or their boys, you know by that time”*

Participant 1 told about traces of evidence (the former migrant labour system in Namibia) that homosexuality existed in Africa, in order to confirm that it is not an un-African phenomenon. He sounded convinced that the existence of homosexuality is not entirely visible because it is a taboo in Africa.

**P-1** *“...we see it as, yeah it does happen but let’s not talk about it...Let’s not put it on the table...Let’s not discuss it, you know...it was more a case of let’s not talk about it, you know”*

A large number of Africans deny that homosexuality forms part of their societies as it does in the rest of the world. According to some, homosexuality is an unknown phenomenon amongst African tribes. However, there are gay men (like Participant 1) who tell a different story. Homosexuality existed, but was not publicly or openly

discussed. People avoided admitting to these practises in an attempt to keep it concealed.

**P-2** *“Uhm, I have heard of, uhm, arguments that homosexuality is un-African...the former, uh...president of Namibia, mentioned that uhm, homosexuality is a, western thing. Uhm, I don't think that uh, that is the right way or arguing, you know. It's not like as if you can take, for example, you can test it by this and say, 'Okay fine, this originated from there'”*

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous arguments classifying homosexuality as un-African. Participant 2 shared that he had heard from some of the arguments made by politicians that homosexuality is un-African. It seems that African political leaders are increasingly making such statements.

**P-3** *“Yeah, I've read also that homosexuality is apparently from those European and American sides of the world, not African. But I think really there were homosexuals in Africa before. They were just trying to hide it and they hide it so good nobody noticed them”*

Participant 3 communicated his awareness of messages in debates, speeches and letters that describe homosexuality as an un-African concept. As mentioned in the Literature Review, the idea that homosexuality is un-African is frequently spread in the media. Furthermore, the argument that homosexuality is not African raises

questions about African history and its traditional practices for Participant 3. In the debate about the ‘Africanness’ of homosexuality, there are notions put forward, resisting the so-called non-existence of homosexuality in ‘African tradition’.

**P-4** *“Oh, yes I am aware that people say it’s un-African but, uhm I am a Namibian. I’ve never been to Europe. Uh, I was born and raised in Namibia. So, it’s happening with me. I mean, I, I don’t see it as something I’ve learned from anybody else. It’s within me. So, I believe it’s, it’s wherever. It’s not only in specific parts of the world. It’s in all cultures. That’s my belief”*

Participant 4 agrees, in the quote above, that the idea (that homosexuality is part of European culture) indeed exists within homophobic discourse in Africa. He used himself as an example to prove this myth wrong.

**P-5** *“Homosexuality is un-African? That cannot be true because there is no way they’re gonna tell me that, before in Africa, men were not sleeping with other men. That’s something that I cannot really believe. That’s not true (...)*

Participant 5 seems to share a similar viewpoint and is not convinced that homosexuality is un-African, meaning that it never existed in Africa, formed part of African culture and traditions, or came from Africa.

**P-5** *“Because uhm, this thing of men sleeping with other men, or being homosexual, or being lesbian, is something from long before. It’s been there. Since long time age. Since the apartheid, since the slavery, everything. And it’s still gonna be there. So, this is not a matter of the way they taught people, or the way they argue in parliament, that this is a foreign influence in people. No, that’s not like that. No, that’s not true. Absolutely not true”*

He strongly believes that the notion of homosexuality as un-African is false because it is part of political teachings and that he can bear testimony to its existence and ‘Africanness’.

Discussion:

Participant 1 portrayed a fairly broad general knowledge of the construction of homosexuality as un-African. He spoke of the un-African homophobic discourse in political terms. This means Participant 1 primarily interpreted the ‘un-Africanness’ of homosexuality through political understanding. Reference made by this gay man to politics when asked about the un-African discourse of homosexuality can reflect the political context he finds himself in. It may suggest of his environment, that it is laden with politics. It is possible that he makes sense of homophobic discourse and many other things in his surroundings through current politics. His version of un-African homophobic discourse demonstrates that Namibian politics and politicians have a significant influence on its people. Even more so, it can determine and construct gay identity and manipulate a gay person’s life. A reason for this enormous

political power might be because of the sentiment of political independence of a mere 15 years and could also be representative of the struggle of black Namibians to reconstruct themselves in a post-apartheid era.

All five participants of the research declared the ideology of homosexuality as un-African as false. The gay men of this study believe a misconception surrounds the construction of African culture and identity. It seems that this misconception was either deliberately created or exploited to undermine the acceptance of gay men in Africa. The gay participants are convinced that it is this incorrect information that underlie homophobic discourse and increase homophobia, which is a fear of homosexuals based on false beliefs.

Homophobic discourse in Namibia utilises silence on the issue of homosexuality or as you may, homosexual acts to further its cause, to find a scapegoat for its social ills. Furthermore, it constructed the nature and history of African culture and ultimately African identity to exclude homosexuality. This was possibly done in an attempt to empower and strengthen the position of those who have the power.

The gay men of this study rewrote or reconstructed the history of the 'Africanness' of homosexuality. Seeing, that all five research participants are from indigenous Namibian language groups, being 'African', one can reason that Namibian homophobic discourse might be build on faulty generalisations and irrational cognitions.



During the data analysis of this theme of homosexuality as un-African, the five research participants echoed voices that are in tune with their in-group (the gay family). This phenomenon was prevalent in challenging the discourse of the ‘un-Africanness’ of homosexuality.

In this particular instance the gay men speak of un-African homophobic discourse as untrue and deceiving. They could possibly have done this to provide an alternative discourse that could benefit them. This alternative might satisfy their need to combat homophobia and the mostly negative impact it has on them. If their attempts succeed it could secure more tolerance and hopefully better rights for them.

The emotional consequence of this talk of homosexuality as African/Namibian can be that it has given these men hope for a better future. Another consequence might be that they might feel relieved at the prospect that things might change for gay men in Namibia. On the other hand, in contesting the ideology of homosexuality as un-African, these gay men have to defend themselves and their position as gay men.

### ***Homosexuality as unnatural***

There are many counter arguments against the ‘unnaturalness’ of homosexuality. Participant 1 believes that homosexuality is natural and argued about the ‘nurture versus nature’ discourse of homosexuality. He also reasoned that any object existing in the realm of the natural world, or that is believed to exist, is identified by language.

**P-1** *“But it is natural because it exists in the nature (...) If it was not, uhm, having any name or it was not natural, it would not have any name, you know”*

**P-2** *“...homosexuals are also human beings you know...I am just as ordinary and normal as anybody on the street, you know...I have feelings...I do everything that any other human being would do”*

**P-3** *“We are also just human beings”*

Participants 2 & 3 are of the opinion that the person behind the homosexual label is forgotten or not recognised. In fact, homosexuals are human beings who have the same emotions as anyone else. They are not different from heterosexual people. The only difference is their sexual preference.

**P-2** *“That is uhm, said to be unnatural because uhm, sex so to say was originally meant for a woman and a man”*

**P-2** *“...it’s unnatural because a man and a man can’t have sex”*

Homosexuality is described as unnatural or as abnormal because it falls outside the range of socially accepted forms of sexual expression. Gender roles are still fixed in societies like Namibia and same sex relations are considered as strange concepts.

**P-3** “...if it was unnatural, I think, uh...that...we would be outcasts...People who...don’t know what they are doing and what they are, you know”

Participant 3 argues that homosexuality is natural because he does not perceive homosexual people to be strangers who portray odd behaviour.

**P-4** “...some people say it’s a sin, uhm, it’s unnatural”

**P-4** “But for me it feels natural because uhm, it’s inside me, you know”

Participant 4 mentioned that people sometimes link the ‘unnaturalness’ of homosexuality with sin. But he feels that it is indeed a natural thing to be homosexual because it is a personal feeling deep inside him.

**P-5** “It’s unacceptable in Herero community, you know”

**P-5** “He’s that unnatural person... He’s, he’s this disgusting person”

Participant 5 shared that his community considers homosexuality to be ‘unnatural’ and that homosexuals are repulsive. His language group thus condemns homosexuality and he is often insulted for being gay as can be seen from the above quotes.

**P-5** “...if you take another man you will not bear children...”

He also stated that homosexuality is believed to be abnormal by his community because no procreation can take place in such a relationship. The quote shows that in the Otjiherero language group, a man’s worth is measured according to his ability to reproduce children. Several myths exist in this regard and are linked to homosexuality.

**P-5** “It’s a natural thing...It’s not that you are going to be the first man in the whole world to be gay”

Participant 5 was convinced that his sexual orientation is natural when his significant others did not reject him (when he came ‘out of the closet’) and assured him that it was okay to be gay. On the basis of this statement by his loved ones, whom he trusts and respects, Participant 5 realised that being gay is indeed not an unnatural phenomenon. In addition, the very notion that there are ‘others’ like him, showed that he is not a freak and it was a comfort to him. He felt that he could belong somewhere because he is now able to identify with a group of people who are similar to him.

Discussion:

Public discourse in Namibia has it that homosexuality is ‘abnormal’ or ‘aberrant’. The general public opinion is that same-sex practices are disturbing, unacceptable and

a national threat to the Namibian nation's future. Procreation or childbearing is regarded as central to the sustainability of the family, which is considered to be the foundation of a good and solid Namibian nation. Homosexuality in homophobic discourse is different than heterosexuality, which is considered a natural form of sexual intercourse for many years in terms of promoting the 'traditional' family.

