

Is liberation worth suffering for?

**An exploration of the impact of religion on the process of queer identity construction,
expression, and negotiation in Cape Town, South Africa**

By: Charlene Donald

Student Number: 221116845

Supervisor: Professor Charlene van der Walt

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Theology (Gender and Religion) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

DECLARATION

I, Charlene Chenaye Donald, declare that this dissertation titled; **Is liberation worth suffering for? An exploration of the impact of religion on the process of queer identity construction, expression, and negotiation in Cape Town, South Africa** unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is the result of my research and that all sources used have been acknowledged using complete references.

Charlene C Donald

Student

Prof Charlene Van der Walt

Supervisor

7 February 2023

Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to all the participants in my study – these are our lived experiences and represent the lives of the queer bodies of colour that came before us. Engaging and reflecting with you was a beautiful process that made this piece of work possible. May we continue to be seen and heard and one day, normalise queer.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

They accept me as I am, nobody refers to my sexual orientation and I never mention it.

It makes things so much easier.¹

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will give the reader the background to, and rationale for, the study. By introducing the systemic barriers that restrict some people from living fully, I hope to help the reader understand the daily challenges faced by queer-identifying persons of colour (QPoC). In doing so I will explore how heteronormative white supremacy contributes to the oppression and othering of QPoC. The concepts of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and racism are introduced and explained as are the ways in which these are informed and sustained by religion and culture. Research questions and study objectives will provide the theoretical framework which informs the methodology and structure of the project. Through this research I aim to problematise the exclusion of QPoC in our society and emphasise the importance of challenging these ideals to ensure that all persons live freely regardless of their identity.

1.2 Study Rationale and Motivation

South Africa is a nation made up of different cultures and religions (Coertzen, 2014), however it is also the home where some of its children are othered by the conservative majority. Maluleke (2012) describes the harmful nature and violation of human rights that some cultural values and beliefs translate into practises that are not questioned or challenged because of an

¹ Hames, M., 2007. Sexual identity and transformation at a South African university. *Social Dynamics*, 33(1), pp. 52-77.

aura of morality maintained by those practising them. Historically Christianity has been privileged above other religions in South Africa and, although a secular state, South Africa's Law is Roman-Dutch, and much of its doctrine was introduced at the time of seventeenth century Dutch settlers, the heritage of which remains the basis of modern South African law (Coertzen, 2014). According to Meyer (2017), the majority affiliation is to a Christian belief, and a large minority adhere to traditional African religions accommodated by a system of customary law. Other religions practised in the country include Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and there is a small population that is atheist or agnostic (Scroope, 2019). Given this, it is expected that the beliefs and behaviours of most people in South Africa are informed to a large extent by strong religious beliefs and even religious affiliation. Consequently, religiosity in South Africa is not removed from the function and performance of constructs of gender and cultural values (Meyer, 2017).

Gender discourses also have a powerful influence on behaviour and the development of an identity that informs how we must be in the world, and how others expect us to be. According to Thom and Coetzee social identity development in a South African context is 'complicated by the continuous process of transformation of a sociocultural identity' (2004: 184). This suggests that different influences on our identity change have various trajectories of relationality, and that constructs such as race, religion, and gender have different levels and functions of power at different moments in our lives. There are some factors however that can be consistent, such as masculinity, and consequently, patriarchy.

Masculinity is defined by Moolman (2013: 95; cited in Meyer (2017) as '...the multiplied, shifting, fluid practises, and performances of gendered bodies and identities. Masculinity is not always attached to a male body but stands in relation, and at the same time, in opposition to

concepts of 'femininity' (Moolman, 2013: 95, cited in Meyer, 2017). According to Kimmel (2013) normative definitions of masculinity suggest that being a man means not being like a woman, therefore men must affirm their power to avoid being associated with being feminine. In South Africa masculinity is hegemonic, with cisgendered men asserting power and privilege to these bodies. Depending on race, class, age, geography and context, access to power and privilege varies even though this hegemonic masculinity still provides a useful frame of reference for understanding the experiences of people who are QPoC in relation to various ideological constructs.

Patriarchal practices are socialised across all South African cultures and persist across generations because of patriarchy's universality and longevity. Interpretations of the Genesis creation stories have influenced the view that men were created to dominate and thus patriarchy as the will of G-d is a general assumption. Patriarchy as a social system is one in which men appropriate almost all social roles and assume almost all dominant positions. A definition by Ackermann has it that patriarchy is '...the legal, economic, and social system that validates and enforces the sovereignty of the male head of the family over its other members... Today patriarchy describes the male-dominated world that we live in' (1991: 95). Sultana (2010) draws on Bhasin's modern definition as 'male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate...'. (2006: 3). Similarly, Lerner (1989) writes that patriarchy implies that men hold the power in all important aspects of society.

Thus, the supremacy of males implies the undermining of women and other genders, and male dominance is thereby institutionalised. Therefore, it can be said that patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance. As a result, it is not only women who

experience oppression by the patriarchal system, but all persons who do not adhere to the societal norms patriarchy prescribes. Connell (1995) helps us understand this by arguing that men use terror as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions for what is acceptable behaviour and practice. Their power, operating through various institutions and in the form of the oppression of femininity is an important part of the gender structure (Connell, 2002). Men position themselves in opposition to the feminine to identify with a hegemonic position in the gender/sex hierarchy (Redman, 2000). The patriarchal system results in heteronormativity which accepts and reinforces heterosexuality as the only acceptable pattern of relating and loving, and that in turn reinforces masculine norms as dominant (Hale and Ojeda, 2018). Connell (1995) suggests that hegemonic masculinity defines normative expectations for men and promotes behaviours such as policing other men who do not live up to the ideal. Rubin (1975) suggests that patriarchy not only suppresses cisgendered women but also leads to the suppression of different sexualities and identities.

Patriarchy not only controls the hierarchy of human status but governs what is considered acceptable in sexual and other intimate relations (Judge, 2009). Heterosexual lifestyle norms that affect and control us and reproduce distinct and complementary binary genders are considered heteronormative (Herz and Johansson, 2015: 000). Yep (2017) suggests argues that there is a normalisation of heterosexuality in our social systems that is referred to as heteronormativity. It describes reality exclusively as heterosexual and considers only those sexual and marital relations that are between men and women as acceptable and natural, leaving no room for alternative experiences, constructions, or realities (Yep, 2017). Myers and Raymond (2010) claim that heteronormativity is the privileged normalisation and naturalisation of heterosexuality and is viewed as a foundational structure in society and culture. It is unquestioning about different societal levels and privileges, and sanctions

individuals purely on presumed binaries of gender and sexuality (Herz and Johansson, 2015). Sentiments that go against heterosexuality as the norm are compounded by the strong patriarchal religious ethic that considers anything relating to Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender or Intersex (LGBTI) as sinful and wrong (Astbury and Butler 2005).

This leads to an othering that informs stigma and exclusion which in turn leads to homophobic attitudes and then to hate crimes (Yep, 2017). Religious texts are quoted by patriarchal and heteronormative communities to define what is normal and acceptable to justify the relegation of queer persons to the margins of society. Tolbert (2000) writes that conservative views and stigma about sexuality and gender stem from intersections of religion, culture, and ignorance. Similarly, Koopman (1998) as cited in Van der Walt and Davids (2022, p35) suggests that heteropatriarchy, derived from the conceptual combination of two systemic realities that insist on a compulsory patriarchy of heterosexuality or heteronormativity is performed through religious argument. In this system bodies are divided into the biological characteristics of male and female and through customs and beliefs they are sexed and gendered into a presumed normal sexual orientation which prescribes how they ought to perform and what they ought to desire (Van Der Walt and Davids, 2022). Anyone who does not confirm to the ideals of heteropatriarchy is marginalised and dehumanised, or, as suggested by Connell (2002) is, exposed to violence. According to Van der Walt and Davids (2022) those who defy the mould of heteropatriarchy experience violence because they are deemed ungovernable. This happens with the blessings of culture and religion alike. The stigmatisation of queer-identifying persons in South Africa is propagated by religious institutions through moral narratives that suggest that we are a sin against G-d (Van der Walt, 2019). In Ackermann's (1991) view our full humanity as queer persons is not recognised in churches and in societies because we are not men.

Institutions of faith have a large social footprint in local communities and serve as the breeding ground for harmful dehumanising sentiments. Religion must bear responsibility for the harm of heteropatriarchy because it acts as a conduit for the exclusion of queer persons, whose realities fall outside the mainstream. Russell (1990) explains how gender and sexuality are deeply informed and upheld by patriarchal power systems and that the recognition of the father as the head of the family accepts patriarchy as the will of G-d. Culture and religion serve the as tools patriarchy uses to oppress and relegate those of us who are not men to positions of insignificance in society, denying us the right to grow to full maturation and the realisation of our full potential as human beings.

The power dynamics in the hierarchy of privilege and acceptance include the intersection of race. Racism in South Africa continues at various levels and institutions of society despite the end of Apartheid in 1994, and is a complex phenomenon linked to the prejudices that cannot be divorced from notions of group identity (Punt, 2009). The notion of race and its association with aspects of physiognomy such as skin tone, facial features, and hair texture is intertwined with issues of class, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and religion; and is linked to power, status, wealth, and social position argues (Pillay, 2017). Accordingly, according to whom to Pillay (2017) racism is linked to assertions of whiteness; whiteness, however, is not limited to physical characteristics but to the position that white people occupy in people's minds, and, beyond that is the belief that G-d intended white people to rule and dominate.

Pillay (2017: 6) argues:

In a South African context, it is the affirmation and imposition of whiteness as the superior pigmentation and population group at the extent of oppressing and

dehumanising the black majority population which led to black people actually believing that they are inferior human beings

This perception suggests that the issue of racism in South Africa is deeply embedded in the minds of PoC and requires us to emancipate ourselves and free our own minds. Pillay (2017: 00) argues further that the Church has a responsibility to defend the rights of people to live with dignity and that human rights are G-d given to all people; instead, the church is often used to justify acts of racism. For example, when Christians tried to justify slavery, they claimed black skin was a punishment from G-d and invoked the curses cast upon Cain (Pillay, 2017). Christianity played an influential role in the ideological formation and justification of the Apartheid political system in that biblical texts were used to justify Apartheid. According to Farisani (2014) the bible was used during Apartheid as a tool to legitimise the Apartheid ideology that excluded, oppressed, and marginalised PoC; and anyone who questioned these principles was seen to be questioning the authority of the bible.

As a QPoC, my identity is subjective and influenced by the context in which I find myself. The construction of my identity is fluid and on-going, and the manner in which I express it is influenced by the space(s) in which I perform it. I exist in a world order that systemically oppresses me, because I am of colour, because I am a woman, and because I am queer. Multiple social forces act upon me systematically to exclude me. My lived experiences are erased from the world as they are considered unworthy, and because I am considered contrary to normal.

The religiously informed heteronormative world in which I construct and express my identity, in the context of an underlying life-denying patriarchal system, tirelessly constructs, reconstructs, and imposes a closet on me because of the tyranny of the binary which renders

queerness either invisible or reviled. Society constructs gendered norms and predicts sexual interactions depending on what sex was assigned to a person at birth. Heterosexuality is not only assumed but expected. Heterosexuality encodes the body into a binary system that hierarchically places the masculine at the top and benefits cisgendered bodies that perform sex and gender roles according to the bodily reality assumed at birth (Van der Walt and Davids, 2022). Bodies that do not conform to this heteronormative order are rendered a nuisance to society and must be eliminated. It is through discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion that this elimination occurs. To survive one is forced to hide. Queer persons are forced to conceal their realities. QPoC are dehumanised by violence, injustice, exploitation, and oppression and they yearn for freedom and justice in order to recover their humanity.

According to Freire (2020: 44) dehumanisation is ‘the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanises the oppressed’. In resisting and struggling against oppression, the oppressed is tasked with restoring humanity for both themselves as the oppressed but also has to liberate the oppressor – thereby liberating both from oppression (Freire, 2020). Liberation is not only gained by recognising the need for it, but by fighting for it (Freire, 2020). For QPoC to be seen as fully human in a heteropatriarchal world that reveres whiteness, we need to quest for freedom constantly and responsibly. Without freedom we cannot exist authentically, and although we desire this, we fear it. Before freedom is discovered there is suffering (Freire, 2020). This suffering can be seen as a destruction of life before it is recognised as a struggle for liberation. Freire (2020) postulates that this discovery cannot be purely intellectual and that it must involve action, with the oppressor – therefore to liberate ourselves as QPoC, we have to go into dialogue and reflect with the oppressor. ‘...[W]hile no one liberates [themselves] by [their] own efforts alone, neither [are

they] liberated by others' (Freire, 2020: 66). Liberation requires that we see each other as fully human, and to do this we must be resilient and be seen to be so.

My liberation from the closet is an unremitting process, a struggle against society's definition of normal which renders me vulnerable to the violence that is used to maintain hegemonic heteronormativity. In the closet that preserves the secret of my identity as a QPoC, I find others who are like me. This closet is not a place of safety. According to Boxer (1996) hiding one's sexual orientation, gender identity, and the expression of sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) becomes a lifelong moral hatred of the self. It places an obligation on queer-identifying persons to form seemingly traditional families and attempt to live their lives as cis-gendered and/or heterosexual in order to gain social approval; this results in irrevocable damage to physical and mental health and can be damaging to relations with friends and family (Fox, 2016, Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Boxer, 1996). Dissociative identity disorder, chronic depression, self-disgust and self-hatred, low self-esteem and negative self-view, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts are some of the ailment's research suggests are likely to develop if queer-identifying persons are forced to keep their SOGIESC a secret from society and themselves (Fox, 2016, Hatzenbuehler, 2009, Quinn, Weisz, and Lawner, 2017). According to Suppes, Van der Toorn and Begeny (2021), concealability may seem beneficial although it can be cognitively exhausting in that it requires ongoing monitoring and the vigilance of potential risks. The closet involves contradictions, complexities, and nuances, and, through the coming-out process, we constantly negotiate visibility, expression, and the validity of our desires.

The dearth of literature on how African QPoC construct and express their identities is noteworthy given the increase in scholarly research on queer identities (Kuper, Nussbaum, and Mustanski, 2011; Kuper, Wright, and Mustanski, 2018). Literature continues to centre on the

experience of gay white men and fails to discuss identity development as a process that occurs through social interaction in a social context, one that is often influenced by religion. The findings of Suppes, Van der Toorn, and Begeny (2021) argue that there are benefits to stepping out of 'unhealthy closets' thereby enabling connection and integration with a queer community which in turn enables access to support and belonging. Beyond the unhealthy closets are intolerant environments filled with stigma and discrimination which become increasingly clear as one's openness and identification grows.

By coming out, queer people integrate the dissociated aspects of themselves. Coming out requires a self-acceptance that claims a normative identity. Coming out is an ongoing process that requires the constant negotiation of when and to whom we reveal our identities. There seems to be strict binarism of known and unknown, silence and speech, public and private, shame and pride, yet, if we follow Foucault's assessment of what can be considered a speech act then we begin to accept that there are many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourse. According to Sedgwick (2008: 145),

'Closetedness itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence — not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it.'

This study asks if liberation is worth suffering for? 'Liberation is like a new birth, a painful one. The person who emerges is a new person, no longer oppressor or oppressed but a person in a process of achieving freedom' Paulo Freire (1970: 25). As QPoC we have the ability to make a difference to our own lives, defying oppressive systems and claiming our own liberation, because we are the ones that know the pain of being oppressed. We need to liberate

ourselves from suffering because as Oduyoye states, ‘oppression does not lie in the eye of the beholder, it tugs at the soul of the one who feels it’ (1995: 81). When one is engaged in the process of liberation, one cannot remain passive to the oppressor’s violence (Freire, 2020). This paper aims to explore oppression in the form of existential threats that include, but are not limited to, the hate crimes, homophobia, and internalised stigma experienced by QPoC when expressing their identities in heterosexist spaces that are influenced by and sustained through religion and culture. To do this I must explore the resilience of queer identity negotiation in a reactionary socio-religious South Africa. Literature suggests no clear condemnation or stance from any religion or culture on the dehumanising treatment of queer people, but rather teachings and practices of gender roles that are used to reinforce ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and in turn perpetuate violence that threatens queer people against living free and fully authentic lives (Phiri, 2002, Owino, 2010). As a QPoC living in Cape Town, this is not only important to me as an individual with lived experience, and as an emerging scholar but as a human rights defender working towards the end of othering.

This chapter will provide a background to, and will highlight, the contextual realities of the people who participated in this study. There is very little research on identity construction, negotiation, and expression of QPoC, especially from South Africa where we are not an ethnic minority and where other socio-cultural factors could influence our queer identity and coming out behaviours. Most of the available research has focused on the experience of white queer individuals and their families. This limits its applicability to the coming out process of QPoC given that most of the literature on the subject emanates from a white-dominant framework (Boe, Maxey, and Bermudez, 2018; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, and Parsons, 2006). The importance of undertaking such research in this area transcends the value of understanding people’s self-concepts to challenge colonial heteropatriarchy systems of oppression that deny life for people

living on the margins of society. The next section will give a background to the study by highlighting the current context of themes and people to which the project relates.

1.3 Background of the study

1.3.1 The dichotomy between state and community

South Africa is perceived as the most sexually liberated democracy in Africa (Hames, 2007: 00). Buoyed by the rights enshrined in South Africa's first democratic Constitution, the advancement of formal equality based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation was a critical marker of legal and social transformation. South Africa was the first nation in the world to protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation and the first country in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage (Geldenhuys, 2021). The Constitution codified the fledgling democratic state, founded on the values of 'human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms', and the principle of 'non-racialism and non-sexism' (South African Government, 1996). The right to equality set out in section 9 (3) of the Bill of Rights established a legal framework in which the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth (South African Government, 1996).

I might get killed because of who I am, because of who I love ².

Despite the inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE), a range of rights did not automatically translate into equitable and substantive access to a variety of

² Fletcher, 2016 as cited in Geldenhuys, K. (2021) 'Hate Crimes against the LGBTQIA Community,' Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine, 114(7), pp. 30–34. doi: 10.10520/ejc-servamus-v114-n7-a9

privileges normally bequeathed to full citizenship (Hames, 2007). A statement issued by Lawyers for Human Rights (2021) quoted in the writings of Geldenhuys (2021: 31) explains How, even...

‘...[t]oday we still fear to simply be ourselves, to dress how we choose or to share an embrace - not only in public but also among those who we may count as friends and neighbours. They too are our murderers, sometimes children as young as 14...Our state dehumanises us in police stations and government offices.’

Twenty-seven years later, our lived experiences as QPoC do not reflect the true nature of the Constitution’s safeguards and our queer-identifying black bodies are continually denied access to these rights, in the streets, in our homes, in churches, and in many of the spaces we occupy. Hate crimes against queer people, murders, and suicides abound as do insidious and subtle examples of homophobia, despite the South African Constitution’s being one of the most progressive in the world (Collison, 2016). It’s an uncomfortable reality for many that, lawfully, all members of South African society are equal and able to live free from homophobia or stigma; yet in practice the culture remains biased, conservative, homophobic, and patriarchal, leading to double lives, shame, and the evocation of the kind of violence already mentioned earlier.

Legal rights alone are not enough to ensure an affirming and nurturing environment for all without a daily reality that matches the legislation. The reality in South Africa is that queer people are likely to experience verbal abuse or possible exclusion from their families and communities and many face extreme violence, discrimination, and murder.

1.3.2 What and who is queer

For the purposes of this research, I refer to people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) as queer. Sexual Orientation refers to one's romantic, emotional, and/or physical feelings for or attraction to, other people; Gender Identity is one's internal and individual experience of gender, which does not necessarily correspond with the sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to an individual by society; Gender Expression is a range of cues that interpret genders and Sexual Characteristics as physical features relating to sex. To ensure inclusivity and accuracy, it is recognised that this queer umbrella is not static and continues to evolve. It is important that from the outset of this research queer is collectively defined as the meaning it will take on throughout. The reader is invited to the process of meaning and to reflect on lived experience and life encounters when interpreting the meaning of queer in this study. The terms used inform our identity and speak ourselves into being. This research aims to understand the collective but unique experiences of QPoC and therefore the definition of queer will remain fluid throughout, allowing space to produce knowledge outside the contours of traditional form.

One of the several definitions of 'queer', as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as cited in Whittington (2012) has remained consistent since the 19th century, and reads: 'strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric; also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious'. Whittington (2012: 157) continues to explain how this definition is hardly used in the 21st century but rather a second definition crafted in 1970, that reads: 'slang, especially of [male] homosexual. Also, of things: pertaining to homosexuals or homosexuality'. According to the United Nations (UN) IOM LGBTIQ+ Focal Point Jenn Rumbach (2020), the term is used by those who feel that they do not conform to a given society's economic, social, and political norms based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

For this research, queer will be understood through the lens of Queer Theory formulated in 1990 and practised today as a position against normative or dominant thought, incorporating Eve Sedgwick's definition of queer (as cited in Whittington (2012: 157) as,

‘...the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses, and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.’

‘Queer’ will serve as an umbrella term that embraces the matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, characteristics, expressions, desires, and habits, including people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. As well as anyone, as redefined by Bornstein (1994: 98) ‘who cares to admit their own gender ambiguities’. ‘Queer’ does not concern any particular identity category but defies labels and rejects stereotypes, encompasses all those subjectivities, and crosses the boundaries established by dominant norms of traditionally defined concepts of gender and sexuality. Sithole (2019) found in the writings of Callis (2009) that the term queer was reclaimed in the late eighties and early nineties by activists who were concerned with gender and sexual freedom, to be used as a shared umbrella term for all non-heteronormative people. Sithole (2019) continues, that the work of Callis (2009) describes queer as an identity, claimed by those of us who consider sexuality fluid, implying that we are not queer in the same way but uniquely articulate our own queerness. Therefore, it can be said that queerness is a spectrum of personal, fluid, and nuanced forms.

1.3.3 Queer confrontation

Queer identity expression in South Africa is embedded in violence and prejudice. Despite constitutionally guaranteed legal protections for queer-identifying people, a disparity exists between the protection provided by the law and our lived experience. There are non-derogable rights couched in our Constitution that guarantee queer-identifying people life, freedom from discrimination, and human dignity, however these rights remain inaccessible to QPoC when the deeply conservative, homophobic nature of South African society prevails.

Only 28.6% of Home Affairs branches had marriage officers that were willing to marry same sex couples.³

We need ISIS to come to countries that are homosexual-friendly. ISIS, please come rid South Africa of the homosexual curse⁴

Forty-nine percent of QPoC are likely to know someone who has been murdered because he or she was queer (Haug, 2021), and according to de Vos (2021) the assault and murder of QPoC continues because their lives seem to matter less than those of others. Many incidents of discrimination towards queer people, especially those of colour, go unreported because of the barriers to justice faced by such reportage. According to Geldenhuys (2021) victims are vulnerable as systems to protect us from further harm from the perpetrator or other community members do not exist and often, we are faced with secondary harassment by the service

³ The Mail and Guardian. 'Less than a third of home affairs officials are willing to marry same-sex couples,' The Mail and Guardian, 2016, <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-09-15-00-409-home-affairs-offices-only-117-have-officials-willing-to-marry-same-sex-couples/>.