The research participants stressed the normality of homosexuality. This description can stem from their desire to lead 'normal' lives and to be treated as ordinary people, not outcasts. Participant 2 described how homosexuality was constructed as unnatural by homophobic discourse. According to Participant 2 homosexuality is considered unnatural in the heterosexual and gender based Namibian society. This gay person's account is ambivalent at times because he described the 'unnaturalness' of homosexuality as if he agreed with it. On the other hand he argued his humanity and the fact that he considered himself normal. It would appear that participant 2 could not confidently claim that homosexuality is normal. The reason for this might be that he has not resolved the discrepancy that exists between his own ideologies/experiences and that of society's norms and expectations.

Participant 4 connects the unnatural status of homosexuality to Christianity. Christian sanctioning in categorising homosexuality as a sin, guides his interpretation of homosexuality as unnatural. He frees himself from the limitations of this discourse by separating normality and religion. This gay man defined homosexuality through

his intrapersonal experiences. This makes his argument difficult to contest and disapprove of since it is very subjective.

Participant 5 experienced the unnatural homophobic discourse in relation to culture and his community. Society and culture holds a dominant position in his life and psyche. This gay man has learnt from the years of hate speech he received from his language group that he is considered abnormal. He was taught to be ashamed of who he is. Participant 5 was aware that he was deemed an outsider because he did not conform to his community's rules. In addition, he was made to believe that he did not fit the group identity of his Otjiherero language group. His text showed that his masculinity was probably questioned and undermined by the homophobic discourse of his language group. Participant 5 must have felt trapped because of the power and influence his community has. He thought he had no alternatives and had no option but to succumb to the homophobic discourse he experienced.

Through the support and acceptance of his primary support group and significant others, this gay participant realised that not all people are against homosexuals. He probably discovered that there is an alternative to what homophobic discourse informed him. It revealed other discourse to this interviewee, such as, other people can accept gay people unconditionally. More importantly he might have noticed that he can be part of another group, that of homosexuals. Due to the fact that he lived in rural areas of Namibia that offer a lifestyle that is not very progressive, for most of his life, this gay man might not have encountered numerous and alternative

discourses. He was probably not aware of counter homophobic discourses and these options might have not been a possibility for this gay man until he reached the capital city of Namibia.

## **B. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT**

### **Subject Positioning**

The second research objective is analysed in this section. This explores how participants experience homophobic discourse in terms of their subject positioning (i.e. how they view themselves and the roles they play out). This is psychologically significant, because it can give insight into their awareness and experiences of homophobic discourse.

#### ***The Victim***

Participant 1 revealed during the interview that he did not feel in control of his experiences and the situation he found himself in. He asked himself several questions in order to make sense of what he was experiencing and probably felt as though he was trapped in his position. He wondered whether escaping was possible because he most likely thought that he did not have the capacity to determine the outcome of his situation at that time. This respondent reasoned that he is involuntary exposed to homophobia and could not do anything but to accept it.

**P-1** *“Why am I in this situation? Why should I go through this struggle? Why should I carry this, this cross that I’m carrying?”*

**P-1** *“You start living a life of positivity, a life of hope that yes, this is the life that I have to impact on other people. I should contribute in this life. I should not just sit there and, cry about my life only. You know, I have to look for happiness and I have to find it, you know”*

Participant 1 challenged his position as a victim of his experiences by becoming actively involved in his life. He reprimanded himself for pitying himself and decided to take on a positive approach. It appears as though he found ways to exercise power and to not act out the psychological subject position as a victim in terms of the homophobia he experienced.

**P-3** *“I was frustrated, stressed, depressed. Because I didn’t know what to do at that time, at that point, you know. When people just say things like that, you are like.....you don’t expect such things from everybody. Maybe a few people, but everywhere you go you are getting these rude criticisms and so on. So you just feel like crying all the time, you don’t even want to talk to anybody, you don’t want to look at anybody. You just want to mind your own business. Wear big sunglasses and a hat that nobody can see you! [laugh] Yeah”*



Participant 3 portrayed that he sometimes gets stuck in the victim's role when he becomes the object of hate speech by others. He thought that he could solve the problem by giving up and running away from his problems. He even thought of withdrawing himself socially as can be seen in the previous quote.

**P-4** *“And I should say, I am a victim of it (...) the way people are saying things, uhm it really hurts. Uhm, but what can you do?”*

**P-4** *“I gotta do something about it. And that is why I am actually---a project itself as well. To challenge the society”* [He is currently working as an activist for a gay rights organisation]

Participant 4 clearly stated in the interview that he is a victim of the homophobic discourse he finds himself in. Initially, he thought that he has no solution to the problem, although he was later able to deal with it in an active manner. He reached a point where he refused to be a victim any longer. He liberated himself by challenging this subject position by living and working as a gay activist.

### ***The Advocate***

**P-1** *“I had to present myself as being gay, Namibian and Damara. You know I had to come out and just say to the people that, ‘I am here, you know I am not invisible’”*

**P-1** *“I do talk with my classmates about the issue. I do talk with other people. So people could know that there are gays and lesbians around, you know. And once they got to know my, my part of the story, once they got to hear the story that I have to tell about myself, it was okay for them”*

Participant 1 tried to resolve his role as a victim of homophobic discourse and tried to promote gay rights. He was convinced that if he shares his experiences, talks to people and make them listen, that they would be more understanding and tolerant of him and other gay people. He gained support and sympathy from others by taking on this assertive position.

**P-2** *“I don’t think of myself as gay always. I know I’m aware of it, I know this is who I am. You know, I can’t change that. But I don’t make it uhm, the number one thing in my life. It is part of my life just like work is part of my life. Or just like family is part of my life. It is something that’s part of me”*

Participant 2 firmly believes in his sexual orientation and its normality. He promoted this understanding of gay people and fought to live a ‘normal’ life. He spread the message of gay rights through his words, describing an ordinary life and a stable identity for those who are gay.

**P-3** *“Yes I would say that people should stop discriminating and being against gay people because everybody is just trying to live their life, you know”*

In the quote above, Participant 3 asserts that he tries to speak on behalf of gays, advocating gay rights [the right not to be discriminated against] and tolerance of gay people. He emphasised the fact that everyone should be allowed to live their lives as they please.

**P-5** *“But you go like, okay, I’ll stand up tall, I mean, stand up tall and straight and proud. And they just go on about it. Because at the end of the day there’s a reward after it. Because my lover will be here, my family will be here. And my friends will be there. And then I can still win, you know”*

**P-5** *“...If there’s gays out there who want to come out, they still have to come out. They can. Because if you come out, we’re a big family already. And we’re having such a very good organisation, this one. Where you can feel free, be openly gay...I am proud to be a gay black man in Namibia”*

The above quotes by participant 5 show that he believes in himself and is proud of his identity. He tries to encourage other gay people in Namibia to freely live out their sexual orientation. He tries to support the Namibian gay population by being an open and proud gay man.

### ***The Outcast***

**P-2** *“A lot of people, once they see this person is like this, then they think, ‘Ok, he’s also like that’. And people start calling you names and discriminate”*

This quote indicates that Participant 2 accepted the fact that he is different and that this difference is used by other people to make him an outsider.

**P-2** *“So, I personally don’t have, have had any bad experiences. Because I know this is the way that I must behave and this is the way I must act. Because it won’t offend anyone...but it’s just there are certain times of, I mean, certain places where you behave like this and like that. So, it depends on your behaviour. So I would say, based on my behaviour that I haven’t had any bad experiences or any strange experiences”*

Participant 2 tries to be more readily accepted as a person and to be treated as normal by controlling the way he behaves [It might be to limit what is readily perceived as feminine roles and behaviour that could identify a man as ‘gay’]. He tries not to give anyone reason to reject him, to discriminate against him or to cause tension about his sexual orientation. In this way he tries to rebel against his position as an outcast.

**P-2** “...It makes me think that certain Namibians are very stupid and narrow-minded and simply...uneducated, you know. Yeah. Definitely. They’re narrow-minded, one-minded, you know they’re very uneducated about certain things. I don’t think that they take the interest to actually uhm, want to know what this is all about and why do people behave like this, you know...So, if you hear about homosexuality and things like that, find out what’s this whole mayhem about the homosexual and things. And then based on that...make your judgment...”

This participant tried to normalise his status as an ‘other’ by educating himself and by advocating the importance of education. Through this, he tried to create an alternative ‘in-group’ versus ‘out-group’ scenario where the uneducated become the outcasts.

**P-3** “...You don’t feel like a person, you know. You just feel like a thing”

Participant 3 revealed that he often feels like an outsider, that he is not part of the human race.

**P-3** “I think, uh...that...would be an outcast. People who...don’t know what they are doing and what they are, you know. But we know what we are doing and we know what we are”

However, the quote above shows that he refuses to take on the role of an outcast by providing a definition of an outcast, which to him, does not apply to gay men.

**P-3** *“So people should stop that negativity and just accept the fact that we are gay and we won’t change. Never, ever”*

Here, he shows that he wants to take his rightful place as a human being, in society and face those who attempt to challenge this position.

**P-5** *“Yeah, uhm, maybe you might be walking, taking your calf to the---. And some will like, ‘Hmm, it’s you! You don’t have a woman, you don’t have a girlfriend, you don’t have a wife. Uhhh, there goes the one. See, look at him. You know what, he’s a homosexual”*

Homosexuals frequently have to cope with negative remarks and gossip. Participant 5 shared that he had similar experiences. This confirms the idea that people always have something to say about them, which could lead to them feeling awkward when they have to appear in public. It could create feelings of not belonging when they do not meet certain standards of society.

Discussion:

The subject positioning the research participants took on often had the purpose of coping with, or undermining homophobic discourse. The roles these gay men acted

out were directed to others' attention to influence them in some way. The aim was to gain sympathy, to be heard and to try and find a solution and a common ground from where they as gay men could defend and reconstruct themselves. The subject positioning of the gay participants could have served them in various ways. It could create visibility, so called transparency about their sexual orientation and give them a voice and a platform to speak from. All of this ultimately enhance the gay men's disadvantaged position and empower them. It also contributed to the discourse of gay men and was created to benefit them. It is presumed that the discourse that arose out of the texts of the research participants emerged in response to, and to counteract the ever popular homophobic discourse.

Participant 1 took on the role of the victim because he blamed external factors and his environment for his misfortune. By being the victim, Participant 1 exploited the sensitive and controversial nature of homophobia. Seeing that contradictory theories exist about the nature of homosexuality, even within homophobic discourse, room was left for other discourses to operate. In this instance human rights come to the fore. This gay man secured himself some support by being a helpless receiver of bad treatment. Participant 1 strived to overcome the crippling effects of homophobic discourse and to take control of his life. In saying that he must be positive and active in determining his life, this gay person tried to demonstrate strength, courage, hope and that he is planning for the future. Through providing a strategic plan for his future, this gay man demonstrated the need for structure. Structure usually stands for security and predictability. The familiarity that structure offers can give a sense of

reassurance and normality. It means the perceived threat is not so overwhelming anymore, and can minimise tension. This can significantly reduce the psychological stress this gay man may experience.

The victim role participant 3 took on was to surrender in dealing with, and fighting homophobic discourse. He did not attempt to resist the discourse but resorted to self-pity. This gay men's solution is to avoid and run away from the difficulties he had experienced. He became the ill and weak person, stating that he is depressed. In analysing his text, it provided a picture of what can be the extreme psychological outcomes of homophobic discourse. It showed the severity and force of the homophobic discourse that is in Namibia. The discourse can make some people miserable, helpless, hopeless and psychologically ill. The account of Participant 3 was pregnant with vulnerability and loss. Psychologically, the constant experience of such emotions can cause the person to have a depressed mood. Thus, this gay person can or might already suffer from a depressive state or one or other mood disorder. The emotions this interviewee described and that was mentioned before are symptoms of depression. The text of this interviewee spoke of having or seeing no alternatives, choices or options. The words of this gay man sounded full of emotion, desperate and expressed a desire to be rescued. This version is significant because it can show how homophobic discourse can drain a gay person's resources, destroy his coping mechanisms and strip him from his psychological health. Considering the above discussion, homophobic discourse can undoubtedly have severe psychological outcomes, such as suffering from a psychological disorder, for gay men



Participant 4 is a 'recovered' victim who is in the process of healing. He concluded that the sensible thing is to bear testimony as a victim to those who are prepared to listen. In this way he aims to fight homophobic discourse. This gay man not only 'wins votes' as a victim but also becomes a hero through this subject positioning. He becomes a hero because he dedicated his life as a victim to fight for gay rights. This gave his life purpose and gave him a sense of direction.

All five research participants portrayed the role of the advocate. It is not surprising since they took the risk to participate in this research to voice their opinions and to share their experiences in a primarily homophobic country. It is apparent from the research results that the gay men want to speak up about, share their thoughts and feelings, teach about and defend homosexuality by being advocates. Advocating can build their self-esteem and have a positive psychological outcome when used as a coping strategy.

As a minority group most gay men probably feel like outcasts. Though it is apparent from the data analysis that some gay men might feel more rejected, discriminated and marginalised than others. This depends on the interpretation and meaning making of the homophobic discourse. Participant 2 is sensitive to rejection and practises caution so that he does not become an outcast. He publicly conforms to society's norms and regulations to fit in. He could fear humiliation and failure. This gay man tried to protect his interests by taking on this role. It must emotionally drain this interviewee to constantly pretend in order to avoid conflict and possible violence. It can be

psychologically harmful to constantly have to deny your homosexual orientation and ultimately your identity which can instil feelings of shame, denial and self-hatred in a person. On the other hand, he learnt skills and competencies that enabled him to take care of himself. It also does not close off opportunities, such as education, freedom and success. One could easily lose out on these if marginalised in a small country (population size, estimate 1, 8 million people) such as Namibia. Paradoxically, his experiences could have made him psychologically strong to succeed despite all odds being against him.

Participant 3 felt oppressed to a sub-human level. This makes him an outcast. In taking on the outcast role he is allowed to admit he is different in a positive way. This difference was described as variety and not in terms of the right/wrong categories that is attributed to difference in homophobic discourse. It provides this gay man with an opportunity to challenge the identity that was given to him as a gay man in homophobic discourse. He can safely create a place for himself in a world that wishes to ban him. Participant 3 found a means to be normal in, and part of the dominating heterosexual/homophobic world he experienced.

Participant 5 is an outcast in his traditional and conservative community. He got this status because homosexuality is considered a taboo in his rural community's culture and norms. He was ridiculed and shamed as a punishment for his 'disobedience'. Though his outcast role he undermines the rigid and old-fashioned doctrine that governs his language group, and celebrates his freedom and individualism. More significantly, his homophobic experiences could paradoxically have emancipated

him. He can freely be and behaves as he wishes because his community endorses it through the labels they assigned to him. As an outcast, Participant 5 has become a problem for his community. This could result in a call for change and policy reform in his community, in the process of trying to address the problem of homosexuality. Participant 5 gained attention as an outcast because people talk about him and notice him as the one who is known for committing a taboo.

## **Emotional Effects**

### ***Fear***

Participant 1 constantly spoke of living in fear; he especially noted the fear of being deported.

**P-1** *“For a lot of people it was a thing of, of fear...It brought in a lot of fear and then a lot of people did not want to disclose themselves as being gay”*

**P-4** *“...what I come across with my friends is that more and more people are pushed into, are being pushed back into the closet by uh, homophobia”*

As mentioned earlier, gay men are often perceived as outcasts. They constantly face hate speech and abuse. Participants 1 and 4 reflected the gay community’s fear in the midst of political homophobic rhetoric. Out of fear, gay men might choose to remain ‘in the closet’ or choose to return to the ‘closet’.

**P-1** *“Because you cannot just come to somebody without preparing them and just say, ‘I’m gay and expect them to accept. You have to prepare them in ways”*

It seems as though Participant 1 could struggle with fears of rejection and anger from others. It appears that he is trying to deal with this by preparing his loved ones psychologically in order to avoid rejection and angry responses. He tries to control other people’s reactions by the way he deals with this fear and by approaching them. Out of fear of losing the affection of his loved ones Participant 1 is looking for ways to gain acceptance from them. This taught him to be diplomatic about his homosexuality and to reveal his sexual orientation in a tactful manner. Fear of conflict and discrimination makes Participant 1 conscious and careful about what he says around people, thus being secretive about his homosexual orientation. Gay men commonly live in fear of rejection by their families when they disclose their sexual orientation to them. Coming ‘out of the closet’ was very difficult for Participant 1 because of this fear. As mentioned, he tried to deal with his fear by preparing others, including his relatives, for his revelation that he is gay or to ‘come out of the closet’. Participant 1 tried to manipulate homophobic people and/or situations in his favour by attempting to manoeuvre acceptance of his sexual orientation.

Participant 1 experienced insecurity because of his fear of homophobia. He does not feel safe and it is important for him to feel safe. This gay man perceived homophobia

as hampering him to live his life to its fullest. He thinks homophobia makes it hard for gay men to have successful committed relationships as gay relationships are not recognised. This implies that fear makes gay men unsure about themselves, deprive them of a complete life and cause constant tension in their lives. He might be feeling alone, and in need of support. It seems that society's intolerance towards homosexuals instils fear, causing individuals to be inhibited and to experience a low mood.

**P-2** *“Not that I’m scared to be who I am. I’m not. Everybody know who I am”*

Participant 2 stated that he is not fearful as he ensures that he is not threatened, by behaving ‘properly’ and trying not to appear too ‘girlish’. He also thinks that people have become used to him being gay.

**P-5** *“And this --- of soldiers just passed by slowly. But they were not looking actually. They didn’t mind our business and we didn’t mind theirs. We were just looked at each other and passed. They didn’t say anything or scream, “You’re not supposed to do something”. But it’s alright. But the criticism is there. But yeah, we can deal with it”*

Fear is instilled in gay men by the constant verbal and physical attacks on them. The gay community live in fear because they have no legal rights to protect them. As

presented in the literature review, even law enforcement agencies pose a threat to gays instead of providing protection to them. This is substantiated by the fact that Participant 5 feared that the soldiers would react negatively towards him and his boyfriend. Although the soldiers did not do anything to him and his boyfriend, it seems that he anticipated confrontation in some way or the other. He was surprised when this did not happen since the idea is that homosexual people should always be denounced, especially by representatives of the government.

Gay men fear that threats revealed in the media (such as gays should be deported or wiped out) would be carried out. Gays fear for their lives and their well-being. Gay men like Participant 5 feared physical or mental harm being done to them because they are gay. As mentioned, the gay community anticipate that gay men might be pursued and prosecuted. This is due to the past bad experiences gay men had when they openly expressed their sexual orientation.

**P-5** *“You cannot just come out there...”*

Participant 5 agreed with the above mentioned statement. He also believed that one has to sensitize one’s family before disclosing a homosexual orientation. He did his preparatory work by first informing his siblings, in order to get a feel for the possible response to his revelation and also to gain support within the family system. He took a long time to ‘come out of the closet’ and to inform his parents that he is gay as he feared their response.