⁴ J Campbell, 'South African Court Delivers Blow to Religious Defense of Hate Speech,' Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/south-african-court-delivers-blow-religious-defense-hate-speech>.

providers from whom we seek help. The ideological formation of gender and sexuality contributes to the positioning of some individuals as normal and desirable, while casting others as unwanted and deviant (Hattie and Beagan, 2013). This often has dire consequences for queer bodies. Homophobic murder and other forms of violent exclusion permeate the lives of the majority of South African queer-identifying people. Matebeni and Msibi (2015) describe this violence and its propensity to ensure that those who deviate from heterosexual norms and conservative binaries become compliant with its social rules and hierarchies.

*On 3 April 2021, Khulekani Gomazi, a 27-year-old transgender woman, was murdered in KwaZulu-Natal. A family accusing her of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old, had beaten Khulekani for hours before taking her to the police. Her family found her at the police station. She was seriously injured, and her mouth had been burnt with battery acid. According to the family, it looked like she had been dragged behind a vehicle because she had deep wounds on her legs. She died at the hospital.*⁵

Queer bodies have become the battleground through which normalcy is negotiated. The murder of Gomazi is a brutal example of how socio-cultural expressions of patriarchal norms result in direct violence against non-conforming people. According to Prado-Castro and Graham (2017) gender identity serves to normalise the behaviours between men and women in society, excluding those who are different as the other. Violence against queer-identifying people, homophobic statements by public figures, and symbols of the dominant heteronormativity of society encode heterosexuality into words and deeds that expose its conservative, patriarchal, homo-prejudiced realities (Hames, 2007). This violence is, according to Anderson and

⁵ Geldenhuys, K. (2021) 'Hate Crimes against the LGBTQIA Community,' Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine, 114(7), pp. 30–34. doi: 10.10520/ejc-servamus-v114-n7-a9.

Umberson (2001), male-gendered and is used by men to control and exercise their power over marginalised queer bodies. It is patriarchy, sustained by religion and culture that supports this exercise and abuse of power by men.

1.3.4 Systemic and societal stigma

The writings of McCornick (2013) take us back to 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a diagnostic category from the highly influential ‘Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders’ (DSM). According to McCornick (2013: 128) ‘[t]his official acknowledgement that homosexuality was neither a mental illness nor a disease was a turning point in the history of gay and lesbian liberation’. It was described by McCornick (2013: 128) as ‘no longer necessary for a person to have to hide what was perceived as an abnormal sexuality’ and people could ‘publicly admit to their secret desires’. This seismic shift in the United States had little impact in South Africa where the grand Apartheid of the 1970s, given expression in the *Immorality Amendment Act of 1969*⁶, declared homosexuality not only to be a sin but a crime punishable by imprisonment as a result ‘coming out’ was a socially transgressive and politically dangerous act.

The movement to depathologise same sex attraction has not extended to all queer bodies in that transgender people are still required to produce reports from medical practitioners to change their gender markers and/or names. According to the Alternation of Sex Description and Sex

⁶ The Immorality Amendment Act, 1969 (Act No. 57 of 1969) amended the 1957 act to introduce or expand a number of offences. Despite the fact that sex between men was already prohibited under the common law crime of sodomy, the 1969 act made it a statutory crime for a man to have sex with another male under the age of nineteen. It also introduced section 20A, the infamous ‘three men at a party’ clause, which prohibited any sexual activity between men at a party, where ‘party’ was defined as any occasion where more than two people were present. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201505/act-57-1969.pdf

Status Act 49 of 2003, Section 2(1) gazetted by President of the Republic of South Africa, 2004: 2,

‘...any person whose sexual characteristics have been altered by surgical or medical treatment or by evolvment through natural development resulting in gender reassignment...may apply to the Director General of the National Department of Home Affairs for the alternation of the sex description on his or her birth register.’

Gender reassignment as defined by the Act means ‘a process which is undertaken for the purpose of reassigning a person’s sex by changing physiological or other sexual characteristics and includes any part of such a process’ (President of the Republic of South Africa, 2004: 1). This contributes to the stigma that is felt, internalised, and enacted by transgender people who are required to justify their existence with each step of the process. South Africa retains a binary gender marker system which not only discriminates against intersex people, whose parents are forced to register a binary male or female gender but renders gender non-binary people invisible and erases their existence.

An 18-year-old girl from Bloemfontein committed suicide after her mother learned about her sexual orientation. The mother was furious and beat her with a belt. When her mother cleaned the room after her daughter’s suicide, she found a letter between the sheets in which the girl wrote: ‘I just wanted you to accept me for who I am and want to be, mom. I am a lesbian.’ The mother blamed herself for what had happened to her daughter ⁷.

⁷ Motsoeneng, 2015 as cited in Geldenhuys, K. (2021) ‘Hate Crimes against the LGBTQIA Community,’ Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine, 114(7), pp. 30–34. doi: 10.10520/ejc-servamus-v114-n7-a9.

Despite legal rights enshrined in the famously progressive South African Constitution, social stigma as informed by patriarchy and heteronormativity continues to unravel the fabric of our romantically named rainbow nation.

1.3.5 Being queer and of colour

This research study was undertaken in Cape Town, often referred to as the mother city of South Africa. Having been the first settlement established by Dutch colonisers in 1652 it is considered the mother to modern South Africa. To some people it is a neglectful mother, though a nurturing one to others. Cape Town is a microcosm of the complexities of South Africa, reflected through the diverse experiences of QPoC, in that it presents different and varying realities. Historically it has been a space of repression and also a citadel for human rights. Cape Town has a complex history of both oppression and resistance and is ironically considered a liberal Eurocentric city while simultaneously having one of the highest hate crimes statistics in South Africa.

According to World Population Review (2021) Cape Town is one of the most multicultural cities in the world and is a significant destination for expatriates and immigrants. Though many expatriates and immigrants may be queer, the reality is that the differentiating factor among the multimillionaires and asylum seekers is often race and their lived experiences are significantly different as a result. Camminga (2016) interviewed migrant and displaced QPoC and found that the lives of these refugees and asylum seekers, both prior to arriving in South Africa and while they were in the country, are largely marked by varying levels of violence, trauma, and exclusion. Those who are read as disruptive of gender norms and who have turned to South Africa to claim asylum are excluded through various means rather than invited into a realm of protection or safety (Camminga, 2016). The transition from colonialism and Apartheid

to a democratic order in which all citizens are equal before the law is indicative of a radical rupture between a repressive past and progressive present; these formal equality gains, however, do not translate into lived experiences for QPoC.

According to Livermon (2021) blackness continues to cohere around heteronormativity and that QPoC struggle to access the rights enshrined in the Constitution. The writings of Garnets and Kimmel (2003) explain how QPoC tend to come from cultures with strong families that extend beyond the nuclear family arrangement in complex networks of interdependence and support. These families are often the source of negative stereotypes about queer-identifying people and the homophobia in these communities' leaves QPoC feeling more vulnerable and less likely to embrace their SOGIESC in the same ways as do their white counterparts. Similarly, Livermon argues that '[t]he is policing of queer bodies in post-apartheid South Africa falls disproportionately on black queer bodies' (2021: 302).

Research suggests that QPoC experience high rates of anxiety and depression because of the greater psychosocial stressors and stigma to which we are exposed as a result of race and SOGIESC (Alonzo and Buttitta, 2019; Shurts, Kooyman, Rogers and Burlew, 2020). According to Francis and Reygan 'the notion of sexual and gender identities, do hold universal cultural relevance and that such identities...may not always be foregrounded' (2016: 78). Race is not something that can be hidden but the burden of sexual stigma felt and internalised by queer-identifying people can lead to concealment, for fear of being identified and targeted (Alonzo and Buttitta, 2019). This act of identity concealment may be considered an adaptive behaviour in the face of enacted stigma.

1.3.6 The process of coming out

Identity categories such as race, class, and sexuality are not static, and they overlap with different magnitudes through time and space (Bhagat, 2018). Rust (1993, p53) as cited in McCornick (2013: 128) suggests that '[c]oming out is a process of discovery in which the individual sheds a false heterosexual identity and comes to correctly identify and label [their] own true essence, which is homosexual'. Similarly, McCornick (2013) found that contemporary research has shown that coming out differs depending on social, political, and economic context, and does not occur in the same order or at the same pace in all instances and includes identity expression with ambits beyond SOGIESC because of the myriad of complex, multi-dimensional, and inter-locking identities common to all.

Some scholars have criticised the concept and metaphor of coming out as imperfect and failing to capture the nuances of expression of sexuality, desire, and gender identity in a heteronormative system (Bailey, 2017). It has been argued that heteronormativity is reiterated because the confessional act of coming out can reinforce binaries, either in or out, ashamed, or proud, living in secrecy or openly (Bailey, 2017). Moore (2012) argues that the assumption that self-awareness begins with dismantling the closet is a reinforcement of the heteronormative conservative view that all people are heterosexual until and unless they disclose an alternative sexual orientation.

While it is important to acknowledge the role of shame and internalised homophobia in social repression and how we perform our sexualities and gender identities, I would like through this research to move past the fixation on the culture of confession that assumes that a failure to confess a queer identity confine one to an internally dark place. Woodcock writes that '[t]he process of coming out exemplifies Foucault's understanding of western society as claiming sex

to be a privileged form of knowledge of ourselves that is prevented by social taboo and repression. It is only through confession, breaking the taboos with a third party listening, that the ‘truth’ can be released’ (2004: 7). *Coming out* demands that the onus is on queer-identifying people to disclose an alternative identity against the assumed ‘normal’ cis-gender or heterosexual identity while *inviting or coming in* provides an opportunity to subvert heteronormativity by refusing to other ourselves through self-disclosure as a means of compliance with the unspoken demand to name ourselves out of fear of being abnormal (Moore, 2012). The writings of Hammoud-Becket offer an alternative to the coming out paradigm which connotes the existence of agency and of one’s ability to choose when and to whom queer identity is disclosed. ‘*Inviting or coming in* refers to the conscious and selective invitation of people into one’s club of life’ (Hammoud-Becket, 2007: 32).

I suggest that for the purposes of this research coming out is considered as a process of recognition of SOGIESC and of a choice to integrate this into all aspects of one’s life (Alonzo and Buttitta, 2019; Shurts, Kooyman, Rogersm and Burlew, 2020). This sharing of one’s personal truth is complex, non-linear, and ongoing. Smuts (2011) posits coming out as important in trying to understand how queer identity is shaped and re-negotiated in various social spaces, and that the intersectionality of identities and social spaces must be acknowledged to understand and conceptualise the process of coming out. The writings of Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, and Krowinski (2003) as cited in Arndt and Bruin (2006) conceptualise coming out as a process with a series of stages that proceed from an initial awareness of being different through dissonance, grieving, and inner conflict, to gradually building a stable queer identity complete with long-term relationships.

*I felt that the cost of honesty and realness would be isolation and marginalization.
Coming out would compress my life into a narrow and grossly overdetermined identity.
I bristled at the thought of being known widely as the 'gay Orthodox rabbi.'*⁸

The concept of coming out presumes an environment that prohibits sexual and gender diversity (Francis and Reygen, 2016) and though there can be unfavourable consequences to claiming one's freedom of queer-identifying expression, it could be liberating and celebrated. This complexity will be explored in this study because the lived experiences that queer-identifying expression bring, though liberating as a claim to one's freedom of expression, often presents unfavourable consequences.

*I could not defend myself against such overwhelming condemnation, so silence was my defence. My choices were to tell nothing and be dishonest with myself or tell the truth and be condemned by others.*⁹

To understand the process of revealing one's queer-identifying self to the world, or coming out, or inviting in, it is necessary to understand the negotiation and positioning of QPoC in social spaces that enable sexuality to be freely expressed; this process may require new closets to be built or to suffer for the sake of personal liberation (Braga et al., 2018). Liberation in the form of 'coming out' or freely expressing one's queer-identity is a struggle that may require new closets to be built or to re-experience suffering (again and again) under the forces of patriarchal religion and society, for the sake of personal liberation (Braga et al., 2018). The

⁸ Greenberg, S., 2004. *Wrestling with God and Men. Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press p.000.

⁹ Bruton, D. (1994). *Insisting on ignorance: The paradox of withholding knowledge in our schools*. In K. Jennings (Ed.), *One teacher in 10: Gay and lesbian educators tell their stories* (pp. 177-190). Boston: Alyson.

‘closet’ that is understood as a device for maintaining the secret of queer-identity, involves contradictions, complexities, and nuances, in which we constantly negotiate our visibility, expression and the acceptability of our desires. Different stages of identity development are influenced by our other overlapping identities and the spaces that either permit or prohibit the disclosure of our SOGIESC (Smuts, 2011).

1.3.7 The complex relationship of queer identity and religion

According to Shurts, Kooyman, Rogers and Burlew, (2020) the most frequently reported fear of rejection by family and/or friends is usually based on the religious beliefs held by these people which teaches that their sexual orientation is sinful. Shurts *et al.* (2020) summarises religion as an organised doctrine of faith, an institution that assists individuals to find meaning in their life, and influences values and lifestyle. Therefore, it can be considered the backbone of all social interactions. Societal values, often determined by religion, are important factors relating to the development of attitudes to, and stereotypes of, queer-identifying people (Arndt and De Bruin, 2006) and we shape and re-negotiate our identity in these social spaces (Smuts, 2011).

Those of us who identify as queer almost inevitably have conflicted relationships with religion and spirituality, as the immense pain and suffering we have experienced is often committed in the name of G-d. The relationship between religion and sexuality is inclined to be ambivalent and contentious. The research conducted by Arndt and De Bruin (2006) suggests that individuals who are religious tend to have conservative beliefs and that those who attend church frequently tend to be homophobic. Much of the secular community, Neitz observes (2014: 00), reflects ideas based on previous religious convictions, therefore even those that consider themselves to have secular view are to some extent influenced by religion. Neitz (2014) posits

the view that religion is an important part of identity, but that having to reconcile one's sexuality with an upbringing that preached strongly held 'moral' views purporting to emanate from religious belief, is one of the most severe struggles that queer-identifying people encounter; this is so not least because a number of 'Christian' organisations hold that homosexuality is an abomination, and, citing Leviticus, use religion as an excuse to debase the act of homosexual union. (Hames, 2012; Shurts et al., 2020; Rosik, Griffith and Cruz, 2007). Similarly, Valentine and Waite (2012) find that homosexuality is considered unnatural, a threat to society in one community, and, by the Muslim focus group, the perception is of a western disease that threatens the religiously prescribed natural order.

*'It is against the Bible'*¹⁰

*'We need ISIS to come to countries that are homosexual-friendly. ISIS, please come rid South Africa of the homosexual curse.'*¹¹

The reconciliation of faith with one's queerness is often undermined by an unrelenting and intolerant religious attitude towards homosexuality. The work of Siraj (2012) considers the construction of Muslim women's lesbian identity within a discourse that negates their sexual orientation and found that their lives produce a unique intersection where religion and sexuality converge yet are forced apart by religiously sanctioned homophobia that prevents them from exploring and expressing their sexuality.

¹⁰ Cf. 1.

¹¹ de Vos, 2021. 'The religious fig leaf that conceals the justification of hate crimes against the LGBTQ community'.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-05-02-the-religious-fig-leaf-that-conceals-the-justification-of-hate-crimes-against-the-lgbtq-community/>

In Geldenhuys's (2021) paper, *The Lawyers for Human Rights*, he suggests that religion is used to legitimise discrimination against the queer community in ways that would not be tolerated for other citizens or groups. Makhaye (2021), however, suggests that there are some redemptive elements that can be beneficial in undermining religion's often-oppressive power(s), when she offers the account of Tamara Jali who was raped for being lesbian and was then rejected by her mother and the Catholic Church, but, notably, she did find a safe space to worship at Victory Ministries Church International who embrace queer identities. Similarly, Van der Walt (2017) argues that although heteropatriarchy is often informed by exclusivist practises of Bible interpretation, the Bible also has the potential to liberate through responsible and accountable Bible engagement. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) is suggested by Van der Walt and Davids (2022) as a redemptive praxis that allows us to contextualise our lived realities, enabling an in-depth engagement that invites marginalised voices to participate in creating meaning. Through CBS the life-denying practises that exclude and incite violence against queer people are challenged and begin to serve as a resource to enhance resilience for queer people of faith (Van der Walt and Davids, 2022).

1.4 Research Design

To truly engage in the multifaceted intersection of queer identity, race, culture, and religion, this thesis employs empirical research in an exploratory study according to a qualitative research paradigm. According to Creswell (2012, p36) qualitative research is the 'process of research flowing from philosophical assumptions to worldviews, through a theoretical lens, and procedures involved in studying social or human problems'. I use this approach to explore the embodied lived reality of QPoC in Cape Town. Acknowledging the diversity of South Africa, in terms of both culture and religion, and the multifaceted and systemic backdrop of the research question, this exploratory research is conducted in order to have a better

understanding of the existing problem rather than to provide conclusive results. By means of grounded theory research, I aim to study the meaning of events for QPoC, assuming that meaning will be shared, through common language, lived experience, and socialisation. Research suggests that grounded theory research addresses social processes composed of meanings, which can be clarified and made public (Glaser, 1978). The theoretical framework of the study is informed by Queer Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and the Sociology of Religion, but that does not mean these theories have to use an inductive approach in order to seek new perspectives. Grounded theory approach may be used when there is some knowledge about the research phenomenon, but a new point of view is sought (Corbin, 1990). I will not put aside ideas or assumptions about the research topic but will use experience to better understand my findings (Asakura, K., 2017). The research questions are carefully formulated to induce the flexibility and freedom to explore the phenomenon in depth (Glaser, 1978). Exploring the systemic realities that inform the daily lived realities of QPoC, the study concentrates on three snapshot themes of identity, recognising that through embodiment and agency the body is not only a site of inscription but also a site of performance, resistance, and self-assertion (Settler and Engh, 2015). These are: identity construction, identity negotiation, and identity expression.

1.4.1 Sampling

I used a non-probability snow-ball sampling technique to choose fifteen participants for the study, and participants were recruited on social media platforms by sharing an invitation-to-participate post and asking those who showed interest in the study to invite one other person to participate who also meets the study criteria. This proposed sampling frame is the purposive sampling assisting in the selection of appropriate participants for the study (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). According to Abrams (2010), purposive sampling is a strategy in which the

researcher exercises judgement about who will be best suited to provide an understanding of the phenomena of interest. The study requires participants to draw on lived experiences therefore the criteria are people who live in Cape Town, identify as queer (as self-defined), and are of colour.

1.4.2 Data Collection

The data collected for this study is through focus group discussions (FGD) held on Zoom; the fifteen enrolled participants form three groups who will meet once to engage with each other and myself on the prepared focus group discussion guiding questions. I record the experience of QPoC through personally reflected narratives focusing on how these experiences link to agency and to the structural and system realities that inform our embodied experiences in the city of Cape Town, South Africa, a space that claims to be inclusive of all bodies. In an attempt to blur the lines between researcher and the research, I invite participants to agree on one key theme that dominates their group discussion, and then ask them to keep a written diary over a period of one week in which they write reflections of their experiences in relation to the agreed theme. Participation in the study is voluntary. A more detailed outline of the methodology is discussed in the chapter on theory and method, chapter three

1.4.3 Research Questions

The key research question that will guide the data collection process towards the main research question is: **Is liberation worth suffering for:**

How do queer-identifying people of colour living in Cape Town, South Africa, construct, reconstruct, and express their identities throughout their lives across various socio-religious contexts?

To answer this question, I will attempt to answer the following **sub-questions**:

1. What are the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression in Cape Town, South Africa?
2. How do queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious contexts in Cape Town, South Africa?
3. How are queer people's lived experiences impacted on by religion and what role does/can religion have on shifting experiences of identity construction, negotiation and expression experiences in Cape Town, South Africa?

1.4.4 Research Objectives

In concluding this study, I aim to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To understand the anxieties associated with queer identity construction and expression in the South African social, religious, and legal context of Cape Town.
2. To understand how queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious communities in Cape Town, South Africa (and the impact thereof on their lived experiences of the world).
3. To analyse the intersectionalities of queer lives in an attempt to understand the complexity of freedom, liberation, power, and suffering in queer-identifying people's lives and the role religion plays therein.

1.4.5 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides a conceptual starting point to uphold the study. Two primary theories will be used: Queer Theory and the Theory of the Sociology of Religion. Queer Theory aims to ‘disrupt’ modernist fixed ideas that concern sexuality and gender by means of a post-structuralist critique of ‘natural’ identities (Schneider, 2000: 208). Queer Theory is defined from multiple critical and cultural contexts such as feminism, post-structuralist theory, and radical movements of PoC (De Laurits (1991). Queer Theory will be used to develop the concepts within which the research will be conducted by exploring identity as fluid and performed in a manner that is responsive to the institutional setting, physical environment, and relational context in which individuals are located. Further, understanding the intersectionality of queer-identifying PoC uses a sub-category of Queer Theory namely – Intersectionality Theory.

According to Davie ‘[t]he Sociology of Religion aims to discover the patterns of individual and social living associated with religion in all its diverse forms’ (2013: 171). Using the Theory of the Sociology of Religion, we will begin to understand how religion and religious experiences have an impact on the lives of QPoC. The Theory of the Sociology of Religion understands how religion affects society, culture, and personality (Yinger, 1957). This theoretical framework will enable interrogation of ‘the closet’ as an enabler of both liberation and suffering by reflecting on systemic sources of oppression that act upon us, so that we can influence the means by which those are internalised.

1.5 Structure of the Study

The research project is organised into six chapters. Chapter one details the background and rationale of the study and gives the reader a glimpse into the theoretical framework and

methodology that upholds the study and introduces the research objectives and research questions to be answered. Chapter two engages literature on the key themes relating to the intersectionality of race, class, and religion on queer identity, religion, and queerness and the process of queer identity negotiation in a hostile and violent socio religious context which helps the reader understand the literature landscape of this study while finding the gaps this research attempts to address. Chapter three outlines the theory and methodology used to engage the study focusing on how Queer Theory and the Theory of the Sociology of Religion inform the study through focus group discussions and the analysis of data to explore the lived experiences of QPoC in a socio-religious populous. Chapter four presents the data collected and notes the key themes identified using a thematic analysis. Chapter five discusses the themes that are identified in chapter four and links the existing literature and theory into a conversation against the key research questions. Chapter six offers general conclusions and a response to the main research question, identifies the limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for future research.

1.6 Conclusion

This research points to the importance of understanding the experiences of QPoC which occur in a matrix of identities and processes over time and across spaces, focusing on how religion influences these sociocultural interpretations and, ultimately, our lived experiences. Through focus group discussions and a series of personal reflections, using Queer Theory and the Theory of the Sociology of Religion, this research will explore the impact of religion on the process of queer identity construction, expression, and negotiation, and hopes thereby to determine whether liberation is worth the suffering it inflicts.

This chapter outlines the motivation for the study, offers a background to the context in which the study takes place and provides an outline of the research design and purpose. The next chapter is a detailed literature review on previous studies that have been carried out on identity construction, negotiation, and expression of queer people and of how the sociocultural and socioreligious aspects of class and race in South Africa have an impact on these ideas.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the purpose of this research and the areas of interest that I interrogate. I focus on ways in which the systemic backdrop of patriarchy underpins heteronormativity which, originating largely in religion, serves to amplify white supremacy, one of the remnants of Apartheid. The exclusion of QPoC is a significant result. This research examines the influence of religion in the othering and exclusion of QPoC. In addition, research questions will guide this project providing an insight into the literature that underpins the theoretical framework of the study, together with the informing methodology used to conduct the research.

This chapter focuses on the literature landscape largely made up of key writers who have given Queer Theory and the Sociology of Religion meaning through their study of heterosexual norms and homophobia, internalised stigma and shame, queerness, queer-identity formation and expression, and also the role of religion in liberating, social, and cultural norms as reinforcers of patriarchy as an underlying system of domination; significant to this undertaking is the role of language in the construction and expression of identity, the closet and coming out and inviting in, and South African Constitution and legislation in relation to the human dignity and equality of queer-identifying people.

The first exploration is made of the dominant narrative of the binary order of sex, gender, and sexuality as ‘natural’ leads to the patriarchal heteronormativity that is informed and sustained by religiously influenced violence and shame. Second is the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, to test the hypothesis that queerness was an accepted part of African culture before the introduction of colonial religion. Consideration is also given to how indigenous African

language for queerness has been devalued to take on negative connotations. The third investigation is into the rights guaranteed in progressive rights-based legislation and jurisprudence in post-Apartheid South Africa that actually remain inaccessible to QPoC. I expose how the right to freedom of religion guaranteed in the constitution serves as legal cover for the homophobia that keeps the rights enshrined in the Equality Clause largely inaccessible to QPoC. I then explore the duality of the lived experiences of some QPoC, for whom the closet can be a claustrophobic and restrictive place of safety, or it can be a chest of fabulous freedoms. Finally, I consider the important alternative perspective on life-affirming and redemptive elements of religion and its role in queer liberation.

2.2 Contextually queer

Mkasi's analysis of how same-sex relationships are perceived in South African social contexts notes that 'heterosexual relationships are generally understood to be between males and females, and what differentiates male from female is the sexual organ which is identified at birth. Therefore, in most cultures it is assumed that the biological gender of the child determines the future sexual partner, and that must always be with someone of the opposite gender. As a result, this heterosexual relationship is referred to as a 'normal' relationship which makes same-sex relationships abnormal' (2013: 14). Research suggests that there are multiple physical variations of sex, whereas gender, rather than being determined by biology, is a performative expression of self that is informed by culture.

The naturalisation of heterosexuality described by Mkasi (2013) forms the basis for othering QPoC and is one of the factors that force queer-identifying people into the closet. This systemic normalisation of heterosexuality is what we refer to as heteronormativity (Van der Walt, 2017). According to Yep (2003) those who do not conform to the heteronormative ideals in our social

systems are dominated, disempowered, and denied through discrimination and the denial of basic human rights. Valentine and Waite (2012) highlight how homosexuality is represented as unnatural and that it is seen to be a violation of the religious duty to procreate. The study found that the Muslim focus group believe that homosexuality is a Western disease that threatens the religiously prescribed natural (heterosexual) order (Valentine and Waite, 2012). Heteronormativity only allows space for heterosexual cisgendered experiences, constructions, and realities (Van der Walt, 2017). Alternative realities are not tolerated as they are deemed un-African, un-Christian, and counter to biblical norms (Van der Walt, 2017). Similarly, based on some interpretations of the Quran, the execution of queer-identifying people is mandated and there is a belief that homosexuality is a disease of the West that only contaminates the weak (Hammoud-Becket, 2007). Robinson defines heteronormativity as ‘a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practises that construct heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality’ (2016: 1). There is a naturalisation of masculine men and feminine women as opposites and an assumption of complementary sexual relations between the two.

Sibisi and Van der Walt (2021) argue that queer bodies are viewed as disruptive, and a threat to the natural order of family and intimacy because they express sex, gender, and sexual orientation outside the heterosexual norm. These views are reinforced by the notion that ‘queerness is a Western import threatening the heteropatriarchal values of the Christian church and the African cultural landscape’ (Sibisi and Van der Walt, 2021: 68). Monogamous, marital, procreative heterosexuality is considered superior to all other sexual expressions, and any variation is considered abnormal and bad (Rubin, 2002). The study by Hames (2012) found that popular culture, influenced by religion, plays a major role in influencing public opinion regarding queer-identifying people, and that in South Africa, despite the diversity of

representation, public media remains firmly heterosexual and heteronormative. According to Van der Walt (2017) these notions are informed by exclusivist practises of religious interpretation. The social pressure to conform to normative ideas about sexuality is underpinned by patriarchy, which privileges cisgendered men and is life-denying for people who experience life beyond the heteronormative binaries. According to Butler (1990) gender that is only understood in relation to sex excludes the bodies of queer-identifying people. Wilchins (2004) illustrates the point by highlighting how each gendered identity must maintain for many a strict and problematic coherence among sex, gender identity, gender expression, and desire; 'female is to women as women is to feminine as feminine is attracted to male' (Wilchins, 2004: 131). What the literature suggests is that this binary gender division and the association of behaviours and attitudes with the feminine or the masculine in coherence with the corresponding biological sex is problematic.

Heteronormativity is built into society and woven into the fabric of institutions and common practises. Robinson (2016) describe it as a practise that structures beliefs around presumed heterosexual desire, rules that force us to conform to hegemonic heterosexual standards and a system of binary gender. We perceive these binaries as opposites, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. Chambers (2007) defines heteronormativity in the context of power, referring to the power of heterosexuality when it operates as a norm. Chambers continues to describe how heteronormativity expects people to exhibit heterosexual desire and identity and when they do, it is rewarded and privileged (2007). South African culture glorifies and promotes heteronormativity and everyone, queer or not, is measured from a heterosexual perspective. According to Robinson (2016) heteronormative standards and discourses that legitimise discrimination against queer-identifying people are embedded in social institutions, including religion, the family, education systems, the media, and legislation.

2.3 Beating us into shape

Those who deviate from the heterosexual norm are rejected by society and suffer physical, verbal, and sexual violence, and are denied access to fundamental self-determination and the fullness of human experience (Braga, Oliveira, Sila, Mello, and Silva, 2018). Heteronormative norms are created through socialisation, and a particular and limited meaning is ascribed to people's bodies (Sullivan 2003) rendering vulnerable to constant violence those who do not conform (Milani, 2014).

Van de Walt (2017) notes that South Africa has normalised the use of violence as a tool for conflict resolution. Hate crimes against queer-identifying people are a sign of patriarchy's pathology which literally battles and disciplines ungovernable deviant African bodies into their normative place in patriarchy (West, Van der Walt, and Koamo, 2016). West et al., (2016) add that heteropatriarchy is one of the religio-cultural and socio-political systems that underpin homophobia. Judge (2015) suggests that homosexuality exists in relation to normative heterosexuality. This is emphasised by the writings of Adam (1998) as cited in Judge (2015: 123) that suggest that it is 'through homophobia that heterosexism and heteronormativity are forcefully achieved and sustained'. Heteronormativity, which normalises heterosexual practice and desire, and considers anything deviating from this as perverse or aberrant, is a system of oppression that intersects with patriarchy to become heteropatriarchy (West et al., 2016). Writing about the African cultural context, Epprecht (2008) suggests that the silencing and shunning of same-sex sexualities is intertwined with the dominant culture of heteronormativity and its dependence on constrained representations of African sex and sexuality. The homosexual, therefore, is recruited into social existence through shaming interpellation which signifies the prohibition that is inherent to heterosexuality. In the research of Hames (2012) which looked at *Embodying the Learning Space: Is it okay if I bring my sexuality to class?*, it

was evident how pervasive and normalised homophobia is. There was a level of sensitivity observed during interviews when participants referred to race, but intense hostility was noted towards those who were perceived as queer. By branding queer-identifying people as socially deviant and religiously demonic, African politicians and churches alike tend to fuel homophobia (West et al., 2016). Hames (2012) argues that their study sample group carried the daily experiences of sexism, sexuality, racism, ethnicity, nationality, violence, xenophobia, (dis)ability, and homophobia from their homes and social spheres in their own bodies. Despite the sample consisting of university students who, because of their level of education, might be expected to be more informed about diversity, their social background remains dominated by socio-religious values because South Africa remains a largely traditional, conservative Christian country.

Across multiple religions, from ‘Anglicans to Pentecostals to Roman Catholics to Muslims, the assumptions is that sex is for procreation’ (West et al., 2016: 6-7). It is assumed that queer-identifying people cannot procreate and therefore their relationships defy G-d’s original creation plan (West et al., 2016). This biblically justified heteronormativity dictates what is normal and places a moral emphasis on what the body ought to do. As such heteronormativity others any alternative expressions of intimacy, stigmatising other practices as hypersexual or promiscuous (West et al., 2016). According to Butler (1999), in order to resist this normative proclamation of, what the body should do we must ask, what the body can do and in doing so, shift the emphasis from normative to performance, creating space for queer bodies and their lived experience (West et al., 2016). This is echoed by Van der Walt (2019: 231) who suggests that a shift is needed from the normative dictation of gender roles that employ an understanding of scripture and tradition that suggests ‘what a body should do’, to a theological reflection that acknowledges the inescapable reality of the body and asks the performative question of ‘what

a body can do'. In so doing space is created for queer bodies that perform gender and sexuality beyond the binaries as well as our embodied lived experiences as queer-identifying people.

According to Sithole (2019) queer-identifying people challenge the dominant heteronormative trends of society and prove that gender is fluid, contradicting the conservative essentialist view that gender and sexuality are fixed. Heteronormative discourse accepts heterosexuality as the only normal sexual orientation and each sex is expected to have certain roles that are considered natural (Yep, 2003; Martin, Kelly, Turquet, and Ross, 2009). According to Van der Walt this discourse of normalcy is viewed as the 'gold standard' and anything that does not live up to its expectations is considered 'abnormal, inferior, and disgusting, which in turn informs stigmatising homophobic attitudes and hate crimes' (2019, pp.222-223).

2.4 Life in the discomfort zone

Factors influencing stigma and internalised shame are numerous and layered among those of us who fall outside the heteronormative ideals and identify as queer, given the complexity of sexualities and gender identities. Queer-identifying people remain stigmatised by society despite the fact that homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder in 1973 in the second edition of the Manual of Mental Disorders¹², and, further, the identification of mental distress associated with homosexuality was removed when the DSM reached its third edition in 1980: at that time ego-dystonic homosexuality, which term describes distress about attraction to others of the same sex, was removed from its list of mental disorders. Religion and culture are often used by those in positions of power to demonise queerness, fuelling homophobic and transphobic hate, resulting in negative and painful experiences in the victims of these

¹² See Homosexuality and Sexual Orientation Disturbance: Proposed Change in DSM-II, 6th Printing, page 44 Position Statement https://pages.uoregon.edu/eherman/teaching/texts/DSM-II_Homosexuality_Revision.pdf

prejudices that are embodied, relived, and have an impact on how we form and express our queer identity (Sithole, 2019).

The findings of Arndt and De Bruin (2006) suggest that heterosexual men have more negative attitudes towards queer-identifying people than heterosexual women, which implies that the violation of what heterosexual men deem to be traditional gender roles may be particularly provoking to them because of the perceived threat posed to patriarchal power and privilege. Interestingly, Hale and Ojeda (2018) note that in order to lay claim to the privileges of whiteness and masculinity, some white gay men choose to reinforce a particular gender and racial hierarchy by defining blackness and femininity as a mark of inferiority and rendering black queer femininities to the status of the abject other.

Serano (2012), as cited in Hale and Ojeda (2018), agrees with the view that femaleness and femininity are inferior to, and exist primarily for, the benefit of maleness and masculinity; this insistence on the oppositional categories of male and female is rigid. These despised feminine traits are considered weak and inferior in a man, but the display of masculine traits imply dominance (Hale and Ojeda, 2018). Bonds of common interest exist between masculine men and any threat to this is countered with misogyny (Hale and Ojeda, 2018). A constant display of male credentials is required to confirm men's power and loyalty to their gender interest. If power over women is not continuously demonstrated then men risk losing credibility and being read as homosexual and/or not conforming to the standards of their gender (Hale and Ojeda, 2018). Thus, gay male desire for straight-acting men, and the need to be perceived as a straight-acting man, conforms to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity.

Butler (2006: 26) claims that:

‘...[t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies which we struggled are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension.’

2.5 Seeing the true colour of queerness

Butler (2006) challenges us to consider that some bodies are privileged under the same oppressive conditions because of race, location, or social class enable access to power. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is, and is not, mine. This forms the basis of what we aim to understand through this study which is how we navigate the concept of the closet and its metaphoric use as a tool to conceal or protect; how the experience of the closet uniquely shapes queer identity, its formation, negotiation, and expression, and how, through queer liberation, we expand the freedoms available to all people.

In South Africa race, class, and culture are vital to understanding the intersectionality of how SOGIESC are considered. The influences of society are embedded in identity argues Han (2017) who sees the performance of sexual identity as dependent on the context of neighbourhood norms, so that how we see ourselves and our place in society is influenced by the mutually constitutive relations among social identities and the multiple social positions we occupy. Such multiple social identities intersect at a personal level to shape experience to make meaning of power and domination at a societal level; gay men of colour, for example, do not experience gayness in the same way that gay white men do, nor are they racialised in the same way as are heterosexual PoC, but, rather, being gay, male, and a PoC simultaneously means

that each aspect of identity intersects with the other (Han, 2017). Livermon (2012) argues that QPoC shape possibilities for belonging by deliberately destabilising heteronormative notions of black identity. According to Han (2017) race, class, gender, and sexuality are experienced differently by each individual depending on social location in the structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Garnets and Kimmel (2003) point out that QPoC have the burden of culturally informed perceptions so lack not only heterosexual privileges but the privileges of whiteness as well. Lewis (2003) argues that PoC disapprove of homosexuality more strongly than do white people and that PoC are less likely to be socially involved in queer communities nor to experience racism in interactions with white queer people.

It is difficult to perceive African people beyond the context of culture, spirituality, and religion, because for African people these are not separate or external aspects of identity throughout life (Sithole, 2019). Language cannot be excluded from the conversation in that culture assigns meaning to bodies and the language used in South Africa for queer people is often derogatory and harmful. The language around the articulation of identity is complex, especially in a country with diverse vernaculars, cultures, and religions. These declarations of self as gender or sexuality are meaningful in affirming queer identity because those words can have negative connotations and are rarely pronounced with pride and conviction. An example of this is *Nongayindoda* of which Matabeni (2021: 569-570) offers the following interpretation:

‘The term nongayindoda used to be popular among Nguni speaking people referring to masculine women or men-like women (the word ‘ndoda’ is man in isiXhosa and isiZulu and thus nongayindoda referred to people who are like men physically, socially, and culturally). In some contexts, it has been assumed to relate only to women who have

chosen not to have relations with men, women in same-sex relations, lesbian women, or women.’

Nongayindoda offers a disruption to the rigid binary that polices and legitimises who and what is deemed outside the ‘norm’ and thus is deemed further from the image of G-d (Matabeni, 2021). Matabeni (2021) also argues that queer-identifying bodies of colour are reflected in borrowed terms and western languages, erasing us from our own histories. The dominance of Western terminologies overshadows local realities and interpretations of gender and sexual identities and indigenous terms have been so extensively degraded that even those who may use them no longer grasp their original strength and significance.

Mazibuko, who argues that such terms are derogatory in communal and faith spaces, found that participants in his study lacked positive Zulu terms to refer to homosexuality and so, groping for a safe isiZulu term to use without sounding hateful, referred to homosexuality as ‘*lento*’, meaning ‘this thing’ ((2021: 111). Pakade (2013) suggests that pejorative labels such as ‘*isitabane*’ are commonly used by self-identifying queer-identifying people: And, according to Sibisi and Van der Walt *isitabane* is a derogatory term to mark queer-identifying people ‘as the ‘other’ and ‘outside’ the norm prescribed by heteropatriarchy’ (2021: 67).

In an attempt to reclaim disparaging terms used to name our queer-identifying bodies, *isitabane* is used by scholars ‘to stabanise’ as a radical decolonising academic practise (Davids, Matyila, Sithole, and Van der Walt, 2019; Milani 2014; Sibisi and Van der Walt, 2021). This term however still bears a heavily discriminatory burden in both public and private lives (Pakade, 2013). The meanings attached to *isitabane* are complex as they are associated with same-sex practises as well as gender non-confirming people. According to Matabeni ‘Language is central

to understandings and interpretations of a gender system' (2021: 567). In the same way that queer can be used as a verb, stabanisation is an invitation to unveil uncomfortable ambiguities, complicities, and ruptures that ensue from intersections of race and culture in South African contexts (Milani, 2014).

Similarly, it is argued that the Western-derived terms that make up part of the LGBTIQ acronym do not simply obliterate indigenous ways of describing gender and sexual dissidence but take on additional meanings related to local understandings of gender and sexuality (Liverman, 2012). Vernacular terms, even though considered derogatory, coexist, and are at times used interchangeably, with international terms, thus fundamentally altering the meaning of Western sexuality identity markers as they describe a variety of positionalities that do not necessary exist or are not accounted for under the Western rubric of LGBTIQ (Livermon, 2012).

According to Amadiume language in gender systems changed with the introduction of Christianity by colonialists, for example, 'G-d' replaced the genderless Igbo word *chi*, thus introducing G-d as a father figure who has a son, and the 'masculinisation of religion' was soon imposed (1987: 136). Despite mythical claims that homosexuality is un-African, research indicates the existence of complex scenarios circumstances of sexual behaviour in pre-colonial Africa, including evidence of same-sex marriage, cross-dressing, and role reversal (Punt 2009). To deny this is detrimental to African culture and dismissive of a pre-colonial African heritage (Punt, 2009). Just as language is a powerful tool for the assertion of homophobia and heterosexism, so it also holds the potential to liberate. When religion negotiates sexuality, queer-identifying people are engaged through language. According to Ryan and Futterman (1998) as cited in Fankhanel (2010) identity is a complex integration of the cognitive,

emotional, and social factors that make up the sense of self, including gender, sex roles, and sexual orientation. It can be argued therefore that social expectations, created by one's declaration of self, have an influence on queer-identity development.

2.6 The remnants of Apartheid

Matebeni and Msibi (2015) remind us that it was Apartheid policies were an important component of South Africa's becoming a society intolerant of homosexuality. The policing of people by means of race, gender, and sexuality provided the engine for Apartheid's construction of difference, and it drove all social relations (Judge, 2021). As a system of racialised spatiality, apartheid's tentacles of social control also extended into the sphere of the sexual. Gunkel (2010: 11) as cited by Milani (2014: 83) explains that 'we cannot understand sexuality in contemporary South Africa without considering the historical legacy of colonialism which has tied together sexuality and race in particular ways. Van der Walt articulates this clearly when she encourages us to 'recognise the affinities between systems of slavery, systems of racism and systems of homophobia' and come to terms with the idea that these are constructed 'on the desire to control the bodies of the denigrated' (2019: 227). Van der Walt also suggests that multiple social forces, including but not limited to, race, class, culture, gender, and sexual orientation are embodied and as a result position and situate us to receive our allocated dose of oppression, domination, and marginalisation. The intersecting nature of these systems of control is why those who worked to overthrow South Africa's Apartheid regime emphasised the importance of human dignity. Van der Walt (2019: 227) draws our attention to Simon Nkoli, who

...went on trial with 19 others for treason in 1987 for mass protest marches organized in the black townships of the Vaal region, emphasized that the battles against

homophobia and racism were inseparable...[and] is quoted in a speech at the first public parade in 1990 organized by GLOW: 'I'm fighting for the abolition of apartheid, and I fight for the right of freedom of sexual orientation. These are inextricably linked with each other. I cannot be free as a black man if I am not free as a gay man' (2019: 227).

The Christian Nationalist ideology that underpinned Apartheid rationality affirmed the sexual 'purity' of the white nation, through the repudiation of blackness and queer sexualities (Epprecht, 2008). In similar terms Winder (2015) suggests that due to dual systems of oppression that work to stigmatise homosexuality and perpetuate the racism to which queer-identifying PoC are subjected, Han (2007) contributes that the multiplicative effects of these minority identifications have rendered outcast those queer-identifying PoC in both the black community and the mainstream white gay community. Queerness is believed to be a choice and is thought to represent a poor lifestyle choice rather than an integral part of a person's identity. Garnets and Kimmel (2003) remind us that cultural values and rituals, socialisation of sex roles, family expectations and obligations, and religion all shape our understanding of SOGIESC and are often contributing factors to the propensity to deny the existence of QPoC. The 2016 report by the Other Foundation affirmed this by asserting that queer people are the most stigmatised group in South Africa.

The notion of passing existed across racial lines in South Africa when light skinned PoC could be perceived as white, and by passing could avoid the risks associated with living as PoC in Apartheid South Africa. Passing still exists as a survival strategy for queer-identifying people (Lugg, 2003, Sanelli and Perreault, 2001). Hames (2007) found that queer students found it easier to be accepted when they 'act straight'. Asakura (2017) in their study *Paving Pathways Through the Pain: A Grounded Theory of Resilience Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans,*

and Queer Youth found similar results, supporting the idea that the full disclosure of one's queer identity jeopardises one's safety. This research recruited particular participants who are afforded basic legal rights and protections, with access to relevant services and vibrant queer communities, in a legislatively liberal Canada. Despite these ostensibly progressive settings, their findings reveal hostile social environments for queer youth. These include verbal abuse, physical abuse, family rejection, cyber-bullying, sexual assault, feelings of being unsafe in school bathrooms, and a high suicide risk (Asakura, 2017). As a result, queer youth quickly learn when, where, and with whom safely to share identities (Asakura, 2017). In all instances, '[y]outh carefully examined and assessed their own physical, social, psychological, and financial safety in different contexts, making intentional decisions about coming out as LGBTQ' (Asakura, 2017: 7).

Lugg (2003) argues that 'to pass' is inherently discriminatory as it undermines personal integrity and autonomy, eroding and denying one's legal and political rights. Given this, coming-out can be seen as asserting queer identity. Though this inspires agency and the possibility of connection, it comes with vulnerability to the normative gaze of surveillance which retains the norm as intact. Queerness is often described as an immoral and unnatural lifestyle and religious leaders declare that '[a]nything contrary to the will of God is evil, and homosexuality generally and same-sex marriage specifically are practices that defy and contradict the purpose of God for humanity' (Ukah, 2021: 73).