### *Loneliness & Sadness*

Some gay men become socially withdrawn because of all the risks involved when they have to reveal their sexual preference. Gay men are often forced to live secret lives in order to protect themselves. These men are in the unfortunate position that they cannot openly share and discuss their private and/or intimate affairs. Most of the time gays cannot talk freely about themselves and their lives. They are also compelled to live in confined social circles. Participant 4 fears the constant conflict that he is faced with. In trying to avoid uncomfortable situations, sorrowful interactions, he tends to withdraw himself socially. In such cases, he prefers to live in isolation where it is safer.

**P-4** *“...It has made me a loner (...) I am always worried wherever I go, I always know, feel that somebody will be offended by what I am”*

**P-3** *“It’s really ... heartbreaking to hear people of your own country and your nation turn against you...Seriously, it’s nothing nice”*

**P-4** *“...rather than sitting there and pointing fingers and saying they are the ones who brought HIV in Namibia. They are the ones that uhm, they are the reason that we don’t receive rain in Namibia. You know, those sort of things are really, really painful to hear every day”*

The research participants verbalised their emotions of hurt and pain in the above-mentioned quotes. It saddens them that their own people treat them so badly. Participant 3, like many gay men, experiences a lot of unhappiness especially when he feels betrayed by his loved ones, the community and the country.

**P-5** “...*You are living in Namibia, and then people are talking about gays being un-African, being unnatural, stuff like that...Okay it will hurt...It hurts...It hurts deep...*”

Participant 5 agrees that the things which are said about gays in Namibia really caused him pain. The homophobic situation in Namibia makes him unhappy and he is pained by the homophobic discourse in the country.

### ***Anger & Hate***

**P-1** “*So, so one starts to force yourself to get out of that anger... you have for yourself and your own life*”

Self-directed anger is not an uncommon phenomenon with homosexuals. It is an expected emotional response for people who are suppressed and dominated by others. Marginalised people such as gay men are often angry with themselves for tolerating a situation or because they feel they cannot change things for the better. However self-awareness can become a first step to overcome the anger, as Participant 1 mentioned.



**P-4** *“Uh, it’s anger...Basically it’s anger...I, I get angry uh, whenever I hear people saying untrue things about my life”*

Gay men, like Participant 4, are angered because they are often categorized in ‘boxes’. Often, these definitions are inaccurate and cause myths, stereotypes and prejudices that spread around. Those who do not know better, take the ‘lies’ at face value, act accordingly and treat gays accordingly. As expected, it causes severe anger that can be directed at others, but also towards oneself. The following quote by Participant 1 describes how anger can transform into hate.

**P-1** *“Because I myself, was, was very homophobic at one stage, being raised as a Christian, having to understand myself. I had internal, internal homophobia within myself that I had to fight with myself in order to accept who I am”*

Self-hatred or internalized homophobia is a prominent theme that gay men experience. There are gay men who learn to hate themselves for who they are, which can be psychologically damaging in the long-run. This is often brought about by the conceptualisation that homosexuality is something negative and bad, and individuals (even when they are homosexual) might not want to be associated with those negative views. Nonetheless, they seem not to be able to change the situation.

### ***Self-esteem***

**P-1** *“...it was very hard for me to accept that I am gay and I have to live out my life as being gay”*

It is often hard for a gay man to accept himself for who he is, even though he might experience a lot of opposition. Participant 1 internalized hatred, in the sense that he disliked the idea of being homosexual, but had to accept it in order to move on.

The negative talk about gay men is most of the times absorbed in the minds of gays. It appears to happen involuntary that gay men start to accept and believe the hate speech that they hear. Due to the fact that gay men are treated as outcasts they start to believe that something is wrong with them. Gay men are made to believe that they chose to be gay and can change if they really wanted to. This might create feelings of guilt and self-blame in gay men. As a result gay men can feel trapped in their bodies and can start to hate themselves for who they are.

**P-1** *“And now I am living out a happy, a gay relationship with myself you know, and others around me”*

**P-1** *“Because this is me, this is who I am... They either deal with me or they deal with the issue that I'm having”*

Eventually most gay men learn to accept themselves, develop a strong sense of identity and build up confidence to defend themselves. After his battle of self-acceptance, Participant 1 managed to make peace with himself and even more so to defend himself, in terms of how he views himself.

**P-2** *“Because every day for me is...like, it’s, it’s heaven [people would ask him] ... Don’t you have any problems?”*

In many instances, gay men do not show their emotions. They would often deny that homophobic discourse has any impact upon them. Participant 2 denied that he has any problems and it seems as though he avoids thinking too much about his sexuality.

**P-2** *“...I don’t think of myself as gay always. I know I’m aware of it, I know this is who I am. You know, I can’t change that. But I don’t make it uhm, the number one thing in my life. It is part of my life just like work is part of my life. Or just like family is part of my life. It is something that’s part of me”*

**P-2** *“I think that if I was straight, I would have had a boring life (laugh)”*.

It is important to note that although it seems that Participant 2 might experience denial, he does communicate some interesting coping strategies to deal with homophobic discourse as can be seen in the examples above. For instance, he seems

to have incorporated his homosexual status into his life and tries not to fuss too much about it.

### *Assertiveness*

In opposition to a low self-esteem, the theme of assertiveness was found in the interviews. Interestingly, homophobic discourse can result in positive psychological outcomes for gay men. A few of the research participants developed coping strategies. The one skill that was most commonly found was assertiveness. These participants found a voice to speak positively about themselves amidst Namibian homophobic discourse. Through their difficult experiences some of these gay men found the strength of endurance and courage. They have become more opinionated and confident.

### **Mental Health**

#### *Depression*

**P-3** *“So you just feel like crying all the time, you don’t even want to talk to anybody, you don’t want to look at anybody...You just want to mind your own business...Wear big sunglasses and a hat that nobody can see you! [laugh] Yeah”*

**P-3** *“And you just feel so down...”*

Participant 3 explained during the interview that he sometimes experiences sadness, pessimism and a low mood, amongst others.

It was found in this research that constant homophobic experiences and hearing hate speech all the time make gay men sad. Negative talk about gay men can drain them psychologically. The lack of positive reinforcement and support might encourage a low mood in gay men. The situation can become so adverse that this low mood becomes fixed and possibly lead to depression.

### *Suicide*

**P-1** *“Is my life worth this?”*

Gay men might become so hopeless that they feel their lives are not worth living. At one stage in his life, Participant 1 questioned the value of his life and whether all the trials and tribulations he had to endure as a gay man are worth living for.

**P-3** *“I thought of just committing suicide because of all this talk”*

Participant 3 developed suicidal ideation because of all the homophobia that he had to endure in his life. He felt like giving up and end his misery by taking his own life. Suicidal ideation can be a serious indicator of the depressive state gay men might find themselves in because of the intolerable homophobia that they are aware of and that they also experience. Life becomes unbearable for gay men in Namibia where there

is constant negativity about homosexuality and attacks on gay men. At several times this man wanted to give up on life, and he might have attempted suicide and succeeded had it not been for the acceptance, love and support of his friends and family.

### ***Anxiety***

**P-1** “...it was a shock to me...for me it was scary to know that I had to go... So it was a bit scary to, to hear that on national radio or on TV as well...For a lot of people it was a thing of, of fear. It brought in a lot of fear and then a lot of people did not want to disclose themselves as being gay. They rather chose to be in the closet much more”

The above quote demonstrates that Participant 1 perceived the implications of homophobic talk on television and radio as possibly life-threatening and it disturbed him. Fear restrains the happiness and general health of gay men. The respondent experienced fear which restricted him to be content and to lead a healthy lifestyle.

**P-4** “...What I come across with my friends is that more and more people are pushed into, are being pushed back into the closet by uh, homophobia. Uhm, that they rather go and marry and, you know, just to please people and do whatever they want to do behind”

Participant 4 also bears witness of how fear that is instilled by homophobia in gay men can cause anxiety. This anxiety can coerce gay people to live in hiding and to not freely or openly live out their homosexual orientation.

#### **4.2.2 CRITERION 2: DISCOURSES ARE ABOUT OBJECTS**

In this criterion, certain objects that are found in the discourse are cited and described. At the same time, talking is treated as an object or discourse (Parker, 1992). This means that the discourse itself is deconstructed and analysed as an object. The third step of discourse analysis is “talking about the talk as if it were an object, a discourse” (Parker, 1992: 9). Secondly the ‘things’ that are mentioned and that are focused on in the discourse are the ‘objects’ of the discourse. Thus, the second step is “asking what objects are referred to, and describing them...” (ibid). The significance of this step of analysis lies in the way ‘things’ or ‘objects’ are presented and described in the discourse. These ‘objects’ are explored in order to understand the phenomenon that is examined.

#### ***Politics***

**P-1** *“You know my mother coming to me and saying, ‘The president talks about this issue and you have to make a change’”*

Public political comments and speeches on homosexuality encouraged debate on the matter within Participant 1’s family. As mentioned, the opinions of political actors

have a great influence on the ordinary Namibian citizen. Discussions in politics are taken very seriously because these have the power to dictate the future. Power allows the voices of dominant individuals to be heard and that of the dominated to be silenced.

Most of the research participants were aware of what was said in political circles about gay men. The political homophobic discourse in Namibia is very prominent and an anti-gay campaign was launched by politicians. Homosexuality has become a political fight in which gay men became targets to score points with. Politicians would like to perpetuate a homophobic discourse as this wins support from the conservatives. Unfortunately, a homophobic discourse has become a political strategy to gain popularity amongst Namibian citizens. Currently, the Namibian public domain is very negative towards gay men and homosexuality as a whole. It is homophobic in its attitude and is the driving force behind Namibian homophobic rhetoric.