This depiction of queer-identifying people in a negative light tends to produce intense disgust and discrimination against queer-identifying people, that may, and often does, lead to physical assault and murder. These descriptions erode self-worth and dignity, justifying discrimination and humiliation and legitimising hate and homophobic hate crimes as 'the will of the creator'

(Ukah, 2021: 87). Asakura (2017) found that queer-identifying youth examined and assessed their physical, social, psychological, and financial safety in each context and made intentional decisions about coming out. In the face of violence from family, in schools, and in communities, those who are resilient are able to assess their ability securely to navigate different contexts and to negotiate the expression of identity. This can be compared to ‘code-switching’, a term used by multilingual people who switch back and forth between languages depending on the current environment (Asakura, 2017: 7).

2.7 The numerous ways of religion

A report by Kohut (2013), *The global divide on homosexuality* provides anecdotal evidence of a link between religion and homophobia, showing that acceptance of homosexuality in countries where religion is central to people’s lives is limited. Similarly, violence against queer-identifying people is often justified and given legitimacy by discriminatory laws that are based on religious commandments or supported by religious authorities who have power. Ukah (2021) found that the personalities, words, and statements of religious leaders tends to normative power which imposes subtle, sometimes even overt, moral, and institutional obligations that perpetuate homophobia. ‘[R]eligious leaders who speak out from the perspective of doctrine against certain forms of claimed sexual expressions frequently face a wider array of political and legal opposition, including accusations that they are engaging in hate speech or incitement to harm’ but that they are rarely held accountable (Ukah, 2021: 73). Notably, religion can be diverse in that it is both the religion of the oppressor and that of the oppressed (Struby, 2018). Those that are oppressed are often oppressed in the name of a particular interpretation of religion, yet often they are praying to the same G-d for an end to oppression. According to De Freitas (2016) the practise of religion can lead to the violation of other beliefs or even other rights. Crockett, Cashwell, Marszalek and Willis (2018) suggest that

religious communities that ignore issues of sexual identity on the assumption that all attendees are cisgendered and heterosexual, though less overtly hostile, are still harmful as they include heterosexist microaggressions. According to West, Van der Walt, and Koama (2016) the bible-based heteronormativity of Christian churches dictates what is normal, placing a moralising emphasis on what the body should do. Anything that falls outside these parameters is stigmatised as hypersexual, promiscuous, or deviant. It is possible that the differences in religious observance between queer-identifying people and heterosexual cis-gendered people reflect variance in religious communities regarding rejections and affirmations of queer-identifying people. Some religious communities explicitly affirm queer identity, others denounce it as sinful or immoral, while others ignore it completely. In Christianity and Judaism, the Old Testament scriptures in Leviticus (18:22; 20:13) are said to describe homosexual relations as an abomination, while new testament scriptures in the Pauline Epistles (Romans 1:26 – 28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10) are said to condemn queer relationships (Shurts et al., 2020). The sacred scriptures of Islam supposedly also forbid same-sex relations (Hendricks, 2006). Shurts et al.. (2020) found that these messages lead to an internalisation of religious negativity inducing individuals to struggle with an internalised homophobia. Some participants of the study by Shurts et al.. (2020), *Assessing the Intersectionality of Religious and Sexual Identities During the Coming-Out Process*, plead with G-d or another higher power to help them change, and felt betrayed when the change did not occur. Lewis (2003) found that beliefs about homosexuality vary according to religion and the intensity of religious feeling; his findings suggest that Jews are the most accepting and born-again Protestants the most disapproving, along with those who attend religious services frequently, pray frequently, and say that religion is very important in their lives.

The suffering is not only experienced from society, but as Lewis, Derlega, Clara and Kuang (2006) write, acknowledging that you belong to a group that is considered to be abnormal and sinful may have both physical and mental health consequences. Therefore, normalising queerness and expressing a queer identity is always in the context of social stigma (Lewis et al., 2006). If one identifies as a specific gender, then is required to function within the dominant heterosexual norms of that gender then failure (Phejane, 2020) to abide by these norms limits the extent of belonging (Butler, 1999) so that marginalisation and discrimination can encourage conduct that is unfair and inequitable (Woods, 2019). It is not always possible to declare queer-identity through speech, therefore West et al.. (2016) challenge us to consider bodily presence as a performative utterance of one's queer identity. Livermon (2012, p300) writes in a similar vein::

‘Black queers create freedom through forms of what I term cultural labo[u]r. The cultural labo[u]r of visibility occurs when black queers bring dissident sexualities and gender nonconformity into the public arena. Visibility refers not only to the act of seeing and being seen but also to the process through which individuals make themselves known in the communities as queer subjects. Ultimately visibility is about recognition since it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings. How that recognition occurs varies and includes the range of sensory perceptions including sight, but also important for my argument, sound in the form of speech acts, public pronouncements, and the act of listening.’

This visibility is policed and is costly as it comes with the risk of being recognised as defiant of the heteronormativity of blackness. Thus, the visibility of QPoC is not only about the acceptance of difference in a black community, but is about defining blackness in a

transformative manner, thereby creating the liberation promised by the Constitution and reviewing the possibilities and limits of post-apartheid South Africa and the salient difference between citizenship and belonging (Livermon, 2012). Boe, Maxey, and Bermudez (2018) argue that racial and queer identity are more salient to those who do not identify with white, male, heteronormative, dominant society. Furthermore, that QPoC experience disconnection from queer communities because of the influences of systemic racism (Boe et al., 2018).

In a Christian normative context, social stigma can often translate into violence, which can often be justified and tolerated, and religion is used in some measure to condone such acts (Reygan, 2016). In the study by Crockett et al. (2018) which looks at the influence of religious upbringing on identity development and same-sex attraction, it was found that some participants view rejection by religious communities as rejection by G-d. Participants also felt that they needed to make a choice regarding their religious community: and had to either denounce their sexual identity or to abandon their religion in order to embrace their sexual identity. Those that left their religious communities spoke of their religion with anger or distain, while those that remained spoke of their sexual identities in shame-based language (Crockett et al., 2018). Winder (2015) found that being gay and flamboyant about it was seen as reprehensible; and a participant was cited who described how, instead of condemning acts of violence towards a gay family member, judgement is made of the victim by suggesting his eternal damnation in hell (Winder, 2015). Sibisi and Van der Walt argue that these experiences of judgement and exclusion led QPoC to find alternative spaces of worship that 'move [their] queer Christian bodies from the margins of Christianity to the centre of worship without being forced to conform to gender binaries to become visible in the presence of God' (2021: 67-8). A sense of community is fostered from within these religious spaces which leads to feelings of

being loved, valued, and cared for because of shared norms of altruism and reciprocity and of common beliefs about suffering (Sherkat and Ellison, 1999).

2.8 Preaching the good news

Arndt and De Bruin (2006) argue that identity formation is not a linear process but involves moving back and forth and/or a spiralling of progression and regression because the heteronormative patriarchal socio-religious world in which we come out, does not vanish when we have ‘come out’. This is echoed by Orne when writing about strategic outness which refers to the ‘continued contextual management of sexual identity’ (2011: 682). This concept defies the notion that there is an end to coming out and grapples with the manner in which people manage their identity (Orne, 2011). Orne also argues that a ‘toolkit’ (2011: 691) of different disclosure methods, namely direct disclosure, active concealment, indirect clues, or speculations all of which are used to manage identity or to respond to a social context. Our environment has a strong influence on whether, and to what extent we ‘come out’ (Arndt and De Bruin, 2006), or rather how we form and express our identity over time (Smuts, 2011). There are repercussions for coming out that must be carefully considered in particular contexts (Orne, 2011). Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) describe how family and community influence our coming out process, culturally, or through religious beliefs that deem same sex relationships and queer identity expression to be wrong or sinful. Norms and beliefs about gender roles, experiences of stigma, oppression, and prejudice in relation to our queer identity, fear of rejection, and concerns about bringing shame on the family all contribute to our coming out journey. This is clear in the findings of Orne (2011) who uses data from open-ended essays to explore three aspects of strategic outness: strategies, motivational discourse, and social relationships. Orne finds that even people who consider themselves ‘beyond the closet’ manage their queer identities but continue to experience stigma; also, that while participants

might tell some people about their queer identity, they tend not to allow anyone from their parents' social networks to know, which means that their behaviour must change continuously. The consequences of coming out are not inherent but are observed from others or based on stereotypes therefore strategic outness is described by Orne as 'the contextual and continual management of identity in which people are never fully 'out' or 'closeted'' (2011: 698). Therefore, Orne (2011) concludes that coming out is an identity management system wherein people control access to and information about their identities rather than its being a development trajectory as is suggested by Cass (1984). 'Coming out' is a commonly used and well-known process which is often misunderstood as a singular event that occurs in a queer-identifying person's life. Shurts et al.. (2020) explain how coming out is an ongoing process of sexual identity development. This is echoed by Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) who conceptualise coming out as a journey. The world is heteronormative, and queer-identifying people therefore must make decisions about their coming out to each person encountered. This decision is fraught with personal risk and social consequences and is dangerous either way (Orne, 2011). Queerness is often observable and this divergence from the heteropatriarchal order renders us different, othering us, and exposing us to violence. Our othered and different bodies are a source of shame not only for ourselves but for our families, our community, and our places of worship (Van der Walt and Davids, 2022). The rejection of queer bodies is justified by normative systems of power that use violence to relegate us to the margins and ultimately erase us from their heteronormative ideals (Van der Walt and Davids, 2022).

According to Boe *et al.* (2018) queer youth are coming out and self-identifying as queer at much younger ages than did previous generations due to increasing queer visibility in the media and greater access to community support. Boe *et al.* (2018) acknowledge, however, that the process of coming out is complex and can lead to conflicted attitudes and feelings because

disclosure of queerness creates visibility and increased visibility leads to increased vulnerability to discrimination and violence. Being out to certain people in one's life and being closeted to others is the reality of many queer-identifying people. Shurts *et al.*, (2020) describes the process of coming out as part of the greater internal and external process of discovering sexual identity. Coming out is described by Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) as a process by which one acknowledges an identity that is not heterosexual and begins to represent a personal truth to others. This process, of self-disclosure, can result in rejection, which, when emanating from religious institutions, can fuel and, particularly, exacerbate the sense of dignity, equality, and freedom having been violated, and at the same time excluding queer-identifying people from safe havens of inclusion that are also enriching (Phejane, 2022). The case of Ecclesia de Langer and the Methodist Church in Southern Africa (MCSA) serves as an extreme example of the church's tendency to homophobia and exclusion. The MCSA publicly shamed and dismissed de Langer, an ordained Methodist minister, citing her intention to enter into a same sex civil union with her partner as the reason for her dismissal. The MCSA argued that same-sex marriage was in opposition to a central tenet of the church which defines marriage as exclusively between a man and woman (De Freitas, 2016; Phejane, 2020, Van der Walt, 2019). According to Phejane (2020) the Methodist church is considered a liberal and supportive space for queer people, but that de Langer suffered shame, discrimination, and the loss of her job because of her sexual orientation. The MCSA relied on biblical references from Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-8 interpreted as advocating shunning, shaming, and execution. In doing so the MCSA sent a clear message of rejection to queer people (Phejane, 2022).

2.9 Blessing or Curse?

Coming out is 'a complex, non-linear and never-ending process' which includes a period of personal confusion and of private acceptance of self and disclosure to others (Alonzo and

Buttitta, 2019: 9). One of the fundamental theories of LGBT¹³ identity development and the first to treat LGBT identity as normal in a heterosexist society is *The Cass Identity Model*. According to Cass (1984) as cited in Shurts *et al.* (2020), confusion about identity begins when a queer-identifying person becomes aware of same-sex thoughts, feelings, or attractions, often leading to feelings of confusion or denial as they question who they are. As they begin to accept the possibility of being queer, they consider the implications of this identity and start to reach out to others who identify as queer and have already navigated the coming-out process, and in this realise that they are not alone; identity acceptance occurs when individuals fully embrace their sexual orientation and view it as positive and can move beyond tolerance of who they are (Cass, 1984 as cited in Shurts *et al.*, 2020). Though individuals reach this stage of acceptance they may still compartmentalise their sexual identity and selectively express their true gender identity, if at all. During the final stage of Cass's model, individuals have integrated their sexual and gender identities into all aspects of their being and consider it as only one component of who they are, rather than its being their entire identity (Shurts *et al.*, 2020).

In their research to determine if coming out is still relevant, Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) point to the fact that most of their models are Eurocentric in nature, because they are describing the experiences of white, urban, middle-class, English-speaking people; they do not accurately represent the lived experiences of those who come out later in life, something many individuals choose while allowing family and community to draw their own conclusions, choosing hitherto to 'pass as heterosexual' rather than having involved themselves in frustrating discussions or exposing themselves to offensive stereotypes. The findings of Alonzo and Buttitta indicates that '[w]omen across all four groups also had a...need to physically distance themselves from their families of origin before they were not able to openly share their gay identities with

¹³ Referenced as 'LGBT' in Cass (1984) prior to the inclusion of I or Q to the acronym.

parents and parental figures’ (2019: 59). This distancing is not necessarily physical but may involve withholding the truth, denying one’s queer identity when confronted, or avoiding the topic. This further demonstrates how family expectations influence the coming out process. The violence experienced by queer-identifying people is not only physical, but as the Garnets and Kimmel (2003) study found, can result in being disowned, rejected, or being thrown out of the family home. As a result, some queer-identifying people elect to postpone, sometimes indefinitely, telling their family about their sexuality (Garnets and Kimmel, 2003). In the writings of Fankanel (2010) disclosure of same-sex orientation to parents is considered to be one of the most arduous declarations of individuation faced by sexual minority youth and one in ten queer youth reported being rejected by their parents. This results in a barrier to openness, due of fear of rejection and verbal or physical abuse (Crockett, Cashwell, Marszalek and Willis, 2018).

2.10 Defined by desire

In addition to physical violence queer-identifying people also experience the systemic violence of a legal system that continues to limit their access to justice and protections enshrined in the South African Constitution. In the account of de Lange described earlier in the text, the court found it unnecessary to address the conflicting rights of freedom of association and of religious freedom versus the right to equality and dignity (De Freitas, 2016), finding that the court had no jurisdiction in the matter and determining that the church leadership and de Lange should engage in internal arbitration to resolve the matter (Phekane, 2020). Van der Walt describes the outcome of that situation as a ‘poignant disconnect between the constitutional protection of the freedoms and rights of religious institutions and the rights and liberties of LGBTIQ+ people’ (2019: 222). Another example of egregious exclusion and stigma is the policy of the Dutch Reformed Church to reverse the recognition of civil unions for queer-identifying people.

In 2015 the Dutch Reformed Church made the decision to become the first church in Africa to recognise civil unions between persons of the same gender and to grant permission to ordained ministers to confirm such unions as well as to ordain openly gay clergy (Van der Walt, 2019). The decision was overturned a year later, and queer-identifying people were cast out even after having been fully welcomed (Van der Walt, 2019). To acknowledge and affirm, and then later shun and condemn and reject, suggests that the ‘victim’ of this treatment is of no value. This is similar to the case of the Grace Bible Church in Soweto which hosted Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, who was visiting from West Africa. Heward-Mills gave a sermon condemning homosexuality as unnatural. He found an ally in Bishop Mosa Sono who affirmed Heward-Mills, stating that the only form of sexual relationship sanctioned by G-d is that between one man and one woman (Van der Walt, 2019). Bishop Mosa Sono is quoted as saying: in Van der Walt (2019: 225) stating that:

‘...we believe in heterosexual relationships between a natural man and a natural woman within the confines of lawful matrimony. Adherence to this stated principle of sexual behavior is an inherent requirement of membership of Grace Bible Church’

These sentiments do not only reject queer-identifying people and deny them a place of worship but do systemic harm in that they legitimise discrimination against queer-identifying people. The role of religious institutions is constitutionally protected, and they are granted the freedom to regulate their own internal affairs with limited interference from the State. The wide-ranging freedom and lack of oversight is derived from the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution: Article 15, the freedom of religion, Article 18, the freedom of association, and Article 31, the right to associate with religious communities (Van der Walt, 2019). Phekane (2020) suggests that, given the guarantee of freedom of religion that is seminal to the

Constitution, it could be argued that discrimination against queer-identifying people might be justifiable in a religious context in that religious denominations are free to determine and uphold their own interpretations of scripture. Van der Walt (2019) suggests that this places religious institutions at a complex intersection with the liberties of queer-identifying people, as a religious denomination may argue that it is their God-given right and even duty to deny certain persons their dignity and to discriminate against them based on one or more of their attributes or characteristics for instance race, class, sex, gender, or sexual orientation (Phekane, 2020).

Heterosexism in the form of discrimination against queer-identifying people sustains patriarchal religious institutions and is associated with abusive power relations (Phekane, 2020). Queer-identifying people who do not conform to the mould of heteropatriarchy are alienated and left feeling inhuman and worthless (Phekane, 2020). Similarly, Sibisi and Van der Walt (2021) write that the stability of the norm that heteropatriarchy prescribes is achieved by excluding, marginalising, and annihilating queer bodies, and Sullivan (2003) agrees, writing that heteronormative norms are created through the social meaning that is ascribed to people's bodies while Milani (2014) asserts that those who do not conform are constantly vulnerable to violence. Heteronormativity dictates that sex is biological and finds expression in the binary categories of male and female. According to Suppes, Van der Toorn and Begeny (2021) in a research study aimed at determining how the relationship between openness about sexual minority status fosters queer identity importance, community integration, and perception of discrimination, found that the pervasiveness of intolerance results in some queer-identifying people's not being open about their queer identity in an effort to minimise personal experiences with discrimination and to shield themselves from harmful consequences. In expressing our queer identity, we risk homophobic people acting out their fantasies of annihilating us from their heteronormative world. Though concealing one's queer identity may seem publicly and

socially beneficial, the reality is that it is cognitively exhausting to conceal information from others, especially when it relates to the essence of your being (Suppes *et al.*, 2021). As a result, queer-identifying people are more likely than their heterosexual cisgendered counterparts to suffer from anxiety and depression (Suppes *et al.*, 2021). Interestingly the findings of Suppes *et al.* (2021) encourage us to consider the need for community and its mental health benefits, noting that queer-identifying persons who have a community consider their queer identity to be more important than their concept of self, which helps them feel more integrated in a broad queer community. Fully expressing one's queer identity means that one is likely to have access to a vibrant community, but this does expose one to discrimination and hostility because this community does not exist in a vacuum, but in a violent heteropatriarchal context. Communities of physical bodies that express their queer-identity have an expressive dimension that cannot be reduced to speech, and West *et al.* (2016: 5) suggest that the gathering of these bodies together says something without relying on speech, stating that:

‘When negotiating embodied identity and negating the heteronormative insistence on ‘correction’ through culture-validated violence, the multiple intersecting axes of oppression need to be taken into consideration. When considering and engaging the embodied realities of, for example, black lesbian women within the South African township context, the constellation of factors represented in axes of identity, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic realities, need to be engaged at the complex point of intersection.’

It is important to consider an embodied queer community as coming out is not necessarily a declaration of full identity but rather an expression of those parts of ourselves we feel comfortable sharing. It is this expression that is identified by society as unacceptable, leading

to violence because it visibly challenges the heteropatriarchal norms. Queer pride directly challenges the narrative that queer-identifying people are sinful and therefore shameful and brings out queer-identifying people into confrontations with the church¹⁴.

2.11 Amazing Grace

Suppes *et al.* argue that while there is an overall benefit to being open about one's queer identity, this 'benefit dampens as greater openness lends itself to a (potentially motivated) heightened awareness of personal and group-based discrimination' (2021: 3). Based on Freire's theory of conscientisations Asakura (2017) suggests that the development of critical consciousness begins a journey towards liberation by exposing systems of oppression and breaking the culture of silence, or rather closetedness. Belonging to a queer community does not shield us from queer group-based discrimination and personal discrimination based on queer identity but it does give us access to a resource from which to draw strength and resilience. The work of Suppes *et al.* (2021) concludes that there are clear benefits to stepping out of 'unhealthy closets', enabling one to grow one's sense of connection and allowing integration with a queer community that in turn acts as a form of support, creating a sense of belonging. This work also concludes that beyond unhealthy closets are discriminatory environments rife with stigma against queer-identifying people. This becomes increasingly clear to queer identified persons as their openness and identification grows (Suppes *et al.*, 2021). Halperin (1995) as cited in McCormick (2013) describes coming out as submitting to a distinctive set of dangers rather than an exhilarating act of liberation.

¹⁴ See the resistance towards being proudly queer by the Westboro Baptist Church people protesting pride. <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/05/29/anti-gay-church-target-d-c-pride-parade/>

‘The true ugliness of the closet is its subtlety. It eats away at your soul bit by bit, and you don’t even realize it. If you never deal with it or come to terms with it, then ultimately the closet will destroy you.’¹⁵

It could be argued that freely expressing our identity is an act of resistance rather than of liberation. Coming out is not being free, coming out is to face homophobia (McCormick, 2013) because, according to Hames (2012), our queer lives do not slot in or assimilate, they disrupt the status quo. Representation is vital, enabling identity expression. The findings of Hames suggest that after 2005 when the University of The Western Cape (UWC) began hosting conferences that promoted inclusion, respect for diversity, and tolerance for difference, there was an increase in student confidence in expressing their sexuality because they knew their professors were ‘just like them’ (2012: 76). The deleterious effects of homophobia render a rather sobering picture of what is involved in ‘coming out’ (Suppes *et al.*, 2021) and, considering the high levels of stigmatisation and vulnerability of queer-identifying people, even despite constitutional protections (Van der Walt, 2019), it is critical to question and stand up against the life-denying systems that entrench this reality. If we address the disparities that queer-identifying persons experience, we must assess whether the constitutional values that guarantee our freedom from unfair discrimination and our right to dignity have been adopted and embraced by the general population of South Africa.

The findings of Francis and Reygan (2016) suggest that the notion of being out and visibly expressing one’s queer identity extends beyond the binary in or out of the closet. They consider the lived experiences of the participants in their study which affirm a dynamic and multifaceted expression of self that claims and creates space (Francis and Reygan, 2016). They argue that

¹⁵ Gar McVey-Russell, *Sin Against the Race*

the concept of the closet has uses but is not uniform or universal. Francis and Reygan (2016) suggest that the closet denies continuity between the self and the other, separating the individual from the collective, presuming the necessity for agentic self-determination. The confines of the closet should not be completely negated but rather considered as a process of disrupting the normative. There can be power and agency in the closet, and therefore coming out becomes not simply a stage or a process of identity development, but, rather, is a constant assessment of the environment and active decision-making, repeated over and over again (Arndt and De Bruin, 2006).

Van der Walt encourages us to reflect on Foucault's notion of power as 'something present throughout the world and in all people'; Van der Wal interprets Foucault to understand 'power as a relational strategy that functions in such a manner as to achieve more power'; he continues: 'Foucault shows that where there is power, there is resistance, and that not all power is negative' (2017: 12). From this it becomes apparent that power is not innately possessed but rather is held by people or institutions and is therefore distinct from authority (Van der Walt, 2017). Perhaps when we come out we not only claim but also exercise power.

My own lived experience does not embody a rigid model of identity development and expression. For me, the closet is not defined by cowardice and denial, it allows me to act as *agent provocateur*, infiltrating predominantly heterosexual spaces and enabling me to undermine and subvert the oppressive heteronormative system that seeks to relegate queerness to second-class citizenship. Coming out is not necessarily synonymous with discovering my real identity and aligning it with my public persona, because it is society, and not me, that imposes the closet, thereby denying my fluid truth.

There is an assumption that if people live in the closet and do not come out, they are living unhealthy and inauthentic lives (Boe *et al.*, 2018). Hammoud-Becket (2007) concurs that assumptions are made that to live a truly queer life, coming out is necessary. While coming out is important and liberating for most queer-identifying people, it would not be necessary if social structures and systems did not impose heteronormativity, gender binaries, and rigid sexual identities (Boe *et al.*, 2018).

Historically, coming out has been a process that allows gay white men to define themselves as marginalised (Ross, 2005) therefore QPoC may not want to identify as queer as their lives are already marked daily by systemic racism and sexism. They may not want to subscribe to the dominant narrative of coming out in order further to risk marginalisation (Boe *et al.*, 2018). Decolonising the concept of coming out allows us to consider the aspect of inviting or letting in, by considering one aspect of identity that may be easier or safer to disclose than another, both of which depend upon the context and life stage of social support (Boe *et al.*, 2018). While acknowledging the importance of coming out for the creation of community, as described earlier there may be alternate ways for queer-identifying people to define and identify their existence.

Hammoud-Becket (2007) postulates that there can be the conscious and selective invitation of people into one's life, and that coming out can create pressure to make one's gender and/or sexual identity public in performative and expressive ways; it may not be necessary to come out, however, to every person you meet to be out of the closet, or – free from Mitzrahim – the narrow place¹⁶. The closet could be filled with precious things, treasures that must be protected,

¹⁶ Slavery in Egypt confined the Hebrews to a narrow place, with constrictions on physical, emotional, and spiritual lives. The Exodus can be interpreted as the story of liberation from the things that hold us back. See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/self-liberation/>

but Hammoud-Becket (2007) offers us an alternative of, perhaps, not having to move out of the closet by making one's queerness public but one might choose to whom to open the door and who to invite into our lives; this could be an alternative to coming out and thinking about ways to invite people in to share our precious jewels. Moore (2012) reflected on the possibility of liberation through other means including conjuring up different metaphors of disclosure. Our politics and practices as queer-identifying people should be organised in response to the need to interrogate and disrupt the heterosexist identity categories and hierarchies of power that oppress us, not subscribing to the demand to organise our lives in response to them.

According to Moore (2012a) the process of coming out and naming our perceived non-normative alternative identity reinforces heterosexism. It is important to unpack the terms that order our lives in order clearly to detect what is situated in the language that represents us. Moore (2012a) argues that by refusing to pronounce symbols and paradigms, namely the metaphors of coming out and the closet, we begin to move from mere opposition, survival, and getting by, to being and getting over. Shifting to the person-centred approach of inviting in honours the complexity of each person's identity and social location. Coming in functions as a hospitable sharing, a choice to disclose to whom and when, defying the unspoken demand forced on queer bodies to name ourselves out of a fear of being named. Inviting in shifts our power of choice to invite individuals we choose to enter our lives rather than having to publicly exit the closet. Coming in can be considered as a process that frustrates the heteronormative hierarchies as it refuses to adhere to accepted categories and binaries (Moore, 2012b).

2.12 Adding Black and Brown to the Rainbow

Winder (2015) found that high levels of religiosity and religious practice among PoC were associated with high levels of disapproval of homosexuality. PoC were found to be

substantially religious and more likely to believe in a G-d who sends misfortunes as punishments (Lewis, 2003). Shurts, Kooyman, Rogers, and Burlew, (2020) argue that it is not the predominately religious environments of PoC that are homophobic, but, rather, the importance of religion to PoC, exposing QPoC to anti-gay sentiments, homophobic teachings, and/or derogatory remarks. As a result, QPoC who identify, for example, as Christian, Muslim, or Sikh often experience an additional level of rejection, directly or indirectly, from their religious institution. This can result in existential crises for QPoC who have followed a particular religious doctrine and are shunned because of their queer identity and told they are sinful. Shurts *et al.*, (2020) suggest that the lived experiences of religious QPoC will be different from those of white queer people because of privilege. According to Livermon '[QPoC] struggle to access the rights enshrined in the constitution not for lack of material resources but for lack of cultural ones — where blackness continues to cohere around heteronormativity' (2012: 300). Winder (2015) describes how young gay black men expressing their sexuality in a church-going family, face a series of dilemmas as they cling onto aspects of organised religious worship, despite the denunciation of their sexualities at home and in church. Where churches and religious institutions have been major political, social, and moral pillars for communities of colour, they may be beneficial for QPoC, but when this religiosity is associated with homophobia, that can be harmful (Winder, 2015). Hence, as shown by Asakura (2017), the processing of queer-identity development and expression is more complex for people with multiple intersecting marginalised identities.

Valentine and Waite (2012) found that queer-identifying people who encounter hostility in their religious communities very often are forced to abandon their faith, or, rather to prioritise their personal experiences of faith over institutional religion and religious authority. Winder (2015) describes the paradox faced by QPoC, who struggle with anti-gay messaging from

clergy, although they still value the emotional and communal aspects of the religious experience. Participants in Winder's (2015) study explained that despite the negative experiences encountered in churches, many of them worked to recapture religious, spiritual, and organisational aspects of the church beyond its confines. While religious dogma can be used to promote homophobia, aspects of religious teachings can be used structurally and substantively to aid queer-identifying people who face adversity (Winder, 2015).

According to Crocket *et al.* (2018) most participants in their study recalled receiving non-affirming negative messages about their homosexuality from their religion, rendering a deep sense of conflict and uncertainty from messages that were accompanied by conflicting messages about God and love. This identity conflict is also found in a study by Valentine and Waite (2012) whose participants insist on their sexuality being inseparable from their spirituality as they believe they are divinely created, and their queerness is therefore an intrinsic part of their being.

2.13 The need for redemptive religious spaces

The writings of West, Van der Walt, and Kaoma (2016) call for safe spaces where the voices of those oppressed within and by faith communities because of religiously-infused homophobia can be heard. Though the right to freedom of religion or religious belief should be respected, this right cannot justify criminalising SOGIESC or inflicting harm on queer-identifying people. The reality of discrimination against the marginalisation of queer-identifying people has contributed to multiple oppressions in the African faith landscape. West *et al.* (2016) suggest that rereading the toxic so-called homosexuality texts in the Bible is not only necessary to demythologise them and empower queer-identifying Christians to respond to the rhetoric, but that they also offer redemptive interpretive options; their argument is that to move beyond

homophobia, 'we must not allow the churches to determine which biblical texts are 'about' homosexuality' (2016: 4).

Van der Walt (2017) offers a praxis of intercultural Bible reading as a redemptive religious practise which enables space for alternative understandings, positions, and insights by inviting the other into the interpretation through a celebration of their diverse biblical understanding and self-reflection. A ten-phase empirical study of intercultural bible reading conducted by Van der Walt (2017) brought together eight culturally diverse women for a contextual Bible study of 2 Samuel 13:1-12 and resulted in a safer space in which women were available for one another in a caring and supportive manner, holding each other's pain, suffering, and vulnerability. These women experienced being truly heard and understood the complexity that social situations present through sharing their personal position and hearing the everyday lived realities of others. Van der Walt (2017) argues that social transformation and the promotion of human dignity is achievable by encouraging interaction between culturally diverse contextually embedded people to celebrate each other through real interactions through the use of intercultural bible reading. Not only can intercultural bible reading create an opportunity to question heteropatriarchy that is often based on the exclusive practise of bible interpretation, but it is an invitation to queer-identifying people who have been pushed to the margins, excluded from society, and silenced, to be seen and heard by creating a safe, supportive environment in which the ideologies that inform othering can be 'named, dismantled and deconstructed' (Van der Walt, 2017: 20). 'Safer space' is preferred to 'safe space' because a space cannot always be completely safe for all people, especially those with marginalised identities. According to Asakura (2017) such a space may function as a recharging station that provides emotional fuel to navigate hostile social contexts.

Davids, Matyila, Sithole, and Van der Walt, 2019 invite us to think about a theology that is for queer people by queer people which disrupts the traditional status of authoritative voices and the dominant direction of theological reflection and engagement. This ‘*izitabane zingabantu ubuntu*’ theology...calls for the theological reflection(s) done by those, and starting from the lived experiences of those, who are often negatively identified in the African context with the term *Isitabane*’ (Davids et al., 2019: 9). This suggests, furthermore, an embodied reclaiming of the affirmation of life by embracing our bodies and destabilising what is considered normal, proper, and holy in faith landscapes, thus reimagining community, and the engagement with sources of faith (Davids et al., 2019).

Schnoor (2006) as cited in Winder (2015) explains how gay Jewish men use religious values and practises to add meaning and purpose to their lives and to make sense of their gay identities. Similarly, Shurts *et al.* (2020) finds that establishing alternative religious organisations that accept queer-identifying people, instead of merely tolerating their existence, are critical of the practise of reinterpreting religious writings to find acceptance, and they are a means of mitigating possibly negative experiences emerging from religious institutions and teachings. Van der Walt (2017: 8) makes the challenging suggestion that alternative methods can be used by encouraging local contextual readings of biblical texts that consider the possibility of diverse interpretation and invite differences that can be celebrated.

Shurts *et al.* (2020) explain how one need not be part of a religious group to experience spirituality, though religion can endorse the expression of spirituality. There is the possibility of healing by becoming part of a religious community that accepts and affirms one’s sexual orientation (Shurts *et al.*, 2020). Crocket *et al.* explain how ‘participants who remained in their religious community of origin were in affirming communities or chose to either reject or

compartmentalise their sexual identities' (2018: 101). In addition, Crocket *et al.* (2018) show how those who remain in their religions experience a sense of integration of their sexual and religious identities, and attribute non-affirming or rejecting messages as human rather than divine. According to West, Van Der Walt, and Koama (2016) this bible-based heteronormativity dictates what is normal and places a moralising emphasis on what the body should do. Anything that falls outside these parameters is stigmatised as hypersexual, promiscuous, or deviant. Van der Walt (2019) challenges us to counter fundamentalist, exclusivist, uncritical and non-contextual religious interpretations that result from heteropatriarchal communities and to strive towards and seek life-affirming inclusive alternative approaches and strategies that can be achieved through responsible contextual intercultural bible-reading processes. Judaism can achieve this through Talmudic study by engaging in 'midrash' which translates as 'to seek with care' through the study of Torah to understand the meaning of text, its context, and by recording contradictory interpretations and constantly re-evaluating the text to distil its divine intent. Midrash¹⁷ forces you to be aware of our own positionality, acknowledging how your biases act as a lens through which to understand the text.

Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) resolve that models of coming out tend to be too linear to be satisfactory, given that the process of coming out is a lifelong process of responding to multiple social forces. Whether sexual identities are viewed as declared, performed, or both, it is apparent that they are fluid and contextual. Therefore, a person's sexual identity is not fixed or constant but can, and often does, change over time and place. Alonzo and Buttitta challenge us to think of coming out as a process of coming into life, which emphasises learning about norms

¹⁷ 'Midrash' is an interpretive act, seeking the answers to religious questions (both practical and theological) by plumbing the meaning of the words of the Torah. See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/midrash-101/>

and expectations of queer culture in the everyday social settings of PoC while ‘stepping into an identity that integrates other critical aspects of identity’ (2019: 22). This is emphasised by the findings of Winder (2015) who also confirms the coming out process is a journey, not an event. McCornick (2013) finds that contemporary research reveals that coming out differs depending on one’s social, political, and economic context that it does not occur in the same order or at the same pace and includes identity expression with ambits beyond SOGIESC because of the myriad of complex, multi-dimensional, and inter-locking identities we all contain/bear/. According to Lugg (2003) multi-dimensionality moves beyond intersectionality by pushing the analysis to be more inclusive, by acknowledging that to be queer, can hold multiple meanings and can be experienced differently from person to person.

According to Winder one aspect of that journey involves working through religious beliefs and ‘the impact of race adds another intersectional component [as queer-identifying PoC] will experience coming out and religious development through their own unique racial lenses’ (2015: 21). Winder (2015) writes that people who are deeply religious or are from deeply religious communities where homosexuality is discouraged, can be faced with anti-gay sentiments, and have a hard time accepting their own identities. Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) show how a component of coming out is grappling with the negative overt and covert messages about sexual minorities that exist in society and having to grapple against internalising these negative beliefs and messages which is often unavoidable and harmful to an individuals’ concept of self and sense of wellbeing. This is echoed in the findings of Shurts *et al.* (2020) that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals experience coming out as a difficult decision because of fear of rejection from family or friends as a result of religious beliefs or the fear of rejection by the church or religious congregations resulting from notions of sin. According to West *et*

al.. (2016) queer-identifying people experience trauma in faith communities because of theologies which are normative and traditional.

The findings of Garnet and Kimmel (2003) suggest that although it is difficult not to disclose one's queer identity, greater distress may be experienced when the alternative means misleading and/or lying to people. Hans (2017) writes that coming out of the closet is central to developing a positive queer identity and claiming one's queer identity. This embrace of identity often results in exposure to homophobia, and when this occurs in churches, Hans (2017) and Winder (2015) both suggest that QPoC turn to alternative, non-religious but welcoming spaces to negotiate and reconcile their religious beliefs with their sexual and gender identity. According to West, Van der Walt, and Koamo 'homophobia in the churches inhabits a particular biblical shape, and so this biblical shape must be interrogated and destabilised and replaced with a redemptive and liberating shape' (2016: 4).

The process of coming out does not occur in a vacuum and, as queer people, we continue to construct identity and express it while we live our life. Therefore, according to Shurts *et al..* (2020) we continue to progress through developmental processes that involve other aspects of our identity, including our faith, which are often affected and challenged when we come out. For as long as patriarchal heteronormativity in our societies and religious spaces is 'un(der)acknowledged, maintained and even encouraged, we will fail to address the ... queerness of all human sexuality' (Punt, 2009: 11).

2.14 Conclusion

This chapter reviews bodies of literature that present a diverse understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of identity-formation, negotiation, and expression of queer-identifying PoC in socio-religious contexts. It considers the complexity and nuance of coming-out and how its consequences are personified.

The literately body explored provide insight into the establishment of patriarchal heteronormativity by naturalizing the binary constructs of gender, sex, and sexuality. There is a naturalization of masculine men and feminine women and an expectation of complementary sexual relations between the two. The literature reviewed suggests that this systemic order is reinforced through acts of violence and discrimination. Those who live their lives outside of this binary are considered perverse or aberrant. Cultural and religious beliefs intensify this discrimination for PoC as non-binary gender identities and homosexuality are considered un-African and immoral. Cultural traditions and religious dogma are often used to justify the intolerance of gender and sexual diversities by socio-religious societies. I consulted literature that researched the closet and the various uses of the closet as a place of safety or suffocation. There is a substantial body of literature that considers the application and denial of constitutional rights in various contexts and how despite being a liberal and progressive country in terms of our legislature, our population remains deeply conservative. The literature reviewed considers how the paradox of how religion is often the reason for the oppression of QPoC, but often also acts as a source of strength to overcome this oppression. I considered literature relating to the use of alternative ways of doing theology that affirms life and invites QPoC to bring their lived and embodies experiences to intersect with their faith.

The literature provides a comprehensive framework that can be used to understand queer identity, however there is an opportunity to expand the knowledge on how class as a result of race in South Africa impacts the lived experiences of QPoC. Further to this, there is an opportunity to consider if the element of resistance to the religiously influenced patriarchal heteronormativity exists.

The next chapter will present the theoretical framework of this study relative to its research objectives and indicate the methodology this research will follow.

3 CHAPTER THREE: THEORY AND METHOD

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I reviewed literature relating to the contours of this study in order to identify unexplored areas that could be illuminated by reflections on the lived and embodied experiences of QPoC. It is clear from the literature reviewed that SOGIESC, though regularly researched, do not often consider the intersection of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity and how it impacts our positioning on the privilege hierarchy of patriarchal heteronormativity. In addition, there is an opportunity to explore the extent to which QPoC are prepared to sacrifice themselves for systemic change and liberation, in religious spaces or socio-religious contexts. From the literature reviewed, it is evident that queer-identifying people often choose to leave organised religion or join religious institutions that are life-affirming, in order to safely express their queer identity. I found very little research reflecting how race impacts this decision.

It was also evident that there are a growing number of people who don't identify with any organised religious group or tradition, however this rejection of traditional religious affiliation does not translate into surrendering their spirituality¹⁸. Millennials are less religiously affiliated and do not belong to faith communities, but rather than identify as atheists or agnostic, consider themselves 'spiritual-but-not-religious' because even though they do not attend church or any other religious gathering, they still believe in G-d or a universal spirit (Ter Kuile and Thurston, 2014: 6). From the literature it is evident that the closet is nuanced and filled with complexity; it is a place of safety filled with treasures but can also become claustrophobic and suffocating;

¹⁸ Using ancient traditions, religious innovators are defining new ways for people to come together, attracting people across geography, age, and religious affiliation, to communities that mirror much of progressive church culture. See 154. Ter Kuile, C. and Thurston, A., 2015. *Where We Belong: Mapping American Religious Innovation*. Kalamazoo, MO: Fetzer Institute, pp.1-54.

it is a place of freedom but can also become restricting. The lived experiences of QPoC help us understand that the closet is a place queer-identifying people come out of, but it is also a place that others can be invited into. In addition, the closet is not devoid of G-d who for some serves as comforter and for others as tormentor.

In this chapter I explore theoretical frameworks that the study will utilise to conduct the research and analyse the findings. The theoretical framework of this research will enable us to interrogate ‘the closet’ as an enabler of both liberation and torment by reflecting on systemic sources of oppression that act upon us, that we influence and how those are internalised. Queer Theory is the primary theory used to develop the conceptual framework within which the research will be conducted. Using a Queer Theory perspective, I explore identity as fluid and performed in a manner that is responsive to the institutional setting, physical environment and relational context in which individuals are located. I endeavour to understand the intersectionality of the lived experiences of QPoC using a sub-category of Queer Theory – Intersectionality Theory and using a secondary theory - the theory of Sociology of Religion, I begin to understand how religion and religious experiences impact these lives. The research will draw on queer theology to understand how societal, (including religious, cultural, and legislative) norms are influenced and influence; are impacted and impact queer identity construction and expression. This chapter will also indicate the method used to conduct the research, highlighting key considerations regarding the sample and data collection as well as considerations of risk, limitations, and ethics. The method that will be used is guided by the theoretical framework and will be presented in this chapter after the theory. Lastly, this chapter highlights mechanisms used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, as well as the ethical considerations and risks.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: How to look and see lived experiences

According to Rakoczy (2011, p 34-35) ‘experience is neither global nor neutral but is diverse according to race, class, education, social location religion...[and] must be interpreted’. Grounded in a gender and sexuality binary, heteronormativity is a worldview that is promoted by systems of oppression that sustain heterosexist attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate violence towards QPoC (Lane, 2021). This is informed by a heteropatriarchal perspective and exposes an ontological position whereby it is possible to explore how heteronormativity impacts on how QPoC construct, negotiate and express their queer identity in a heterosexist world. The question of liberation becomes a question not only of how we, as QPoC find ourselves in the closet, but why we might feel at home there.

Considering the enormous responsibility that I felt to get the data collection right – to ensure that I recruited the right people and asked the right questions, I found that I also wrestled with identifying the most suitable theory or theories through which to analyse and understand my participants’ experiences. I settled on Queer Theory.

3.2.1 Queer Theory

Queer Theory was the most suitable framework within which to conduct my research because it challenges normative structures and discourses. According to Butler (1993) Queer Theory remains never fully owned but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from prior usage, making it flexible and responsive in nature. Queer Theory is a theoretical model which developed out of traditional lesbian and gay studies and is unaligned with any specific identity category, thus making it beneficial for use in a number of discussions that aim to destabilise what is considered the norm (Jagose, 1996). Queer Theory demonstrates the impossibility of any natural order – being in and out of the closet and calls into question even apparently

unproblematic terms – like liberation. This makes it well-suited for this study which aims to explore the lived experiences of QPoC. To be queer (as described in the introduction) and of colour is not homogeneous for the participants of this study and so, given that being queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming, Queer Theory similarly curves endlessly towards the realisation that its realisation is impossible (Lee, 1995).

‘Queer’ is such a simple, unassuming little word. Whoever could have guessed that we would come to saddle it with so much pretentious baggage—so many grandiose theories, political agendas, philosophical projects, apocalyptic meanings? A word that was once commonly understood to mean ‘strange,’ ‘odd,’ ‘unusual,’ ‘abnormal,’ or ‘sick,’ and was routinely applied to lesbians and gay men as a term of abuse, now intimates possibilities so complex and rarefied that entire volumes are devoted to spelling them out. Even to define queer, we now think, is to limit its potential, its magical power to usher in a new age of sexual radicalism and fluid gender possibilities.¹⁹

Even the origins of Queer Theory as a term are deliberately disruptive. To pair the defamatory word ‘queer’ with the revered term ‘theory’ was according to Halperin (2014: 339-340) scandalously offensive. It was coined to unsettle the complacency of lesbian and gay studies, offering an alternative to the hegemony of white, male, middle class models of analysis (Halperin, 2014). From the literature reviewed I understand that identity is fluid and performed in a way that responds to the institutional setting, physical environment and relational context in which individuals are located. According to Punt (2009) the conviction that heterosexuality and the cisgendered gender binaries are divinely commissioned and the exclusive societal

¹⁹ Halperin, D.M., 2003. The normalization of Queer Theory. *Journal of homosexuality*, 45(2-4), pp.339-343.

norm, is detrimental for the appreciation of the full ranges of sexualities and sexual expressions in Africa and is counterproductive of understanding issues related to gender, sex, and sexuality in biblical texts. Therefore, to understand the lived experiences of identity and lived worlds of QPoC I am using Queer Theory as it disrupts the inflexibility of identity, providing a non-minoritizing view of sexual and gender subjectivity that destabilises the heteronormative order because Queer Theory normalises' queerness as an acceptable way of life (Matebeni and Msibi, 2015). Using Queer Theory, I hope to undermine the obscure yet powerful norms that support the privileges of heteronormative life including the normalizing of hegemonic heterosexuality. Cheng's (2011) description of 'radical love', guides my research, aimed at exploring the potential of liberation and questioning whether it necessitates suffering, exploring how religion impacts queer identity construction, negotiation, and expression. Cheng (2011) posits that the radical love of the queer community helps overcome obstacles that prevent us from living fully as intended by G-d. Queer for the purposes of this research is used as an umbrella term that collectively refers to people identifying with non-normative, minority and marginalised sexualities and/or gender identities as elaborated in chapter one. This queer umbrella reflects a collective identity that continues to expand and evolve. Ahmed (2016) challenges that queer was never to meant to become an identity but ought to describe the uncapturable or unpredictable trajectory of sexual life and gender identity. '[Q]ueer once sought to provide an umbrella term for nonconforming genders and various sexualities, ones that did not easily submit to categorization, it is now clearly embroiled in a battle of its own' (Ahmed, 2016, p 490).