### ***The church***

**P-1** *“...I want to live in that church where being gay would be okay. But there isn't any in Windhoek yet”*

The church enjoys much attention in the homophobic discourse. The church is considered the most influential body that either condones or condemns homosexuality and gay men. Participant 1 stated that he is religious and that his faith is important to



him. He has a hunger to openly praise God and practise his faith regardless of the fact that he is gay.

**P-2** “...you have to go to church and you have to listen to somebody preach to you and you do listen to the input of others”

The church often supports homophobes since they are provided with the platform to utter hate speech and to justify it with the Christian doctrine. The church can be regarded as an instrument that prohibits homosexuals and identifies them as outcasts. Participant 2 feels that the church caters for the feelings and opinions of fellow Christians.

**P-4** “Personal experience though, is the church issue that I have with the uh, youth group. That we had a tour and uh, you know I was told literally, I was told that uh...the way I am is a sin. I will never, I will burn in hell, and all sort of things”

**P-4** “Uh, you know when it comes to uh, church. You know, I don't go to church as a result of homophobia”

The church is heavily criticised for its rigid, traditional value system because it is a symbol of tradition. Ironically, the church frequently judges and rejects individuals, whilst it is expected to open its doors to all human beings. Those who oppose

homosexuality benefit from the anti-homosexual stand of the church on the matter. Those who suffer from the discourse would like to see a revolution in the church and its policies; currently they are outcasts of this institution. Some gay men do not believe in the church anymore.

The church was described as still very homophobic by the gay participants. They often testified that their most abusive experiences took place in the church. According to the research participants, a lot of hate speech against gay men is spread in the church. It is not surprising that most of the five gay participants left the church and practise their Christian faith privately.

### ***The Bible***

**P-1** *“In the Bible women were not allowed to have make-up on, wear earrings, even men. But now in society that we’re living in, people are allowed to do those things, you know...Why not homosexuality? Why should that be an issue in that sense? It shouldn’t be”*

Participant 1 shows in the quote above that references to the Bible are only made on certain issues such as homosexuality. Furthermore, he emphasises the fact that Christians are selective in which examples of the Bible they follow. They painstakingly follow certain rules, while other rules are overlooked. Very importantly, he highlighted that change has occurred throughout the years in the way

the Bible is interpreted and that the Bible should be interpreted in its relevant contexts.

**P-2** “...a lot of people use the bible for wrong reasons (...) you can't take out a phrase and interpret it your own way and say, 'Well this is what the Bible says and this is what you're supposed to do'”

Participant 2 believes that the Bible can be employed by Christians to serve their own interests. He is of the opinion that certain parts of the Bible are focused on and made reference to in isolation to substantiate a person's particular argument. He indirectly questions the right or authority of individuals to use their interpretation of the Bible to dictate to other Christians how to practise their faith.

**P-3** “Apparently, the Bible says, or is against uhm, homosexuality”

The legitimacy of homosexuality is perceived and presented in what the Bible is supposedly saying on the matter.

### ***African culture (tradition)***

**P-5** “...there you have to be a very straight man... Now you have to have a girlfriend, you have to have babies, you have to be a Herero man who's like...homophobic...Homosexuality is like taboo there”

Accounts given of African culture and references to it are commonly found in Namibian homophobic discourse. Participant 5 used his culture as an example of African culture. The respondent confirmed that homosexuality is verbally and publicly denounced and is advocated as not being part of his culture. The family is shaped by culture and it operates under the jurisdiction of culture's ideologies, customs and norms.

**P-1** *“And it's not to say that every mother desired that their child should be gay. You know, every mother is looking forward to the day that their son would be married, their daughter would be married, and have children and things like that”*

Participant 1 shared the ideal for the model of the family that is mostly accepted and strived towards in Namibia. The nuclear family's survival is encouraged by the homophobic discourse as it supports childbearing within a heterosexual relationship, preferably marriage. The ideal purpose for couples to be together would be to have children. The family is still valued in Namibia and has a prominent place in most individuals' lives. Family members usually share a certain bond and are thought to support one another, although this is not always the case.

One cannot really say that the family is for or against homosexuality. Most families experience some sense of disruption when one of the members is gay; however, the family as revealed by the research participants did not reject or abandon their gay

members. The ambiguity usually lies within social pressures to condemn homosexuality on the one hand, while caring for a loved one on the other. Families of gay men are often torn apart by the 'crises' that they face with the news that a member is homosexual. Conflict is the order of the day because of the discrepancy in opinions on the issue of homosexuality.

Gay men find it difficult to openly talk to their families about their sexual orientation. Possible reasons for it might be because of the resistance that families pose against homosexuality, to protect their families and themselves. Another possibility that cause gay men to refrain from honestly communicating with their families is the fear of rejection. The family might also pressurise a gay man to change and to abandon his sexual orientation and seek an alternative lifestyle.

### ***Verbal & Physical Abuse***

**P-1** *"The verbal abuse of being said, 'Hey you moffie' "*

**P-2** *"And people then start calling you names and discriminate against you..."*

**P-3** *"...people like call you names and go on pointing at you. Like funny things, like whistling and when you turn around they say 'Look at this faggot'..."*

**P-3** “...everywhere you go you are getting these rude criticisms...”

**P-5** “They will criticise you, they will talk bad about homosexuality”

**P-5** “...they don’t just stare, and look and gossip...”

Homophobia is mostly executed in the form of hate speech or verbal abuse. Several examples can be seen in the interviews conducted. As mentioned earlier in this study, speech can be a powerful measure to control individuals. It has the potential to either build or destroy people’s lives. All the interviewees seem to have experienced some form of verbal abuse with regard to their sexual orientation.

**P-1** “...There were fightings physically and things like that as well. So, with others also it’s a case of, many are beaten by their families”

In extreme cases, homophobia can result in violent physical abuse or assault. It can occur in the immediate family or even the community set up of the gay person.

**P-1** “...men who are drag queens, who prefer to wear women’s clothes and things like that, they are beaten up on the streets”

Gay men who appear / behave feminine and who also ‘cross-dress’ become victims of violent acts because they are more ‘identifiable’ as being gay.

**P-1** *“The SFF, the Special Field Force was also beating two, two of my friends, uh, who are, who are gay, but who prefer wearing women’s clothes...”*

**P-2** *“...people being stopped and taking off earrings...”*

Government agencies are often involved in incidents that are reported. Civil servants are accused of making themselves guilty of violent acts toward gay men.

### ***Language***

**P-1** *“...if it did not exist it would not have a name...It would not have a name in all the languages that we know of...In Damara it is uh, ‘#amadhi’, or uh, ‘moffies’ or things like that”*

Language has the ability to convince and to validate. Homosexual men have indeed been identified, described and referred to by indigenous African languages, as seen earlier in this study. Awareness comes in the form of linguistic activity which encompasses meaning and understanding. Language is transported and carried over from one person to the next person through various means of communication. Homophobic language mostly manifests itself through speech and the media.

**P-1** *“...to hear that on national radio or TV as well”*

**P-5** *“They would scream about me on TV or say whatever...”*

The media is a powerful tool in discourse because it carries across messages that are being exchanged in societies. Becoming aware of discourses in this fashion is very significant because this medium of communication (especially the radio) reaches most Namibians. Communication through media sources are usually taken very seriously as the Namibian government often uses the media as a tool to communicate with the nation.

**Discussion:**

Three themes take prominent positions as objects that are referred to in this study. Politics and the church are dominant, may be because of the power and influence they possess in Namibia. The Bible was also frequently mentioned by the research participants. The reason might be, because Biblical verses are mostly used in the arguments in homophobic discourse, as well as counter arguments/discourses.

Participant 1 was very aware of the politics of the country. In his experience politics is important in his decision-making processes. Politics might have been mentioned by this gay man to draw attention to its weaknesses. Reference to Namibia's general homophobic political atmosphere can indicate the importance of it in the country's homophobic discourse. This can also explain the possible influence perceived as threats that politicians have on gay men like Participant 1. Threats from the most powerful authority of the country are quite significant and it could be perceived as a



serious threat by this interviewee. It can emotionally drain the person who might constantly think about it, worry about it and become nervous about it. If the person constantly experiences the threat and the emotions persist, it can cause a state of emotional turmoil.

The church was generally described as an unpopular object. It was mostly considered the mouthpiece of homophobia. The church was associated with bad experiences such as hate speech and rejection. Furthermore, the institution of the church was accused of injustice and of harbouring homophobes. It was not considered a safe place for gay men.

### **4.2.3 CRITERION 3: DISCOURSES ARE ABOUT SUBJECTS**

The steps of analysis in this criterion involve the people or higher forces that are spoken about in the discourse. Step 5 of discourse analysis is about “specifying what types of persons are talked about in this discourse, some of which may already have been identified as objects...” (Parker, 1992: 10). Certain people are noted and described. The ‘subjects’ co-constitute the discourse and may be in possession of information about the object that is being studied. Subjects serve as collateral informants about a discourse that include them. Therefore in the 6<sup>th</sup> step, in analysing a text, the type of person that is talked about, what this person convey and what this person might communicate to the readers of the text, should be specified (Parker, 1992).

## ***GOD***

**P-1** *“When God created everything, God said, ‘Everything, that I’ve created is fine...I don’t have any problem with it’ ”*

Certain attributions are made about God, based on the interpretations of the Bible by gay men and what they have been taught about God. Descriptions of God are used to counteract the predominantly homophobic Christian doctrine. God as a subject is used to support gay men and their sexual orientation. Participant 1 regards homosexuality as natural because gay men are the products of God and God claimed all His handiwork as good. In this instance God is depicted as the ultimate power that has the last say about homosexuality.