3.2.1.1 Colouring queer

Queer as a group identity has been criticised as excluding of certain bodies because queer group concerns are only pertinent to the group if they are a result of one's gayness, which is usually

understood as white gay men, resulting in gender and race not being the group's concern (Barnard 1999). Though versions of queer have been criticised as being presumptively white and classist, QPoC have exposed and opposed its exclusionary limits in the context of a broadening struggle (Ahmed, 2016). Ahmed (2016) challenges us to consider that if queer refers to people whose gender and sexuality are fluid then what of those who understand themselves as requiring and wanting a clear gender category within a binary frame in order to affirm their struggle.

In relation to race, only white people can afford to see their race as unmarked, irrelevant or a subordinate category of analysis. According to Barnard (1999) Queer Theory similarly (re)produces this kind of racial normalisation and exclusion demarcated by queer community. Rather than showing that racial difference is not a significant variable of queer articulation and performance, its complete absence points to the continued normalisation of whiteness by queer theorists and suggests that in at least one important respect, Queer Theory might not be as different from the epistemologies and methodologies that it so frequently claims to contest (Barnard, 1999). In order to do this research, we must accept that differences are also different to and from each other and that lived experiences of queer-identifying people of colour will be impacted by the intersectionality of their race, class, language, and culture. According to Barnard (1999) work done under the guidance of Queer Theory has tended to use a single perspective categorisation that erases the localised presence of QPoC. Barnard (1999) argues that sexuality is always racialised and race does not exist independently of sexuality. Similarly, De Lauretis (1988) argues that neither race, gender nor sexual orientation alone can constitute one's identity or the basis for a theory and a politics of social change.

While the markers of queerness are often mistakenly assumed to be concealable or their express a matter of choice, race is self-evident: one can look around a room and tell how many white people or people of colour are in the room. It can however be argued that race itself does not exist, as evidenced by Apartheid South Africa's Population Registration Act of 1950²⁰, which allowed for reclassification from one 'race' to another, or the classification of 'honorary white' which applied to people from East Asian countries. Racial definitions change when you cross national boundaries and geographical borders, forcing you to insist on your blackness because of your lighter skin tone or as a mixed-race person having to tick the 'other' box on application forms suggests that race is a construct (Barnard, 1999). According to Barnard (1999) race is as constructed and unstable as sexuality and gender, however, remains social, cultural, and political.

Race and sexuality are not two separate axes of identity that cross and overlay but rather ways to circumscribe systems of meaning and understanding that formatively and inherently define each other (Barnard, 1999). Queer Theory emphasises the differences among and within queer groups, thereby taking up the challenge of describing multiple inscribed subjects (Barnard, 1999). In examining the shared experiences of QPoC, I aim to understand how ideas of identity are constructed: 'how to be', how to act' and 'how to understand oneself' in society. The role of intersectionality in understanding queerness is vital given that queer identity construction is strongly influenced by other social factors that are fluid and diverse within a single society. I will use the concept of intersectionality as a lens to analyse the accounts of the participants,

²⁰ The Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950 (commenced 7 July) required people to be identified and registered from birth as one of four distinct racial groups: White, Coloured, Bantu (Black African), and other. See <https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/DC/leg19500707.028.020.030/leg19500707.028.020.030.pdf>

considering being of colour (race) and queerness as enmeshed and constructed by each other, avoiding an additive approach that would regard these elements of self as independent.

It will be impossible to delineate queer membership because even within this study ‘the closet’ will exist as according to Sedgwick (1991) sexuality is ambiguous, identifications are fluctuating and strategically performed while also ascribed. Furthermore, the notion of coming out will be interrogated and troubled as a form of resistance or liberation, using Foucault’s (1976) History of Sexuality series on queer theorisation, in which he argues that confession, established by the Roman Catholic Church in 1215, has become pervasive in contemporary society. Using Queer Theory, I aim to understand if speaking the truth of one’s queerness as an act of liberation from repressive cultural constraints doesn’t ultimately obey societal mandates to name and confess one’s sins and, in doing so, co-opt our sexualities into socio-religious systems that then further constrain and control it. According to Yip and Page (2013) religion continues to be an important part of the identity and as suggested by Neitz (2014), influences our lived realities in oppressive ways while also granting certain privileges. Therefore, studying how gender works in coherent religious communities provides insights into possibilities for agency that are not always visible (Neitz, 2014). In doing this work, we can begin to shift the question posed by Butler in Ahmed (2016: 491 - 492) from ‘who do I want to be?’ to ‘what kind of life do I want to live with others?’. It must however be acknowledged that it is difficult to ask the question ‘what kind of life do I want to live with others?’ if the life we are striving for is not regarded as a life at all. (Ahmed, 2016)

Queer Theory erodes the pervasive, powerful norms that support the privileges of heteronormative life including the normalizing of hegemonic heterosexuality. Cheng (2011) argues that there is no set normal, but rather changing norms, that people fit in or out of.

Similarly, Piantato (2016) writes that it is through the notation of fluidity that Queer Theory formulates new understandings, rejecting the binary. The aim is to disrupt binary norms that suggest good hetero- and bad homo-sexualities, in an attempt to destroy difference and inequality. To unbox, is to queer but also to erase fixity and embrace fluidity. According to Schneider (2000, p206) 'queer refers to something outside the norm'. However queer resists definition, as it seeks to exist outside heteronormative presuppositions. Queer refers to what stands against normative sexual identity and refers to more than same-sex relations (Schneider, 2000). This is echoed in the writings of Piantato (2016, p5), that suggest that the term queer enables a 'more complicated explanation of gender and sexuality...by considering all marginalised sexual identities that could not fit into the hegemonic social discourses, legitimating them as alternative sexual orientations that can be defined by the term queer.' It can therefore be said that Queer Theory incorporates a range of subjectivities that are not strictly recognisable with a man or women given that these socially performed identities can be as suggested by Butler (1990) performed by either sex.

3.2.1.2 Resisting heteronormativity

Butler as cited in Stuart (1999) argues that gender is not expressive of some inner nature, but is performative, as we learn to become a woman or a man by following the gender scripts handed to us by our culture; and that each performance reinscribes that gender on our bodies. The binary order is interwoven with heteronormativity that dominantly positions heterosexuality and considers any deviation from heterosexuality outside the norm. It is only when this script is disregarded or badly performed that the non-natural nature of gender is uncovered (Stuart, 1999). The example of butch and femme lesbians, who disrupt the connection between sex, sexuality, gender, and the prescribed performance is a useful example of what resisting the binary script could look like.

Queer Theory erases these boundaries in order to disrupt traditional notions about sex, sexuality and gender identity and characteristics, and according to Butler, as cited in Stuart (1999), the proliferation of subversive performances of gender is difficult as no one stands completely outside of them, and this is the essence of Queer Theory. Queer is not another identity alongside the LGBT alphabet but rather a radical destabilising of identities and a resistance to the naturalising of any identity (Stuart, 1999). Similarly, Piantato (2016) suggests that queerness is a symbol of the struggle against heterosexual culture and the term used for marginal sexualities that could not fit into the common discourse about gender and sexuality.

Stuart (1999) quotes Foucault's argument for social constructions of sexual identity in their writings; Christianity is a queer thing; the development of queer theology, by presenting that this is achieved through discourse and constant redefinition; and that power, though held by dominant groups and used against those with less power, can be fluid, redeployed and present in all parts of society. 'Where power [is] exercised there [is] always resistance to it, which itself [is] a kind of power' (Stuart, 1999, p 376).

3.2.1.3 Exploring the closet

To do this research we must accept that differences are also different to and from each other and that the lived experiences of QPoC will be impacted by the intersectionality of their race, class, language, and culture. Many people who identify differently under the queer umbrella, are, according to Stuart, suspicious of the refocusing proposed by Queer Theory, and are unwilling to sacrifice their sense of identity and distinctive voice, something they have not only fought for, but only recently acquired (Stuart, 1999). The basis of Queer Theory is an acceptance that normative discourses cannot hold queerness and that there is a new

understanding of sex, gender and sexual identities that acknowledges that these are fluid. Understanding identity as fluid and in constant formation, negotiation and expression suggests that people are constantly questioning the idea of self, in multiple ways and that a fixed and stable identity does not exist.

Piantato (2016) writes that Queer Theory is an anti-normative approach that rejects dichotomies and suggests a more complicated understanding of gender and sexuality. Queer Theory considers all marginalised sexual identities and legitimises them as a viable alternative. Recognising that we are intersectional beings and that our identities are constantly evolving, Queer Theory allows us to accept the notion of fluidity by rejecting the binary and arguing that identity cannot be reduced to opposition but encompasses a wide spectrum of subjectivities (Piantato, 2016). The binary gender order is linked with heteronormativity, which positions heterosexuality in a hegemonic position in relation to homosexuality and denies the possibility of alternative sexualities. Piantato (2016) explains that the aim of Queer Theory is to deconstruct these categories and the hegemonic structures and ideologies associated with them that perpetuate a fixed understanding of SOGIESC. Queer Theory is an inclusive approach that encompasses all those marginalised identities that do not fit into normative discourses. It legitimises alternative identities and rejects labels that refer to stable identities by embracing all alternative and fluid subjectivities that cannot be ascribed in hegemonic discourse. With this research I aim to establish whether the closet limits or protects QPoC.

Butler's (1990) work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) helps us deconstruct the linear link between gender, sex and sexuality and argues that these links are cultural and social constructs that manifest through the repetition of performative acts. These acts are not spontaneous decisions but rather what Foucault defines as regulative discourses

that create regulatory situations that generate and reproduce certain identities. Therefore, gender identity is not an expression of our natural gender or who we are intrinsically, but rather manifests through repetitive practise that we constantly enact (Butler, 1990). This enacting is not conscious; it is controlled through social regulation. Butler (1990) suggests that because of this, we do not have agency and are transformed into an illusion of self – that we are not the actor of the action but rather the outcome of it. Similarly, Sedgwick (2008: 3) writes that ‘the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know’. The relations of the closet have the potential to be revealing (Sedgwick, 2008). ‘[T]he relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition’ are associated with social meanings ascribed to speech acts (Sedgwick, 2008: 3). Sedgwick (2008) highlights that there are many silences and that closetedness itself is a performance initiated by the speech act of silences. Sedgwick (2008) refers to an ACT UP T-shirt that reads: *I am out, therefore I am*, which is meant to do for the wearer not the constative work of reporting their outness, but the performative work of coming out. Silence is therefore rendered as pointed and performative as speech in relations around the closet (Sedgwick, 2008).

Our silence and closetedness hold knowledge about the normative and this in turn informs who we become in our outness. Butler (1990) continues that sex is also produced by discourse and that by deconstructing sex and gender there is the possibility to expand the understanding of sexual orientation. Butler (1990) helps us understand that identity can be fluid, suggesting that gender can be independent of sex. Thus, the term queer refers not only to a broad range of identities but also to identities situated in between these multiple identities and orientations. Queer allows us to imagine that there is no difference between men and women or heterosexuality and homosexuality and problematises these binary constructions. However, to

fully explore the experiences of QPoC, we need to look at the systems of inequality that act upon us differently because of our social identities, extending beyond the binary and intersecting to create unique dynamics and effects. Queer Theory enables this research to hold the nuances that do not fit into the normative and recognises the alternative as legitimate, while disrupting the restrictions created by the binary. In order to understand how the layer of race and consequently, class, ethnicity and culture impact our lived and embodied experiences, I include Intersectionality Theory as a sub-theory to help expand the understanding of identity.

3.2.2 Intersectionality Theory

3.2.2.1 Understanding experiences because of intersections

I will use the concept of intersectionality as a lens through which to analyse the accounts of the participants, considering being of colour (race) and queerness as enmeshed and constructed by each other, avoiding an additive approach that would regard these elements of self as independent.

According to Nash (2008) intersectionality is a multidisciplinary approach for analysis and is often used to understand race and gender and how they interact to shape the multiple dimensions of people's experiences. Intersectionality allows us to destabilise the binary of race and gender, letting us consider identities' more complex nature. '[W]hile intersectionality has worked to disrupt cumulative approaches to identity (i.e., race + gender + sexuality + class = complex identity), and to problematize social processes of categorisation through strategic deployments of marginalised subjects' experiences', it does often replicate the approaches it aims to challenge (Nash, 2008, p 6). Intersectionality Theory has largely been used as a theory of marginalised subjectivity instead of a generalised theory of identity, as literature has

excluded studies of identities that are privileged, even though they are also constituted by the intersections of power (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality Theory will help us understand what determines which aspects of our identity are foregrounded in certain circumstances and moments, while critically considering race and gender as social processes that inform each other but operate uniquely (Nash, 2008).

McCall (2005: 1781) explains that the ‘intersection of identities takes place through the articulation of a single dimension of each category’. Therefore, ‘the multiple in these intersectional analyses refers not to the dimensions within categories but to dimensions across categories’ (McCall, 2005: 1781). As QPoC from particular economic and social classes we are placed at the intersection of multiple categories, namely – race/ethnicity, class, gender identity and expression and sexual orientation but we only reflect a single dimension of each of these categories. Our personal narratives situate us within a network of relationships that define our location within a society, though these are limited to the perspective of the social group.

In this study we refer to QPoC as a collective, however there are multiple identities and intersections represented by this phrase, and as such there are multiple unique lived experiences. These differences within groups contribute to the tension among groups (Crenshaw, 1991) as race and gendered experiences, though intersectional, often define and confine intersects. Given that the methodology of this study will make use of focus group discussions (FGD) to collect data, it is important to consider that the complexities of day-to-day life for individuals will be difficult to determine as the group discussion will look at broad structures of inequality (McCall, 2005).

This research is not limited to understanding the experiences of individuals as queer and of colour but aims to understand how the societies in which we exist, shape, and influence our existence. Therefore, the Sociology of Religion is used as a secondary theory to frame and make sense of religion, in the context of everyday life.

3.2.3 The Sociology of Religion

In the Sociology of Religion, the concept of religion is studied to understand individual expressions, practises, and beliefs and how these are incorporated into everyday activities (Winder, 2015). This focus on individual religion, rather than institutional religion or religious dogma necessitates the examination of not only people's beliefs, religious ideas and moral values but emphasises everyday spiritual practises involving physical and emotional experiences and expressions. According to Winder (2015) the Sociology of Religion focuses on the role of collectively derived and constructed religious experiences, realities, and worlds, thus highlighting a way in which religious practises can be used to justify and make sense of everyday challenges and setbacks. There has been a tendency to label anything we do not understand about other cultures, past or present, as religious (Segal, 2006). In the South Africa context, the moral policing of sexuality continues to be rooted in faith communities. For this reason, I took a sociological view of religion as it allows me to understand and explain why religious people the things do they do, and why they do it the way that they do it (Settler 2022). This approach allowed me to offer an account of how religion shapes social change through the beliefs and behaviours of both my study participants and the religious communities to which they belong, or conversely, the faith communities that vilify their queerness and existence.

According to Sherkat and Ellison (1999) religious beliefs, commitments, and resources are an important part of building and maintaining ethnic identities, and they provide the ideological and actual resources brought to bear in ethnic conflicts ranging from the struggles over civil rights in the United States, to economic justice in Latin America, to Islamic and Zionist movements in the Middle East. Therefore, the Sociology of Religion affords me an opportunity to understand how race in Cape Town, South Africa is performed in different socio-religious contexts and to explore the ways in which religion affects society, culture and specifically, for the purposes of this research, the lived experiences of QPoC.

According to Hertel and Hughes (1987) religious beliefs, regular religious attendance and religious commitments are central to establishing and re-enforcing patriarchal gender roles. According to Davie (2017: 171) '[t]he Sociology of Religion aims to discover the patterns of individual and social living associated with religion' [and not] the competing truth claims made by religion'. Therefore, it enables us to ask why things are as they are and moves us to a level of explanation. Segal (2006) writes in the introduction of the Blackwell companions to the study of religion that religious law as sacred as it is, is incomplete without the ongoing tradition of comment and exegesis. Generations carry the wisdom of all time in written and oral forms in the form of tradition.

3.2.3.1 The founding fathers' perspective

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are considered the founding fathers of the Sociology of Religion. Marx argues the relationship between religion and the economic order, and the real causes of social distress cannot be addressed until the religious element in society is removed, therefore arguing that religion cannot be understood apart from the social world of which it is part (Davie 2017). Weber (1993) argues the multicausality of social phenomena and against the one

sidedness of materialism, therefore arguing that religion reflects the economy, and that religion is something other than, or separate from, society or the world (Davie, 2017). Davie (2017: 174) explains that Weber 'is concerned with the ways in which the content of a particular religion, or more precisely of a religious ethic, influences both individual and collective behaviour'. Durkheim (1976) argues that religion binds members of society by prompting people within a society to affirm their common values and beliefs regularly, therefore considering what religion does socially. Societies evolve, requiring new forms of religion, therefore while religion may always exist, it may vary from place to place and from one period to another to best fit the prevailing social order (Davie, 2017).

Religion provides meaning through which to navigate existence (Davies, 2017). Religious beliefs influence how we behave, therefore changes in belief generate changes in behaviour the impact of which is felt beyond the religions sphere. Davies (2017) argues that religion is the central framework that explains what is happening, why it is happening and what the consequences are. Hence the Sociology of Religion as a theory in this research guides the questioning of what is happening to QPoC in a socio-religious South Africa, why is it happening in some places but not others, and what are the likely consequences for QPoC.

The literature reviewed highlighted how religious beliefs, attitudes, and religiosity influence not only society's response to QPoC but also the resilience of QPoC in their quest for liberation. Therefore, the Sociology of Religion is used as a secondary theory to support Queer Theory in exploring how the identity of QPoC is impacted by socio-religious contexts and in an attempt to understand the patterns of behaviour that bring meaning to the experiences of QPoC.

3.2.3.2 Contemporary feminist elaborations

Neitz (2014) writes that religious groups provide settings within which individuals and societies articulate their moral culture, defining what it is to be a good person and to have a good society. This work will be beneficial to my quest to understand the complexity of freedom, liberation, power and suffering within queer-identifying people's lives and the role of religion therein. Religion not only remains an important part of identity for many people, but also a cultural resource and it is often used in legal, and legislation matters regarding human rights (Neitz, 2014).

According to Woodhead (2001) gender is a shaping factor of identity and its performance provides an opportunity to understand religious identities. Using Woodhead's (2001) work, I will explore how religion influences the identity expression and agency of QPoC within traditional conservative religious spaces. I will contrast that with the experience of QPoC who have either rejected conservative dogma and text, situate themselves within a more progressive religious community or those who, while acknowledging the power of religious institutions within society and culture, no longer ascribe to these religious beliefs. In doing so I will attempt to answer the question of whether liberation is worth suffering for, by establishing if religion contributes to oppression or can be used for liberation through resistance and redemptive interpretations.

Neitz (2014) describes how she believed that there was a connection between understanding the processes through which gender inequality operated and undoing it. Similarly, it is important to understand and distinguish between those who concern themselves with religion as a set of dogmas and texts that deny the autonomy of the individual and those who see religion as a community of people of faith (Neitz, 2014). According to Arat (2017, p 29-30) 'the pews

might be empty, but religion is well and alive as people now believe without belonging [and] religion continues to re-emerge within...contemporary society'. Therefore, understanding the subjectivity of identity in relation to religion will help to guide the study through the matrix of oppression within which queer-identifying PoC are located. This is what McGuire (2008) describes as lived religion – that embodied practises inform beliefs. Thus, what people do is as much a part of their religion as what they believe (Neitz, 2014).

3.2.3.3 *Embodying experiences*

Neitz (2014, p 516) explains in the paper, *Becoming Visible: Religion and Gender in Sociology*, 'how similar sets of beliefs and rules could have different consequences when applied to individuals in different situations. Annerman (2014) explains how lived religion happens on the margins of orthodox prescriptions but does not exclude traditional religious communities as it encompasses how people *do* religion. Annerman (2014: 190) continues to explain how lived religion refers to the embodied aspects of religion that occur daily, including both 'experiences of the body and the mind'. Lived religion therefore gives us a framework through which to understand not only people's practises and rituals, but also how their general views and opinions are influenced. This would include not only religious rituals and tradition but also activities that may not be considered spiritual but are undertaken as a result of how people express their connection with religion.

It is important to note that culture and customary traditions influence religion. According to Neitz (2014: 521) '[r]eligion is always gendered, as well as raced and classed'. While Ammerman (2014, p 193) suggests that 'society provides its own cultural building materials for religious expression'. This contextualisation allows for a localisation and personalisation of spirituality. The reality is also that the secular and sacred occur concurrently in our daily

lives without merging. As Ammerman (2014, p195-196) explains, ‘sacred and secular sometimes literally sit next to each other... [and] [t]he religion people live everyday weaves in and out of the language and symbols and interactions of public spaces and bureaucratic institutions.’ This does not mean that the boundaries are clearly defined, as people carry their religion in ways that mould their daily behaviours and relationships (Ammerman, 2014).

3.2.3.4 The influences of everyday religion

Religion is stitched into our rhythm of our lives. To recognise that it is always present is to recognise that it is ‘created and deployed’ as Ammerman (2014: 196) describes it, in social processes. Religion is therefore social and not an innate human instinct (Berger, 1969 as cited in Ammerman, 2014). From this, I understand that though religion does not formally emerge from non-religious spaces, religious conversations, practises, and beliefs transcend these spaces; and are carried into these spaces by individuals. Therefore, the more active a person is in their spiritual and religious practises, the likelier they are to transcend their religion into non-religious spaces.

The studies of the Ammerman (2014) describe how the different nature of work is likely to lend itself to spiritual pursuits or be completely absolved of religious views and conversations, regardless of people’s religious practises and beliefs. Ammerman (2014, p 197) writes that:

‘[Those whose] [w]ork... involves service to others or that explore the realms of beauty and imagination seem to invite spiritual definition and reflection... and [b]y contrast, [those who] work in the world of business, as well as labo[u]r... [are] not likely to be spoken of by people in it as spiritual..., no matter how personally religious [they are]’

Given the age group of the participants of the study and the study criteria being QPoC who are financially independent, it is likely that the focus group discussions participants will be employed. It will be interesting to establish how religious influences are constructed, negotiated, and expressed in their queer identity within the workplace. Ammerman (2014) further describes how spiritual elements flow into the workplace through interactions between co-workers and that workplaces are understandably dominated by questions of power and status and that the binary view of religion and spirituality is misguided. Though religion cannot and should not shape how individuals do their work, unless of course their work is religious in nature, it does shape the values people bring to work, and as a result, their social relationships in the workplace, which in turn influences how QPoC express their identity in these the workplace. Ammerman (2014: 199) writes that:

‘Religion is shaped by membership, but membership is considerably more complicated than checking a box on a survey. It may be the sort of life-long organi[s]ational participation we have traditionally expected, but it may also be membership of a much more fluid and less bounded sort.’

This membership is the basis for developing relationships. In a world of strangers, religious affiliation can form a basis for recognition. Ammerman (2014) found that participation in religious services played the most dominant role in shaping everyday religion and that within the interactions of a religious community, people learn to live out their religious beliefs. These religious beliefs seep into everyday life naturally. ‘People talk about going to the doctor and pray for healing, exchange babysitting services and thank God for their families, pray over the injustices in the world and mobilise petition drives.’ Religion is not only a part of everyday life, but everyday life is also a part of religion. As Ammerman (2014: 202) puts it, ‘our work

in finding religion in everyday life must inform and be informed by conversations about the nature of everyday life.’

3.2.3.5 Religion and community

People’s stories continue to adapt, expand, and recede, and how their religious practises and stories are used to make sense of their lives is ever-changing (McGuire, 2008). Rotolo (2021: 3) suggests that ‘[h]ow people understand and relate to religion is fluid and dynamic’. Rotolo (2021) argues that religiosity needs to move beyond identifying frequencies and patterns of religious practise towards an understanding of what guides people’s engagement with religion and the meaning behind religious practises. It can be argued that religion influences moral beliefs and views. Morals in society are seen to determine social rules – defining what is good and bad, right, and wrong, just, and unjust and worthy and unworthy (Rotolo, 2021). A multitude of moral orders of society influence how people understand, participate in, and relate to religion. Whether people pride themselves in religious community or reject it, their actions are in relation to a moral order (Rotolo, 2021).

In this study, we specifically consider QPoC in Cape Town. Recognising that due to the legacy of Apartheid, there is a class divide that exists within the city, it is likely that the experiences of PoC who identify as queer will include intersectional struggles. The church is often central to community-building and in the study of Rotolo (2021), respondents of colour alluded to the vital role their churches played in structuring and uplifting their community. This involvement in community-building suggests that religion has an influence on the values a community upholds. This can result in alienation and the ostracization of non-religious people or people who do not ascribe to the dominant religion’s values and influences within their community.

For a number of people, religion is an important part of identity (Yip and Page, 2013) and people's rights are often negotiated with religion as according to Neitz (2014), much of what is secular is based on previous religious forms. It is, however, important that we consider religious observance and practice as dynamic, influenced by people's diverse life experiences and the moral frameworks used to navigate them. McGuire (2008: 12) explains that 'people construct their religious worlds together' and that this is achieved by sharing experiences of our intersubjective reality. This is evident in the findings of Rotolo (2021) which revealed how participants' religion and their moral orientations have changed over time due to changing circumstances. Furthermore, Rotolo (2021) found that participants value their relationship with G-d more than their involvement in organised religious groups. Therefore, to avoid misguided claims about levels of religiosity, it is important to consider changes in religious practises in conjunction with experiences that may influence changes in people's views towards religious practises.

However, the relationship between religion and SOGIESC is contentious because as Yip and Page (2013) found, people do not often completely abandon religion and they rarely fully submit to all its requirements either. While religion can be oppressive, it can also provide a space of comfort and resistance. Similarly, as queer-identifying bodies, while we may experience oppression, we may also have access to privilege on the basis of our race or class and/or gender identities. Embedded here are mechanisms of regulating queer relations. Therefore, it is important that we use an intersectional approach to understand that as queer bodies of colour, we are in a matrix of oppression that is constituted by a multiplicity of relations of class, race, gender, and nationality (Collins, 2000 as cited in Neitz, 2014).

3.2.3.6 Putting Sociology of Religion to use

Using the Sociology of Religion, this work aims to use a narrative analytical framework that will consider how we negotiate and construct our identity and how the spaces in which we express ourselves are influenced by religion. It is anticipated that these rich conversations will construct an analytical lexicon to understand the kinds of religious actions that either liberate or oppress us. According to Rotolo (2021), religiosity extends beyond the frequency of church attendance, and the Sociology of Religion aims to identify patterns of religious practice. These are not empirically obvious as religiosity is complex and lived out uniquely by people. It is not limited to formal religious engagements but is embedded in how people live. For example, one group of people may rarely attend church due to their lack of religious commitment, a second group of highly committed religious people might rarely attend church due to the constraints of their lives, and a third group may not see church attendance as important to their religiosity (Rotolo, 2021). Rotolo (2021) adds that some people might even see church attendance as counterintuitive for real religious engagement.

3.3 Methodology

Our queer-identifying bodies often find themselves in spaces that have predetermined our gender and sexual identity, relegating our identities to the margins of what society deems normal and acceptable. This is not only uncomfortable but challenges us to destabilise these heteropatriarchal ideologies that are maintained by socio-religious narratives that enforce the patriarchal heteronormative binary. The theoretical framework of this study was constructed using Queer Theory, Intersectionality Theory as a subsect and the theory of Sociology of Religion as a secondary theory. This informs the research methodology. To explore the resilience of QPoC in a reactionary socio-religious South African context, I use two theoretical frameworks as follows: engaging Queer Theory I explore the contextual realities that inform

the development of queer identity and the intersection of race. Working towards understanding the pervasive patriarchal heteronormative systems informed and sustained by religion. I examine the lived experiences of QPoC using the Sociology of Religion to understand patterns of behaviour and their outcomes and impact.

I chose to use the qualitative research paradigm and appropriate data collection methods informed by these theories. Qualitative research emphasises the process of research flowing from philosophical assumptions to worldviews through theoretical lenses and procedures involved in studying social and human problems (Creswell, 2012). My research questions help explore the systemic realities that inform the lived experiences of QPoC and how these influence their identity construction, negotiation, and expression.

3.3.1 Research Paradigm

Recognising that there are other influences of queer identity construction, negotiation and expression beyond the influences explored in this study, a qualitative empirical research study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of queer-identifying PoC living in Cape Town. Using a grounded theory research with a queer phenomenological approach, I aim to study the meaning of events in the lives of QPoC, assuming that meaning will be shared through common language, lived experience and socialisation, I use FGDs to surface this data. I consider how Cape Town reflects the interest of those who hold power and how in turn, that power influences spaces to legitimise experiences as natural and normal to such an extent that it is impossible for them to consider an alternative to that neutral and normal mindscape and how that impacts on the identity constructions, negotiation, and expression of QPoC.

The philosophical framework of queer phenomenology is used to reveal how suffering is taken for granted as a norm for those who are negatively impacted by patriarchal heteronormativity. The heteronormatively constructed closet is used to illustrate how religiously influenced heteropatriarchy upholds a false binary between those who are normal, and those who are by default abnormal, are at risk to violence in the quest to become normal by disrupting and troubling normalcy. Bodies take shape as they move through the world directing themselves towards or away from objects and others. Queer phenomenology reveals how queerness disrupts and reorders social relations by not accepting and disorientating, claiming, and using power to do so (Ahmed, 2006).

3.3.2 Research Goals and Objectives

The goals of this research were focused on understanding the dynamics of how QPoC negotiate their identity construction, negotiation, and expression in the context of the socio-religious cultural values of South Africa, as a progressive constitutional democracy with some of the highest hate crime statistics in the world, in an attempt to encourage religious power(s) to be used to affirm life and defy patriarchy.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the anxieties associated with queer identity construction and expression in the South African social, religious, and legal context.
2. To understand how queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious South African communities (and the impact thereof on their lived experiences of the world).

3. To shed light on the intersectionalities of queer lives to understand the complexity of freedom, liberation, power, and suffering, and encourage religious power(s) to be used in life affirming ways.

To achieve these objectives, I developed sub-research questions that will be answered through FGDs. These questions help to understand the contexts in which the queer identity of participants is constructed and expressed, as well as how we negotiate our identity when confronted by hostility because of our race, queerness, or both. Further, investigating the pervasiveness of patriarchal heteronormativity in religious spaces, examining the lived experiences of QPoC in relation to religion and religiously influenced reactions towards our queerness.

Questions that were noted are as follows:

4. What are the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression in South Africa?

This question allows me to examine the literature surveying the realities of QPoC within a socio-religious, constitutionally protected yet racially divided Cape Town, South Africa, affording me with the opportunity to engage different lived realities. This gives me the chance to engage with the stories of those excluded and othered because their gender and sexual diversities resist patriarchal heteronormativity. Naming the anxieties that QPoC face breaks the silence of these bodies and creates an opportunity to compare and contrast these narratives and begin to identify the reasons behind the different and/or similar experiences.

5. How do queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious contexts in South Africa?

This question helps me explore how QPoC build and share an identity in the context of a heterosexist and socially conservative South Africa with a legacy of apartheid that continues to shape the landscape. To answer this question, I explore the concept of the closet and the language used to describe this notion of hiding or rather protecting our identity. Further, I use this question to search for the nuances relating to how we behave differently with different people in different situations over time.

6. How are queer people's lived experiences impacted by their identity expression and what role does/can religion have in shifting these experiences?

This question allows me to examine the lived and embodied experiences of QPoC and how we position ourselves in relation to religious beliefs and places of worship. I hope to find redemptive and affirming experiences of religion that can be shared in the hope that they can be replicated to offer alternatives to the life-denying realities reviewed in the literature. For participants who are religious, I hope to understand how they represent their queer identity in religious spaces, and how religion fuels their resilience.

To respond to these sub-questions, I developed FGD questions in which I examine the realities of participants collectively.

3.3.3 Methodology and Data Collection

The research was conducted in post-colonial South Africa, Western Cape, Cape Town, among previously or currently religious, QPoC who are financially independent. I planned that the sample would be made up of 15 queer-identifying PoC aged 18 - 65 years, who are South African or have South African residency for longer than two years, currently live in Cape Town South Africa and are fluent in English. It was also a requirement that participants be familiar with South African expressions of sexuality and have personal or social experiences of religion.

People construct stories about themselves and their experiences that reflect the meaning they attach to these stories, and it is my hope that through FGD these stories can be shared and engaged with to explore if and how they still reflect dominant discourses of society. Therefore, by sharing a story, multiple dimensions of influence are unveiled as narratives reveal much more than just concepts being researched, they reveal the truth of people's lives and when an enquiry is made about a person, that life is put centre stage. According to Kumar (1987) a FGD is a semi-structured data collection methodology in which purposively selected participants discuss topics based on a list of key themes or guided by questions drawn up by the researcher. Through conversation and the telling and sharing of stories, we open possibilities of meaning making as we begin to understand that many diverse characters contribute to the construction of a single story and that the same story can be told and retold in many different ways.

I wanted to create this fluidity and flexibility to represent queer identity and how the expression of our queerness is negotiated and shaped by different contexts of the world we interact with. By creating a space where participants felt free to share narratives and discuss them with each other, we are not bound by the idea that only one interpretation is possible, and we realise that

we have the freedom to construct and transform hopeless narratives into those that contain redemptive possibilities.

3.3.4 Sampling Method

I used a non-probability snow-ball sampling technique to choose fifteen participants for the study. I created a social media post by taking a photo of what I felt symbolised the areas of interest of the study; namely the constitution, the bible, the Buddhist scriptures, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tanach and a rainbow flag which symbolises the diversity of queer people, all held in my hands as seen in figure one below. The flag could, according to Laska, Johansson and Mulinari (2017) be read as a floating signifier that links communities of belonging together and is pliable to different meanings and interpretations.



Figure 1: screenshot of Instagram post used for participant recruitment

In the social media post I asked the question; *Is Liberation worth suffering for?* and invited people to help me answer this question by volunteering to be a part of my masters' research study. In the same post, I shared the study sampling criteria asking if people identified as QPoC, are aged between the ages of 18 and 65 and are currently living in Cape Town and wrote that they should send me a direct message (DM) for more information. I tagged @triangleproject_za which is a non-profit human rights organisation offering professional services to ensure the full realisation of constitutional and human rights for queer persons, their partners and families,

@LGBTConsortium which is a national specialist infrastructure and membership organisation working to build resources, sustainability and the resilience of queer groups, organisations and projects, and @LGBTQ.Black.Pride which is an Instagram page that shares and publishes content relating to QPoC and has more than 175 000 followers. I posted this story on my own personal Instagram account and enabled the privacy settings for it to be reshared by the pages tagged in the post as well as allowing others who view it.

This sampling frame is known as purposive sampling, used to select appropriate participants to participate in the study (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). According to Abrams (2010), purposive sampling is a sampling strategy in which the researcher exercises their judgement about who will be best suited to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of interest. People sent a DM to my inbox indicating that they were interested in participating in the research study. I then shared the participant invitation letter (annexure I) with them and requested a short meeting to go through the study parameters, explain the research protocol and respond to any question they might have. A total of twenty people showed interest in participating and shared their contact details, however of those, only seventeen people confirmed their participation after reviewing the invitation letter and agreed to the introductory call. During the introductory call, I introduced myself, I positioned myself as a QPoC living in Cape Town and explained why I was interested in pursuing my research topic. I explained how the data would be collected and shared the focus group protocol (annexure II) with them to consider before confirming their participation. All seventeen participants confirmed their willingness to participate however due to scheduling and availability only fifteen participants confirmed their availability to join an FGD.

3.3.5 Data Collection Method

It was originally planned that data would be collected through once-off in-person ninety-minute FGDs followed by a daily reflection by each participant one-week period after the FGD. According to Goldstein (2022) FGDs are a method adept at capturing experiences of historically silenced or marginalised populations and exploring sensitive and/or personal topics. Furthermore the ‘focus group method [provides possibilities] to explore novel or taboo sex-related topics and/or experiences of diverse or marginali[s]ed populations (Goldstein, 2022: 3)’. The fifteen enrolled participants make up three groups of five people each. The FGDs were held online using the Zoom Application.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, being physically present in a confined space with participants for engagement was deemed to be irresponsible as it would increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19, hence the use of an online platform to engage with participants was preferred. Research suggests that queer youth already use the internet for social support, have more online friends who are supportive and view online spaces as a safer place to socialise than offline, therefore the use of an online FGD was a suitable alternative (Hillier, Mitchel, and Ybarra, 2012; Mitchell, Ybarra, Korchmaros and Kosciw; 2014; Ybarra, DuBois, Parsons, Prescott and Mustanski, 2014). Acknowledging that the process requires sensitivity and may risk uprooting past trauma by discussing experiences of exclusion, the space also creates room for deep engagement, which may be therapeutic and help find healing through collective sharing (Goldstein, 2022). Ybarra *et al.* (2014) suggest that there is evidence supporting the notion that online support groups reduce isolation and stress by increasing access to people going through similar challenges and that an online discussion style format may have a positive impact on queer youth who may feel marginalised and isolated in their communities.

After conducting introductory calls to go through the introductory letter, share the background of the research, answer questions and ask people to share their email address, their preferred time for the focus group discussion (FGD), their preferred pseudonym, what network service provider they use for their data reimbursement and their preferred pronoun, I grouped the participants according to their availability and sent calendar invites with a link to the Zoom meeting room. I enabled a safety setting that allowed only authenticated users to enter the meeting room, therefore only those using the email address that was invited to the meeting were allowed to enter the meeting room and join the FGD. Three days before the FGD I shared the consent form (annexure III) for participants to complete and send back to me, the referral pathway (annexure IV) and focus group discussion protocol with participants via WhatsApp and email; as well as the proposed time and date for the FGD they had been allocated to and asked them to confirm that they were still available.

I initially grouped five people into three groups, however there were some instances where participants were no longer available at the scheduled times but still wanted to participate in the study, so a fourth group was created from anyone that was unable to make their originally scheduled FGD slot. At the beginning of each FGD I explained that participation was completely voluntary and shared information about the psychosocial support available through the referral pathway. I explained that participants could withdraw from the study at any point and that if they had connectivity challenges, they should inform me. I encouraged participants to keep their videos off, rename the displayed name with a preferred pseudonym, put their preferred pronouns in brackets next to the displayed name and to feel free to unmute and speak when they wanted to contribute to the discussion. To disrupt the power relationship within research I re-introduced myself to the participants at the beginning of each FGD, as a mixed race cisgendered lesbian living in Cape Town. I explained that my interest in conducting this

research was inspired by my own lived experiences grappling with my racial and queer identity in the complexity of a socio-religious South Africa that expected me to perform a certain race, gender, and sexuality because of the way that I present and that I wanted to understand if these experiences were shared, and how the Sociology of Religion within our different contexts influenced these patterns. I explained to the participants that as a student of gender and religion, my aim was for us to collectively conceptualise alternatives that could be proposed to those in positions of influence and power to use to affirm queer lives of colour in religions institutions. I explained that I would facilitate the FGD by asking the FGD questions, but I too would offer my own lived and embodied experiences into the discussion as a conversation partner. This being based on the findings of Ybarra *et al.* (2014) that suggest that a group moderator is essential in invigorating a thoughtful discussion about sexuality and to guide a discussion that includes topics that are likely to lead to self-reflection and a deeper sharing of experiences. I then asked participants to introduce themselves and before commencing with the first question I requested consent for the discussion to be recorded.

To ensure and protect confidentiality, all participants were given a pseudonym in the write up of this dissertation, however it is noteworthy that only three participants used a pseudonym in an effort to remain anonymous during the discussion. All other participants were comfortable using their real names and engaging in the FGD with their videos on. The FGD took place over a period of four consecutive days. At the end of the FGD it was planned that the group would be asked to reflect on the discussion and collectively agree on one key theme that dominated their group discussions and keep a written diary over a period of one week where they would write a daily reflection of their experiences in relation to the agreed theme. At the end of the FGD each participant shared what they felt the key theme was for them. I then summarised what I had heard from each participant and asked the participants if that was an accurate

summary of the theme of their discussion. All groups, except group one had sufficient time to stay on the call longer than the planned ninety minutes to agree on the final theme that they would reflect on daily for the week.

The themes that emerged are:

FGD Group 2: Conflict with a conservative populous and progressive constitution and how this requires an evolution of culture and religion

FGD Group 3: Constantly having to leave to stay alive – sacrificing something for the sake of safety and comfort to be our authentic selves

FGD Group 4: Individual paths and intersections curated by our own experiences and privileges determine our levels of expression and visibility which potentially breed tensions within and outside our queer community

I created a WhatsApp group for FGD Group 1 participants, and we engaged via text to finalise the theme. Despite being a group of only gay men of colour, the participants of FGD Group 1 had very diverse opinions on what the core theme of their discussion was but after non-confrontational but deliberate questioning of each other in the WhatsApp Group, they reach consensus that what I had summarised adequately represented their theme.

FGD Group 1: Different levels of privilege and power are afforded to different bodies (based on a hierarchy of cisgendered heterosexual hegemonic masculinity) and this awareness makes us realise our lack of privilege in certain spaces (depending on where we present on the hierarchy).

The day following their FGD, I sent a WhatsApp message reminding each participant of the theme and requesting them to send me a WhatsApp text or voice recorded note of their thoughts or reflections each day before 21h00. I then sent a follow-up reminder every morning but emphasised that there was no pressure to do so if they chose not to and reminded the participants of the psychosocial support available to them until the end of the data collection period. This feminist approach aimed at breaking the subject's silence in order to include marginalised voices in the creation of research (Blackeslee, Cole and Conefrey, 1996). By allowing participants to interpret the collective voices that represent their lived experiences I hoped to reduce the possibility of misrepresenting, burying or confusing participants voices and perspectives, allowing me to view participants as partners in research, with power and agency to craft their stories, appropriately shrinking the authoritative voice as the researcher in the process.

3.3.6 Instrument: FGD and WhatsApp Diary Reflections

The FGD Protocol was used to guide the FGD and included open-ended questions that participants were asked to respond to in a conversational manner with each other and myself as the FGD facilitator. The questions were shared with the participants before the FGD, and they were asked to review them and think about their own lived experiences and/or experiences that they have witnessed and draw on these during the FGD.

The FGD questions used to answer the research sub-questions are:

1. Lived Experiences

- a. What is your race/ethnic background and in what ways do you express it?
- b. How do you identify on the LGBTQ+ spectrum and how did become aware of this?

- c. What are your religious beliefs/practices?

2. Identity formation/construction (*in the context of South Africa as a progressive constitutional democracy, with diverse cultures and religious influences on society*)

- a. What (and how) has influenced the development of your identity?
- b. How has what you have observed (negative/positive) in society influenced your queerness?
- c. How does your race, ethnicity and/or culture influence how you express yourself?

3. Identity negotiation (*in the context of South Africa as a progressive constitutional democracy, with diverse cultures and religious influences on society*)

- a. Would you describe yourself as living in or out ‘the closet’? (Follow-up: What are the reasons for this? Is this different in different settings?)
- b. In what ways and places do you express your identity differently? (Follow-up: What are the reasons for this?)
- c. How has your identity formation/construction and expression evolved throughout your life?

4. Role of religion, society, legislation, and culture

- a. How has religion impacted your lived experiences as a queer-identifying person?

- b. Have the redemptive elements of religion influenced how you live authentically as a queer-identifying person? (Follow-up: if yes, how?)
- c. As a queer-identifying person of colour, is your experience of performing and articulating your identity the same?
- d. How does the language used by yourself and others to refer to or to describe you and influence your feelings about being queer?
- e. In what ways can the power of religion be life-affirming?

The WhatsApp Diary reflections didn't work. Though FGD groups agreed on the key theme that dominated their FGD, only two participants submitted their reflections for only one day. Both the participants that shared their reflections were from group four and their reflections related to how after the FGD they were vividly aware of different moments throughout their day where they negotiated their identity consciously and sometimes without being aware because of the circumstances they were faced with in that moment. This data was not used but affirmed the main theme of their group.

3.3.7 Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach; therefore, the purpose of the research was to understand and interpret. Maxwell (1992: 14) within qualitative research, 'the researcher is the instrument' therefore involvement and immersion into the research serves as an aid to discuss any changes that may occur given that the landscape of the research is not static. Our current understanding of gender and sexual diversities as innate must be understood as discursively produced and deployed rather than as inherently true (Foucault, 1990). Therefore, in a queer understanding of the subject, the self is not stable, nor fixed, yet is compelled to by aligning with a normative understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality (Goldstein, 2022). Therefore, to

start from a queer understanding of subjectivity requires a different approach to interpreting findings that trouble the quest for definitive answers about queer matters. To ensure reliability in this qualitative research I aimed to ensure trustworthiness by building a rapport with the participants through continuous communication throughout the data collection period.