**P-1** *“...when Christ came, Christ said that you know, as long as you believe, as long as you love your neighbour as you love, love, yourself you know, it’s okay (...) If God so loved the world, why hate people because of what they are or what they want to be?”*

**P-4** *“I still believe in the Creator. I know He loves me, I know it’s because of Him that I am alive...”*

**P-5** *“Because if He is a God of love, if He’s a God of love, then He loves everyone... He doesn’t include whether you are white or you’re black or you’re gay or you’re straight”*

God’s love is for everybody and the guarantee thereof is an assurance to gay men. God is portrayed by the research participants as accepting of everybody, including gay men.

### ***Straight People***

**P-2** *“I think that if I was straight, I would have had a boring life (laugh)”*

**P-2** *“I don’t think that they take the interest to actually uhm, want to know what this is all about and why do people behave like this, you know”*

Heterosexuals are portrayed as ordinary and having dull lifestyles by Participant 2. He also thought that they are ignorant because they are not interested in educating themselves in order to find out more about homosexuality. Instead, they simply pass judgements in an uninformed manner.

**P-3** *“...homosexuals do experience this...straight people being so rude and negative all the time”*

‘Straight people’ are spoken of by homosexuals as the ‘other’ and is conceptualised as opposite to homosexual people. Labels are given to heterosexual or straight people

and they are placed into certain categories. Heterosexual people are considered ignorant and narrow-minded. Connotations or descriptions of ‘straight’ people are generally negative and insulting.

**P-4** *“But the other person, straight person, for instance, won’t understand me at all”*

Participant 4 also believes that heterosexual people are short-sighted and not open-minded.

### ***Parents / family members***

**P-1** *“...it was a difficult thing for me to come out to her as well and tell my mom that I am gay and, and this is what I prefer...Because I was afraid of that...But later I decided to come out and see what the consequences would be”*

**P-1** *“...with my sister coming out and, and her being, uhm, because there was a lot of verbal abuse as well as physical abuse in that sense...There were fightings physically and things like that as well”*

Parents or family members have the power to decide what is taboo and are the carriers of belief systems. Conflict and violence regarding homosexuals often start at home within the family unit as shown above in the quotes by Participant 1.

**P-3** *“But sometimes even the thought of my parents, you know, I ...it’s really nothing nice because I’m the only so-called son...of my parents and...disappointment sometimes, I think”*

**P-5** *“I thought, okay my parents are going to kill me because this is unnatural”*

Parental authority greatly influences the lives of their children. They have the task to educate and mould their children into adults they can be proud of. It is expected of children to adhere to this guidance and to be loyal to their upbringing. If children are not obedient to their family they are considered a failure and an embarrassment. The opinions of family members are usually regarded as important and are highly valued and respected. Family members are usually the key participants in the discourse. Parents are thought of as being against homosexuality and that they would not accept their children being homosexual.

**P-5** *“Then, when I told my parents they said like, I mean, they’re village people...So they just said, ‘Okay, no, we realised in time, but we were just waiting for you to come out with it”*

Participant 5 perceived his parents as traditional and old fashioned. Below he describes his parents as reasonable and understanding. The respondent did not expect

his parents to be so accepting and forgiving as they demonstrated to him. He was surprised that his parents could divert from their conservative ways of thinking.

**P-5** *“All my family around me, maybe if they have any problems with it, maybe they don’t really show it... But when I have my boyfriend with me, they, they show that they accept me and him”*

**P-5** *“Because I now can leave my lover or my friend who’s gay with my family”*

Participant 5 speaks of the family as the most supportive social unit. The acceptance of the family is very important for gay persons because it is the group to which they belong if the rest of society rejects them.

**P-5** *“And your child, your daughter or your son is gay or lesbian and you don’t accept them and you tell them that you love them... No way... If you really love them, just accept who they really are”*

Participant 5 expects families of gay men to accept them as they are and for whom they are, just as his family did.

## Gays

**P-2** “...I have friends who...want to make a scene or who always want to be noticed. And people have the perception that all homosexuals or all gay people are like that.”

**P-2** “...but I know that my friends are very ... they, they, they're a bit wild you know, sometimes. And that, I think, ticks people off because then people think that we want to be seen, you know”

Participant 2 explains how his gay friends are different from him when conducting themselves and in dealing with their ‘gay status’. It seems that he is not happy with the picture these particular friends portray to society about homosexuality.

**P-2** “So I have friends who tend to perform or try to give a show...”

The respondent seems to be disappointed by his friends because they try to live up to the stereotypes that exist about gay men. His friends might play out the roles that were assigned to them by heterosexuals because they want to be accepted, even if it is on those terms. Gay men who internalize and adhere to what society defines as gay, often experience relationship problems.

**P-1** *“So any time I can, I could, at one point, end our relationship and start with another, you know which, which causes promiscuity, you know, amongst the gay and lesbian relationships”*

Participant 1 felt that there is a lack of commitment in his relationship because it is not respected by law or the church. He is concerned about the implications of such a ‘casual’ arrangement.

**P-1** *“It is not respected and it is not even recognised as a relationship, even by other gay people, or as well as the law, it makes it difficult to relate to one person only, you know”*

The non-recognition of gay relationships brings about a lot of uncertainties and insecurities between the respondent and his partner. He described a homosexual relationship as a mere testing situation because it is not supported. Participant 1 was of the opinion that gay men experience difficulty in sorting out their problems and differences within their relationships with their partners. He implied that gay men rather seek an alternative, possibly easier solution such as turning their back on the relationship. This is often a more attractive option since it is simpler to end a gay relationship than to divorce when married as a heterosexual couple.

### ***Friends***

**P-3** *“As long as you know we are there for you, we are your friends...”*



**P-5** *“And my friends will be there”*

Friends are usually talked of as allies and also very importantly as rescuers. Reassurance by friends normalise things and they can offer support. Friendships are symbols of belonging. It is even more significant for Participant 3 who formed close ties with heterosexual people who were accepting and caring of him. Participant 5 is also sure of his friends and their support. He constantly mentions that he has his friends. It seems that he has loyal and caring friends who are committed to their relationship.

**Men**

**P-1** *“Like men, African men only socialise with men and they don’t socialise with women, so what men do together as men is, is their thing”*

Men are presented as secretive and closed in their social interactions. They are seen as powerful and as functioning independently. They form and belong to exclusive groups whose activities are unknown to outsiders.

**P-5** *“...you have to have a girlfriend, you have to have babies, you have to be a Herero man who’s like ... homophobic”*

Participant 5 classifies and defines men as either straight or homosexual. Obviously he speaks from his current frame of mind. A man is considered to be a man if he acts in certain ways as expressed in the quote above.

### ***The homophobe***

**P-1** “...you find that the person who is much homophobic is the person who is really interested in wanting to know more about being gay...”

**P-2** “...I know when I was younger I was very, very, very talkative and very...very girly and things like that, you know...And I think that’s where the problems comes in. A lot of people, once they see this person is like this, then they think, ‘Ok, he’s also like that.’ And people then start calling you names and discriminate you”

Participant 2 probably felt rather insignificant because he was raised to regard himself as unworthy since he had to live out a taboo that was despised by his community. He experienced discrimination or homophobia since his school days.

**P-2** “Because if you’re forever hating homosexuals and making all this hatred speeches and this marches and things against homosexuals, when do you actually have time to reflect on your life and give direction to your life...”

**P-3** *“They, they just sit there, they criticise and stuff...You know...And the next minute when the sun is down, they’re all over you”*

The participants depicted homophobes as too concerned with homosexuals, possibly ignoring their own lifestyles and shortcomings. The homophobe is described according to the person’s homophobic behaviour. This suggests that homophobes could be anybody who makes him/herself guilty of homophobic behaviour. Homophobes could be found in all sectors of the Namibian nation, including the workplace.

**P-3** *“Whether you work or not, they don’t give a damn, they’re just being rude”*

Participant 3 felt that gay men are not assessed on merit in the workplace and are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. Participant 3 shared that he was treated with disrespect by his employer(s) because of his sexual orientation. It seems, once again, that gay men are disempowered by homophobic discourse.

**P-3** *“...at workplaces it’s really difficult...someone are like, ‘Oh my God! Why did I hire this thing? I didn’t know he was like this”*

Employers are often accused of labour malpractices and unfair treatment of their workers, especially if they are gay. Gay men are frequently mocked at the workplace

because they are in a subordinate position as employees and secondly because there are currently no specific laws that protect gay men against homophobia. Employers can exploit a gay man if his sexual orientation becomes known; it can be used to blackmail him to coerce him to obey his employer.

#### Discussion:

Due to the fact that homophobic discourse is socially constructed, it has many subjects that contribute to the formation of this social creation. The subjects interact and influence one another through their communication. It is believed to be an interactive process where the one's discourse exists because of the other. This means discourse is always directed to the other. One has to keep in mind that it is not only the gay person that is subjected to homophobic discourse. Gay people participate and contribute to homophobic discourse. The gay community's discourse is also directed to other subjects in homophobic discourse.

Gay men are conscious of male subjects as they form part of the gender group. It would be the first subjects with whom they are compared since homosexual/heterosexual males are considered the same species. Participant 1 hinted that more gay men might be present in Namibia than what is believed because most of them are still 'in the closet'. A lot of gay men probably hide their homosexual orientation because of the severe homophobic environment in which they exist. Another reason could be that homosexuality has been secretly practiced among supposedly 'straight' men. Even more so, this research participant's message cue that

homosexual acts were for most of Namibian history a part of its culture. He further suggested that the existence of homosexuality was hidden by the silence that surrounded it in the past. Men could readily keep this information from Namibian social conscious because they had the power.

Participant 5 created an awareness of how masculinity is defined in his community. It seems that stereotypes and prejudice are used to form homosexual/heterosexual dichotomies to separate people into social categories. This is useful in creating a gay identity. Often this unilateral gay identity is based on false ideologies. This misconception of gay men could alienate, marginalize and further disempower them. The message is that people are often wrong in their judgments and beliefs about gay men.

Participant 1 & 5 made particular reference to the men as subjects. The reason could be their intense consciousness of culture. They strongly identify with their respective language groups. A hierarchal system is build into their cultural system. Men are mentioned because they are so important in the communities of the gay participants. It is because of the power heterosexual men have, that they are being referenced.

Participant 3 described heterosexuals as hostile and bad-mannered. This can tell one more about heterosexuals' behaviour when interacting with gays. 'Straight' people most of the time treated this interviewee badly. Heterosexual men are associated with homophobic behaviour by this gay man because of his previous experiences. This could indicate that heterosexual male subjects dominate homophobic discourse.

Participant 3 demonstrated that he was aware that other gay men are also subjected to homophobia. In this instance he could have tried to side with his (gay) group. Through his negative description of heterosexuals this gay man constructed difference and distance between gay and 'straight' people. His version is a testimony of the tension that exists between the two groups. Hostility toward heterosexuals was detected in this person's text. He spoke badly of heterosexuals and this could be termed as reverse discrimination. This gay man wanted to discredit heterosexuals.

Participant 4 conceives homosexuals as the 'other' as he clearly called a straight person an "other person". This once again shows how important the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy is. It is built on differentiation that usually causes discrimination and rivalry between the two categories. Participant 4 expects heterosexuals, because of his previous experiences, to devalue and misjudge him. He concluded that 'straight' people are ignorant and intolerant of gay persons.

On the other hand, the gay men in the study spoke of both gay and 'straight' people as their friends. They identify their friends as those who accept their homosexual orientation. Friends seem to be a main source of support to the gay persons of this research project. The research participants regard their friends as very important because they add value to their lives and validate them. Friends treat them as normal people, do not devalue or disrespect them. These gay men perceive their friends as close allies in the fight against homophobia. For gay men, having friends, especially

heterosexual ones increase their worth. It can alleviate psychological distress to know that not all heterosexuals are against gays and are keen to destroy them.

Parents are often feared because they have the power to reject and abandon their children who are often dependent on them. The parental styles of Participant 1 & 5's parents seem to be authoritarian. These parents would possibly discriminate against their gay children and try to coerce them to obey the socio-cultural norms of their community. In general, family members are often perceived as a threat by gay men because they are extremely interconnected with society as social beings in Namibia. Witnessing and being familiar with this significant social consciousness of their family members, gay men expect them to advocate homophobic social norms and depict socially accepted behaviour. All the research participants shared the belief that their families did not reject them. They proclaimed the acceptance and support of their families for confirmation and approval. Close ties with family members mean that a gay man is part of the family. To have membership in one of Namibia's most respected social institutions, the family can give a sense of belonging and security to a gay person. The support of family members can reassure a gay man, and it can improve his self-esteem and reduce feelings of loneliness. It can reduce fear and feelings of anxiety as the gay person would feel safe and protected in the family unit.

Reference to God was made out of the need to receive unconditional love and acceptance from 'somebody'. The connection the participants made with God anchors their faith because a personal relationship with God still allows them to be

Christians. God is important to the gay interviewees because they believe all people are equal before Him. They find salvation in their belief in God. These gay men have a need to be understood because they are outcasts in the intolerant society they live in. They seek understanding through God, their creator.

#### **4.2.4 CRITERION 4: A DISCOURSE IS A COHERENT SYSTEM OF MEANINGS**

The 7<sup>th</sup> step of discourse analysis requires “mapping a picture of the world this discourse presents...” (Parker, 1992: 12). This means the role of analysis is to formulate the world picture of the world as is observed in a particular discourse. The 8<sup>th</sup> step is “working out how a text using this discourse would deal with objections to the terminology...”(ibid).

#### ***World view***

##### **Participant 1**

**P-1** *“So, for me it was a thing of challenging me to come out, challenging me to be visible in public”*

Participant 1 sees the world as full of challenges for gay people. He thinks that a gay person needs to constantly prove his worth to the outside world. In his opinion, the



world consists of a private and public arena. He feels that being successful means being recognised and respected in public. He also sees the world as willing to learn about gay people, waiting to be informed about homosexuality and gay people.

**P-1** *“So slowly but surely it is coming [society allowing homosexuality]...You know, so it’s about time that such things happen. That we also recognise our own relationships...Uhm, I think the best thing that one could say is that it’s about time that Namibia moves away from homophobia. And, and probably puts it on the table and we talk about it and we start living it out”*

Participant 1 sees the world as changing and as being progressive. He is occupied with time, and what time ought to bring.

## **Participant 2**

**P-2** *“...The practice of homosexuality is uhm, morally it’s wrong”*

Participant 2 makes sense of the world in terms of right and wrong and there is no middle ground. It is a world that is full of judgements and these judgments are based on moral values.

**P-2** *“Because I don’t wake up in the morning and say, ‘Oh, I’m gay and I’m in this world...”*

Participant 2 perceives the world as restricting and confining identity. Society's strict rules and regulations limit a person and cause a lot of misunderstandings about the individual's personhood.

**P-2** *"...I'm sure that if you concentrate on your life and you sort out your business and your life, you know, you sort of like think, 'Well, I mean, leave them, let them be, you know. They're just normal human beings who are trying to sort out their lives and live their lives'"*

**P-2** *"But in fact you'll be judged alone"*

Participant 2 portrayed an individualistic approach to life. He reasons that the focus should be on the self, and that a person should make his own decisions and carry the consequences thereof as one is judged alone before God.

### **Participant 3**

**P-3** *"When people just say things like that, you are like.....you don't expect such things from everybody. Maybe a few people, but everywhere you go you are getting these rude criticisms and so on"*

Participant 3 conceives the world as the enemy and as a world that is against gay people. He sees life as unfair and that gay people are powerless. According to his

descriptions, gays are victims of their circumstances and life is a struggle. The world provides one with many choices and one has to make a decision. A gay person's world does not respect him irrespective of who he is, what he has or what he has done. This person's view is that the whole world is against gay people.

#### **Participant 4**

**P-4** *"...you always grow up thinking that, 'My life is wrong'..."*

It is a hostile world that makes cruel judgments. The world is governed by straight people that leave gay people with no choices. It is a secretive and unsafe world. It is a world that is full of alternative lifestyles in which dominant views do not rule anymore. The world is traditional and lacks education.

**P-4** *"But uh, the more books you read, the more people you meet, you uh, start thinking differently...You know, that's exactly what's happening in my life"*

The above-mentioned perception of the world was held by Participant 4 until he gained more exposure and experience of the world. This means he had contact with outside sources that influence perceptions and opinions. His image of the world changed when he gained knowledge from outside his regular frame of reference.

**Participant 5**

**P-5** *“Only my village...I have experiences there”*

This person's world is confined to the village he grew up in and it is his reference point.

**P-5** *“I'm a kind of a family person”*

His world revolves around the fact that he is from the Otjiherero language group. Being part of this group is the determining factor in his world. His frame of mind is limited to being Otjiherero and to the village life as he experiences it. It is a world that requires patience because it evolves slowly over time. He feels that the world sends mixed messages, where people live separate lives during day and night. Family serves a very important function to him and he defines his world in terms of his family life.

**P-5** *“Because at the end of the day there's a reward after it”*

Participant 5 feels that if you believe in something it will realise. It gives him reason to continue fighting, although he perceives the world as unfriendly towards homosexuals.

**P-5** “...*homophobia is everywhere*”

He also feels that the entire world is unfriendly towards homosexuals. This makes it more challenging for them to continue with their lives.

#### **4.2.5 CRITERION 5: A DISCOURSE REFERS TO OTHER DISCOURSES**

A particular discourse utilises, includes, is included in and refers to other accessible discourses. In order to appreciate a discourse, its operation and interaction with other discourses is of relevance. The 9<sup>th</sup> step in discourse analysis is “setting contrasting ways of speaking, discourses, against each other and looking at the different objects they constitute...” (Parker, 1992:14). A discourse is identified by disqualifying that which it is not. Pinpointing the differences in discourses signifies its uniqueness and characteristics. A phenomenon such as homophobia exists within a reality such as homophobic discourse. The essence of the discourse could also be discovered in the analysis of discourses impacting on one another. The co-existence of discourses is realised through the similarities that they have. The parallels of discourses are the connecting points for their cooperation and support of one another, possibly becoming a part of the other. Hence, the 10<sup>th</sup> step of discourse analysis is “identifying points where they overlap, where they constitute what looks like the ‘same’ objects in different ways...” (ibid). The function or role of the discourse becomes apparent in such an analysis.

### ***Racist discourse***

**P-1** *“I had to present myself as being gay, Namibian and Damara”*

**P-1** *“I know amongst the coloureds it is allowed. Amongst the Wambos it is now trying to---slowly but surely you know as time goes. And within the Hereros it is coming slowly but surely”*

**P-2** *“...President of Namibia mentioned that uhm, homosexuality is a, is a western thing”*

**P-3** *“...That homosexuality is apparently from those European and American sides of the world, not African”*

**P-4** *“Oh yes I am aware that people say it’s un-African but, uhm, I am a Namibian. I’ve never been to Europe”*

#### Discussion:

Participant 1 constantly refers to other races when describing homophobic discourse. It seems race is important in homophobic arguments and that a connection is often made between the concepts of homophobia and race. It would appear that this gay man compared his own worth in relation to other races. It is a possibility that his references to indigenous ethnic groups are made to prove that homosexuality is African. This discourse could also serve to create black alliance, as black

homophobia might be prevalent in Namibia. This person might also try to defend his identity as a Damara by mentioning that homosexuality exists and is tolerated to some extent in other ethnic groups. He seems to be proud of his identity.

Discourse of race is a very important underlying discourse that can be associated with homophobic discourse, since homophobic statements sometimes connect the homosexual phenomenon to a certain 'race'. The discrimination against homosexuals is closely linked to the division between white and black colour groups. Homosexuality is commonly conceptualised in Africa as 'a white man's disease'.

The homophobic and racist discourses draw on certain similarities of discrimination, marginalization, oppression and violence. It is founded on the basis of intolerance of differences. These are two of the most prominent discourses that stem from power relations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to delve into the concept of homophobic discourse. The research project was comprehensively and concisely reported to the extent that it could be replicated to produce the same findings. This secured the accuracy of the study and made it reliable. This study employed literature on homophobic discourse to explore the research question. The responses of the participants were examined and interpreted through discourse analysis. The accounts of the gay men were reviewed as texts or discourses. The findings were discussed in terms of their psychological impact as well as the framework provided by the literature on the given research topic. The relevance of the research was ensured through the establishment of a definition of the research topic or question and by developing objectives for the study. Adherence to the research question and objectives made the study valid.

Three main research objectives guided this study. The first objective was to explore homophobic discourse in Namibia. It was found that homophobic discourse is dominant in Namibia. Homophobic discourse comprises of the basic assumptions that homosexuality is un-African, unnatural and un-Christian. Homophobic discourse is kept intact by other discourses like the political discourse. It was found that homophobic discourse mainly surfaced in the local media and in hate speech by political leaders and ordinary citizens in public and also in the church.



The unnatural homophobic discourse developed out of both masculinity and psychology. Homosexuality was previously classified as a psychological disorder in the discipline of psychology. In Africa it is simply viewed as unnatural because it does not fit the patriarchal system that is strictly followed and which dominates African culture and traditions.

The un-African homophobic discourse is based on myths that homosexuality is a choice and is not part of African tradition. The majority of Africans are against homosexuality. Homosexuality is still illegal in most African countries. Namibian politicians started a feud with homosexuals. The illusion exists that homosexuality is a 'white man's disease'. Contrary to this belief, indications were found in this research of traces of homosexuality in Namibian historical cultural practices. Researchers have documented testimonies of indigenous people describing what could be termed homosexual acts or behaviour in 'African cultures'. In addition to this, the (African) gay men of this study shared their recollections of homosexuality's existence in Namibia's history.

The homophobic attitude of the church towards homosexuality and gay men often drive them away. The church took on the role to 'cure' individual homosexual tendencies. Homosexuality is predominantly condemned by the Christian world. The reason for this is that Christianity, like many Africans, supports the belief that homosexuals have a choice and the power to decide whether they want to be homosexual or not. Religious gay men often become confused and struggle to find

direction. Everyone needs an anchor and a sense of security in life. Religion is a belief in some higher power and provides a sense of belonging. Having to renounce their faith can have a profound spiritual and psychological impact on the lives of gay men. This could generate feelings of loss and insecurity, particularly about the after-life. Gay men may feel alienated and can become vulnerable because their religion as a source of support, validation and a means of coping has been taken away from them. Homophobic discourse can therefore create enormous ambivalence and confusion within gay individuals who were brought up in Christian environments. The study focused on Christianity as opposed to other religions because most of the Namibian people, including the gay men who were interviewed, identify themselves as Christians.

The second objective was to explore the gay men's awareness and experience of the homophobic discourse in Namibia. The gay men that were interviewed were aware of homophobic speeches of politicians, anti-gay legislation and the injustices or violence motivated by homophobia. The participants knew that the Namibian government is not gay-friendly and is one of the driving forces behind homophobic discourse. They were conscious of how other gay men were influenced and treated because of homophobia. The interviewees could account for past homophobic experiences and some gave vivid examples of what they observed. The gay men were aware of how homosexuality and gay men are spoken of by homophobes. Gay men were familiar with the language or wording used in homophobic discourse.

Homophobia led to gay men being the primary targets of discrimination and abuse. The participants experienced verbal abuse and witnessed physical abuse of other gay men. They encountered discrimination on numerous occasions. The gay participants mainly came across homophobia in the church, on the street and in their particular communities. These homophobic experiences cause psychological symptoms in Namibian gay men, which might lead to psychological disorders.

The third objective of this study was to explore the psychological impact of homophobic discourse on gay men in Namibia. Certain emotions became apparent in the discourse of the research participants and some explicitly indicated what they felt. Homophobia hurts gay men because they often feel humiliated, ill-treated and threatened. The participants communicated that gay men live in fear and were angered by the injustices that result from homophobia. Interviewees showed that the discourse of homophobia can have many negative psychological outcomes for gays. However, there are a few isolated cases where one could conclude that something positive has come out of gay men's homophobic experiences.

Indicators of possible mental disorders were found in some of the texts. Firstly, signs of depression were common. Secondly, the constant fear experienced by gay men might result in anxiety. A third concern was suicidal ideation. It is a natural consequence of a person with a low self-esteem and destructive thinking patterns to conclude that his life is not worth living anymore. Gay men are often devalued and reminded of how 'bad' or 'insignificant' they are. They constantly have to face and

deal with critique or assault. The research participants shared that they experience emotions such as loneliness and sadness that can develop into a continuous state of having a low mood and negative thoughts. In desperation to relieve these thoughts and feelings the person might harm himself.

The significance of this study is that it explored new angles of old situations, and concepts, which gave rise to new meanings. The research developed a transformative discourse to counteract current Namibian homophobic discourse. The use of discourse analysis in this study was an excellent method that unmasked falsehoods of the homophobic discourse. More importantly, it allowed this research to describe how a few gay men spoke about their awareness and experiences of homophobia. Discourse analysis created an opportunity for the few gay men of the study to express their knowledge on how homosexuality/homosexuals are spoken about and dealt with. Through these descriptions, it is possible to understand how the research participants interpret and are psychologically influenced by the way they (gays) are talked about and treated by others. Their perceptions and interpretations influence their meaning. This informs these gay men's thoughts and emotions which can have a positive/negative psychological impact on them.

Gay men's relationships with their families are often disturbed when they 'come out of the closet' and usually result in conflict, but the relationships are not terminated. Since the relationship is not terminated, issues are never really resolved. Some relationships of gay men are ruined by the labels they carry and the emotional

problems they experience. It was found in the study that gay participants work very hard to illuminate labelling and their implications. The interviewees tried to deal and cope with labels by positioning themselves in a specific role. These subject positions can be that of 'a victim', 'an outcast' and so forth. The purpose of taking on these roles as their own was to challenge, resist and cancel the roles (labels) others subscribe to them and sometimes force them to play. Gay men have challenging relationships with most heterosexuals, given all the hatred, anger and bigotry between the two parties due to the homophobic discourse.

Failure of a gay relationship might possibly be a result of the fact that all the odds are against it. Gay relationships often also fail because there seems to be a lack of commitment. This might not be true for all gays, however, there is less support and incentive to work out disagreements without the legal and religious sanctioning of marriage. Due to homophobia, gay men in same-sex relationships often do not have the social power to freely choose the terms of their relationships. As any other relationship, homosexuals would like to be able to continue their relationships, like getting married for instance. Gay men desire social and legal protection of their relationships. It was suggested by the participants that intimate relationships between same-sex partners were considered less worthy of respect and protection because they fall outside of the parameters of marriage.

It is proposed that subsequent studies include lesbian women as part of the sample for homosexual research. It would be significant if a study is conducted to explore and describe the research problem of what homosexuality is, the different forms of homosexuality found in Namibia and what it means for lesbians to be classified as homosexual.

Longitudinal studies could prove very interesting as they could demonstrate psychosocial changes with regard to homosexuality and the homophobic discourse that occurs in Namibia. Future studies need to elaborate and contribute to the available literature of homophobic discourse. The history of homophobic ideology could also be studied.

There is a need to develop our scientific understanding of all aspects of homophobia, including its origin, prevention, development and treatment. It would be worthwhile for example, to investigate the motivational factors underlying homophobic discourse per se.

It is recommended that studies on the development of sexual homophobic prejudice early in the life span of adolescents and young adults be done, as it can provide valuable insights into anti-gay stereotypes and the myths and prejudice inherited through culture.

Some studies could also focus on the perpetrator (homophobe) in Namibia, using a cognitive-behavioural approach to study the meaning-making processes within such individuals. Future studies on homophobia and its psychological outcomes could perhaps employ the Model of Global and Situational meaning of Park and Folkman (1997) to explore psychologically, the processes of how gay men make sense of homophobic discourse, how these meanings influence the effect it has on them psychologically and how the cognitive process of meaning-making allows gay men to cope with homophobic discourse.

In Namibia, an HIV/AIDS epidemic-ridden country, it could be important if a study could be done on homophobia in the work setting. Such a study could investigate how stigmas attached to homosexuality influences gay people's work performance and what the consequences are. It would be crucial to ascertain how gay people deal or cope with such stigmatizing conditions. Studies could also be done on therapeutic interventions or treatment for gay men who suffer psychological distress as a result of homophobia in this context.

This study is worthwhile because it addressed a form of discrimination (homophobia) that is a disturbing social problem in Namibia. The research is important because it indirectly directs consciousness to other areas of discrimination and social injustice. Most of all, this research project showed the possible psychological effects homophobia could have on the gay person.

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