The data collection methodology used data from FGDs to establish themes for written diary reflections. Though the written diary reflections were not kept by all the participants of the study, the reflections from the two participants that did submit their reflections affirmed the key theme of their group. Adding the diary reflections were an attempt to queer the data collection method. According to Ghaziani and Brim (2019, p 15) ‘methods are queered when we use the tenets of Queer Theory to tweak or explode what is possible with our existing procedures’. The validity of qualitative research is easily affected by the researcher’s perception, therefore given my positionality within the study, as a QPoC, I remained aware of my involvement and my own intuitions about identity construction and expression relative to the themes that emerged from the FGDs. I did not avoid those entanglements and intersubjective relations but acknowledged that they highlight the relationality and instability of subjectivity. I acknowledged that in creating a FGD Group we produced a temporary and unstable sociality which compelled participants to perform a nimble subjectivity that was response to the changing effects of the conversation as it unfolded. Rather than seeing this as a threat to the reliability of the data, I embraced the shifting narratives produced through the FGDs as insights into the ways in which subjectivity is never truly fixed and is always perpetually reproduced (Goldstein, 2022). Liberation and suffering, outness and being closeted is contextual and cannot ignore the intersectionality of each participant, and we cannot step outside of our own experiences to obtain observer-independent accounts of our experiences, therefore I used my own lived experiences to challenge the level of validity but not to invalidate

data. Furthermore, beyond analysing raw data, the tone and language used in responses was also analysed for consistencies across participants when reflecting on the similar lived experiences across the different themes that emerge from the FGDs.

According to Cypress (2017) qualitative research is more complex as the research design can change or is, as in the case of this study, emergent. However, there are preliminary steps that can be accomplished and remain consistent such as negotiating consent, building, and maintaining trust and identifying participants. It is also important to allow creativity as according to Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001: 526) this supports the discovery of the not yet known, 'going beyond previously established knowledge and challenging accepted thinking'. Consequently, this research aimed to use a creative data collection method and a rigorous and explicit data analysis.

3.3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is known as the process of ordering, structuring, and establishing meaning from data collected (Kothari, 2004). I transcribed the recordings of the FGDs using Otter, a voice transcription application and watched the recordings of the FGDs to identify any facial expressions that were noteworthy. I then used thematic analysis to interpret the data from the FGD and the written diary reflections. Thematic analysis is described as a foundational method within qualitative analysis (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). Through using a thematic analysis process, I familiarised myself with the data by rewatching the recorded FGDs and correcting the Otter transcription in the process to ensure that the transcript was accurate. I then read through the transcript from a thematic perspective and began to highlight important themes with which to dissect the data. I organised the data by question and theme by colour-coding the text in the transcript. During this process I searched for key quotes from the

participants that emphasised certain themes and responded to the research sub-questions. Using this approach, I was able to identify primary ways in which participants talked about identity construction, negotiation, and expression as QPoC living in a socio-religious Cape Town.

3.3.9 Ethical Consideration and Risk

Prior to initiation into the study, the research protocol and informed consent forms were reviewed and approved by the UKZN Ethics Committee on 13 January 2021 issuing the following ethical clearance number HSSREC/00003589/2021. It was explained that participation is completely voluntary and that should an individual decide to opt out of the study at any point, there would be no negative consequences. The study was explained in full to the individuals before asking participants to sign consent forms (Babbie 2010). The details of the FGDs were shared prior to the individuals' deciding to participate, to ensure that each person fully understood the intimate nature of the questions that would be asked. A copy of the consent form is available in annexure III. Participants were assured of confidentiality and that the data would be used exclusively for research purposes.

Given that data was collected through FGDs, participants could censor their responses to reflect more socially desirable responses. FGDs were held online due to intensified COVID-19 restrictions, but I did not miss the opportunity to observe other non-verbal expressions that enhanced the richness of the data, as participants' videos were on with only three participants whose videos remained off for the duration of the FGD. To mitigate against the censored responses, participants were encouraged to share openly and honestly and not judge each other's responses. The security settings on the zoom link did not allow anyone to enter the meeting without being admitted by me and only authenticated users could enter using the link. The second part of the data collection which involved keeping written diaries was to serve as

additional data sources, to validate the FGDs. Some of the participants have not disclosed their sexuality because of violence and the stigma from society. To protect participants, I used pseudonymous names in this write up, to assure confidentiality. Participants were given information on counselling services that they can contact should they wish to talk to a professional counsellor about their psychological and emotional distress, if it resulted from or was triggered by the FGDs. A formal referral system (the naming of support structures) for further support to participants was put in place and shared with participants before the FGDs (annexure IV). I did a check in at the end of the FGDs collectively with all the participants on the call and again individually via text on WhatsApp and all the participants responded that the experience was therapeutic and that they thoroughly enjoyed the engagement and felt safe throughout the discussions.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on the intended methodology and how it was used to generate data and conduct the research. Queer-identifying bodies of colour carry the burden of their identity in a patriarchal heteronormative South Africa that systematically seeks to exclude us and deny us life. Our queer-identifying bodies don't only straddle the boundaries of rejection and acceptance but carry the treasures of G-d's radical love – which offers us resilience and a uniqueness that transcends the binaries of desire(s) and expression(s). By employing three theoretical frameworks that I consider instrumental in engaging the realities of the fifteen queer lives of colour located in a historically divided Cape Town, South Africa, I explore how heteronormativity impacts how QPoC construct, negotiate and express their queer identity in a heterosexist world. I use Queer Theory to destabilise patriarchal heteronormative binaries that insist on granting power to cisgendered white heterosexual men, to construct and sustain socio-religious dominant discourses that deny QPoC life, thus, creating a lens through which QPoC's

lived experiences of identity construction, expression, and negotiations can be validated as valuable and treasured, in a closet of radical and fluid possibilities. I introduced Intersectionality Theory to understand how race, class and culture interact to shape the multiple dimensions of QPoC's experiences. Intersectionality Theory creates an opportunity to explore that what determines what aspects of our identity are negotiated and foregrounded under due to varying societal pressures. Intersectionality Theory helps us understand the fluidity of identity in a network of relationships and interactions.

I then introduced the Sociology of Religion which offers the study insight into how religious experiences, realities and practices can be used to justify and make sense of everyday experiences of QPoC. Using the Sociology of Religion, the study will also explore how race is performed in different socio-religious contexts. I outlined the development of Sociology of Religion and its contemporary use to explore the complexities of freedom, liberation, and suffering. These theories informed how I consider the realities of QPoC and the patterns of our life worlds, to determine an appropriate methodology to collect and analysis data. In this chapter

I went on to explain how the theory was used to determine a suitable data collection method to answer the research questions posed in this study. The chapter also outlined the research methodology of the study. I explained the research goals and objectives and how data would be collected through FGDs to answer the sub-research questions and explained the sampling framework. I highlighted the importance of queering traditional methods when engaging queer narratives and examining systemic realities that inform our embodied experiences as QPoC and how I attempted to do this by inviting participants to keep diary reflections of collectively agreed themes. I explained how thematic analysis is used to interpret the data and noted my

own biases as both a limitation and an opportunity for deeper engagement considering my own fluidity as the researcher looking in but also as a QPoC who represents the sample, looking out. I highlighted the ethical considerations of the study and measures taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

The next chapter will present the findings from this study as responses to the research sub-questions and highlight the themes established from the data collected.

4 CHAPTER FOUR – PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the stories of QPoC seeking liberation from heteropatriarchal ideologies that seek to erase our existence and relegate us to the margins of society. Amplifying the voices of people who are told their voices should not be heard gives us valuable insights into the perspectives of those resisting normative heteropatriarchy, helping us to understand how QPoC develop the resilience to survive the casual cruelty of heteropatriarchy.

Over a period of four days, I conducted four in-depth FGDs with QPoC living in Cape Town, South Africa to explore the following research sub-questions:

1. What are the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression in South Africa?
2. How do queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious contexts in South Africa?
3. How are queer people's lived experiences impacted by their identity expression and what role does/can religion have in shifting these experiences?

This chapter will share the narratives of queer black embodied positionality, allowing me to explore and examine their lived realities within a socio-religious heteropatriarchal Cape Town. Though these narratives share the perspectives of QPoC, they do not represent a shared reality for all QPoC. As qualitative research it serves as a glimpse into the experiences of a sample of QPoC and as a starting place for reflection. These narratives help us make meaning of the experiences, in all their variations, of those of us who are considered sexual deviants and non-

normative in terms of gender, in relation to dominant beliefs about race, culture and religion. Furthermore, this chapter will highlight the key findings of the study and present them in relation to the research objectives. I have organised this chapter into two sections; the first section summarises the demographics of the participants' descriptive data responses, and the second section summarises the responses into themes that relate to the research questions.

4.1.1 Profile of FGD participants

I was fortunate to have secured what I consider a diverse representation of QPoC from across Cape Town, representing different racial and ethnic groups, ages, occupations, and levels of education. This diversity allowed for wide-ranging experiences to be incorporated into the discussion, initially confirming my own experience that queers are not a monolithic group, and that in particular these FGDs afforded participants the opportunity to discuss their lived experiences as QPoC in a safe-haven that is generally reserved for bodies that do not look like theirs. This diversity and the composition of the focus groups are briefly illustrated below.

Below I present a series of four tables illustrating the participants' demographic composition. As shown in the table 1, the proportion of participants was highest for black people. As shown in the table 2, the proportion of participants was highest for participants identifying as men. As shown in the table 3, the proportion of participants was highest for participants who identify as gay. As shown in the table 4, the proportion of participants was highest for Catholics and agnostics or atheist participants.

Table 1: Proportion of participants by race

race	n	%
Black (African)	9	60%
Coloured	5	33,33%
Mixed Race	1	6,67%

Table 2: Proportion of participants by gender

gender	n	%
Man	11	73,33%
Woman	4	26,67%
Non-conforming	0	

Table 3: Proportion of participants by SOGISE per LGBTQ

LGBTQ	n	%
Lesbian	1	6,67%
Gay	10	66,67%
Bisexual	1	6,67%
Trans	1	6,67%
Queer	2	13,33%

Table 4: Proportion of participants by religious affiliation

Religion	n	%
Catholic	4	26,67%
Anglican	1	6,67%
Evangelical	1	6,67%

Muslim	2	13,33%
Mormon	1	6,67%
Traditional	2	13,33%
Atheist/Agnostic	4	26,67%

4.1.1.1 Focus Group Discussion Group One

Group One was made up of four participants who all identified as gay men.²¹ One of the participants was a black Xhosa gay man born in the Eastern Cape who currently lives in Cape Town. Although he does not consider himself religious, growing up he was encouraged to attend the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (informally known as the Mormon Church). The pseudonym given to him is Dodo. One of the participants, a black gay man, though born and raised in South Africa, has foreign national parents: his mother is from Zimbabwe and his father is from Tanzania. He was raised with both Catholic values from his mother and Muslim values from his father but does not practice or affiliate with any religion. The pseudonym given to him is Sawa. One of the participants identified as a queer coloured man. He confirmed that he is not religious but was raised Catholic and does believe in G-d. The pseudonym given to him is Moya. The last of the participants from group one was mixed-raced but confirmed that he identifies as coloured. He is a gay man. He was raised in a Muslim home as a Muslim and mentioned that his mother converted to Islam before marrying his father. He currently does not practice any religion. The pseudonym given to him is Yo.

²¹ Group one had no specific requests but asked if their names would be used. It was clarified that pseudonyms would be used in instances where participants would be quoted in the research findings

4.1.1.2 Focus Group Discussion Group Two

Group Two was made up of three participants. One black Tswana gay man currently living in Cape Town, originally from Kimberly. He was raised in a religious Catholic family and was actively involved in the church growing up. He was an alter server until high school and prayer is something that is strongly valued in his childhood home. While he was raised Catholic, he was not confirmed as he felt confirmation would require him to live according to the church's dogma and his own conscious would not allow this, as he knew that he was gay, something that was not acceptable to the church. The pseudonym given to him is Kewaru. Another participant of group two was a coloured bisexual woman. She mentioned that though she identifies as coloured she tries to distance herself from her coloured identity. She was given the pseudonym Mary. She advised that she is agnostic in her beliefs. The third participant of this group was a black Xhosa gay man. He mentioned that because of his queer identify, he was othered and chose to step away from Xhosa tradition and culture and subsequently the church. The pseudonym given to him was Citygirl.

4.1.1.3 Focus Group Discussion Group Three

Group Three was made up of four participants The first was a black gay man born in the North West province of South Africa to Ghanaian parents who belonged to an Evangelical Charismatic Christian church. He is currently living in Cape Town and has been given the pseudonym Edward. The second was a coloured gay man born and raised in the Western Cape who is currently a practicing Anglican priest given the pseudonym Nathan. The third was a Xhosa queer-identifying women born in Johannesburg but currently living in Cape Town who was born into a Christian home. Although she believes in a G-d she has not identified as

Christian from a young age and currently practices as a Sangoma²². She is given the pseudonym Tammy. The fourth participant in this group is a queer black identifying woman living with a disability who is completely agnostic. Her pseudonym is Wheelstoys.

4.1.1.4 Focus Group Discussion Group Four

Group Four was made up of five participants.²³ The first was a coloured gay man originally from Namibia. Though he was raised in a Catholic religious home, he does not currently practice any religion. He was given the pseudonym Flyer. The second was a black Xhosa transman born in the Eastern Cape and living in Cape Town for the last 5 years. He is currently on a spiritual journey to becoming a traditional healer, though he was raised as a Christian. He remains deeply spiritual and acknowledges a creator but does not affiliate with any specific religion. He was given the pseudonym Pluto. The third was a black Xhosa lesbian woman who grew up in a religious home but now considers herself an atheist. She was given the pseudonym Stella. The fourth participant was a black Xhosa gay man who grew up Catholic but is no longer religious. He was given the pseudonym Nails. The last participant in this group was a coloured gay man who grew up in the Eastern Cape but has been living in Cape Town for the last 10 years. He was raised in a Catholic home and still considers himself Catholic. He was given the pseudonym Tuto.

See below table representing the range of participants, listed in alphabetical order of pseudonym.

²² Someone who fulfils duties from healing physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses, directing birth or death rituals, finding lost cattle, protecting warriors, counteracting witches' curses, narrating history and most of all – communicating with the ancestors.

²³ Tuto was disconnected from the call due to internet early in the FGDs so his input into the discussions was very limited.

Table 5: Participant information

Pseudonym	Sexuality/Gender	Race/ Ethnicity/ Nationality	Faith/ Religion/ Belief
Citygirl	Gay Man	Xhosa	Raised with African religion and Christianity but stepped away
Dodo	Gay Man	Xhosa	Mormon
Yo	Gay Man	Coloured	Raised Muslim but currently atheist
Edward	Gay Man	Black Ghanaian	Raised evangelical still Christian but not practicing
Flyer	Gay Man	Coloured Namibian	Raised Catholic currently not religious
Kewaru	Gay Man	Tswana	Catholic
Mary	Bisexual Woman	Coloured	Agnostic
Nails	Gay Man	Xhosa	Raised Catholics currently atheist
Nathan	Gay Man	Coloured	Anglican
Pluto	Heterosexual Transgender Man	Xhosa	Raised Christian currently African Religion
Sawa	Gay Man	Tanzanian/ and Zimbabwean mix but born South African	Raised Christian and Muslim currently agnostic
Stella	Lesbian Woman	Xhosa	Atheist
Tammy	Queer Woman	Xhosa	Christian Sangoma
Tuto	Gay Man	Coloured	Catholic
Wheelstoy	Queer Woman	Coloured	Agnostic

4.1.2 Overview of proceedings

The FGD protocol was shared with participants who had agreed to join the discussions and gave detailed instructions on how to access the platform that would be used for the online FGDs, an overview of the FGD process and included a copy of the questions that would be discussed. This was not done so that participants could prepare, but in order to ensure that they would be aware of what would be covered during the FGDs. At the start of each FGD, I introduced myself and positioned myself within the study as a researcher with the lived experience of a QPoC in Cape Town and I explained my motivation for doing this work. I made suggestions on how I proposed we engage online to ensure that the dynamics of the virtual space still felt intimate and safe and explained the intention to create a space that allowed participants to communicate their feelings and share their lived experiences openly without concern of confidentiality or judgement. To do this, I asked participants what they needed to make the experience of sharing some of their most vulnerable moments feel safer. Each participant was listened to, and their suggestions were adopted as collective agreements for each group. There were no explicit requests but there was a general recommendation that we respect each other's views but not shy away from questioning each other where it was appropriate to do so. What surprised me was how quickly a group of strangers felt comfortable enough with me and each other to unmute their videos and trust the structure of the process. All the participants felt at ease and expressed that the introductory call left them feeling like they knew me personally so they trusted that I would hold the space for them. Each FGD lasted longer than the intended ninety minutes, for slightly over two hours as all groups, except group, were available and wanted to stay on longer than the scheduled time allotted for discussion and agree on the theme that had dominated their FGD. This was not a hinderance to the process, and to my surprise participants were eager to continue engaging with each other beyond the FGD as they found the process healing and therapeutic.

I now present the data that emerged from each sub-research question and the themes distilled from the FGDs.

4.1.3 What are the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression in South Africa?

After introducing myself and the participants, and then setting the scene, agreeing on the rules of participation, and making the group a safe space, I reminded participants why we were there. The first set of focus group questions were focused on the social, legal, and religious challenges that QPoC face in contemporary South Africa. When asked the question(s): ‘What is your racial/ethnic background and how has it shaped who you are as a person today?; How do you identify on the LGBTQ+ spectrum and how did you come to identify as such?; What has been your experience of living as a queer person in South Africa?; What level of acceptance or hostility or indifference have you experienced from your family or community towards you as a queer person?; What role, if any, has religion played in your life, as a queer person’ these are some pertinent responses from participants that emerged from their discussion quotes and presented under the following themes: queer identity; culture, race and SOGISEC; Resisting exclusion; Cape Town as the queer paradise of South Africa and Passing (as white or straight) to be comfortable in Cape Town.

The participants offered general concepts about their social and lived experiences of being queer-identifying and of colour in the Cape Town context.

From this, the following themes were distilled: Queerness as queer and the privilege of passing.

4.1.3.1 Identity – Queerness and the intersection of race, ethnicity, and culture

The first two questions I asked during the FGD were for participants to identify themselves in terms of race and ethnicity, and gender and sexual identity and to give a narrative on how this shaped who they are and how they came to label themselves with these words. Across all the FGDs participants self-described as queer and in this regard, they understood and expressed queer differently. Queer was used interchangeably throughout the FGDs as a descriptor, a verb, a way of expression but also as an identity. Participants felt that identifying themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual was a declaration of their sexual preferences and desires which was not necessary as this element of their identity is performed with, and to those they choose to and was limiting and restrictive. Though central to their core identity their sexuality is not relevant in knowing who they identify as, but rather their queerness. Knowing that they defy normative heterosexuality, but not necessarily in what way or how.

‘I identify as queer. [I] struggle with the alphabet and boxes and titles... I have only had real relationships with women but never identified as a lesbian. Makes me feel stuck having to love only women.’ -Stella (FGD 4: 24 December 2021)

‘...used to say bisexual but now comfortable with queer.’ – Mary (FGD 2: 21 December 2021)

‘... gay as a descriptor is easier to use but assumes cisgendered man attracted to other men but I’m attracted to masculinity not men so am questioning what it means to be gay... therefore say queer man as a political statement that describes my journey. An affirmation to self and my own journey. I can be queer and still be gay.’ – Edward (FGD 3: 22 December 2021)

Similarly, queer was used as a non-normative gender identity and expression. Participants felt that it was meaningful to them that they be seen as different and recognised as such as these gender elements unlike sexuality, were aspects that they deliberately declared and expressed.

‘... queer fits because it encompasses all aspects of personality, sexuality, and sexual preference.’ - Nails (FGD 4: 23 December 2021)

‘... deliberately decided I want the world to see me as queer... proud of being recognized as queer, even when called queer as a slur.’ – Citygirl (FGD 3: 22 December 2021)

‘I love queering the masculinity and femininity spectrum but painting my nails... shouldn’t associate femininity with she [pronoun] only’ – Flyer (FGD 4: 23 December 2021)

For queer to remain queer, queer must remain undefinable, ever-changing, and uniquely expressed, interpreted, and understood. With the varying uses of queer across the for FGDs, it was evident that queer was largely understood to mean queer.

The discussions that formed around the questions of lived experience and identity construction indicate that PoC experience socio-cultural dissonance and that religion often plays a contributing role to their distress about identity. Participants spoke about how their gender and sexual expression often conflicted with what was expected of them as PoC, from a specific race or ethnic group, as there were cultural practices reserved for or designated to specific gender identities. From the discussions, it is evident that all the participants who identify as men have

been subjected to expectations about what it is to be a man and express manhood, and that this expectation was not aligned with their own identity, so they felt the pressure to construct and express an identity that aligned with societal expectations. This how Dodo expressed how his identity differed from what was expected of him as a Xhosa man;

‘...[B]eing gay, goes against this manly stuff...’ - Dodo (FGD 1: 20 December 2021)

Similarly, Nails shared how he had distanced himself from cultural beliefs:

‘... stepped away from [Xhosa] tradition and culture because of my sexuality but with age [I] found that it was not the culture itself but rather people in this society who vilified queer people.’ - Nails (FGD 4: 24 December 2021)

Participants discussed how they were conflicted with their sexuality because it was contrary to what their societies expected of them.

‘...for a long time and I tried not to think about it because [I] felt that this would affirm it, [I] wanted to avoid because I didn’t want to be associated with it given the negative connotations that society associated with being gay.’ -Kewaru (FGD 3: 23 December 2021)

Interestingly, even within the queer space, there are also expectations around identity expression. Rules of engagement that define how masculine gay men, feminine gay men and straight-acting gay men must express their identity, which differ across racial and ethnic boundaries. Participants felt the need to conform and adjust their identity construction and

expression to societal expectations of them, often based on the perceived or assumed race and gender because of the pigmentation of their skin or physical sexual characteristics.

‘Queer spaces are filled with racism, colourism and ablism, so to be queer, one must be white, if not white a certain shade of brown and able bodied. -Wheelsntoys (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘...set ideas and constructs of what it means to be a man, and a gay man meant that I spent a lot of time trying to abide to these ideas and constructs but when I reached a certain level of self-confidence and adulthood, I tried to go against them.’ – Sawa (FGD 1; 20 December 2021)

‘... [I] have a model c²⁴ accent and deliberately developed this accent and only during fees must fall²⁵ and University did I re-evaluate myself and who I am’... I grew up in [a] Muslim and coloured community and was lighted-skinned so was often assumed to be a coloured child.’ - Nails (FGD 4: 23 December 2021)

There is an interesting tension here with perceived identity and self-declared identity. Some participants are seen to be a certain race based on physical characteristics and choose to express themselves differently, to avoid association with said identity.

²⁴ Model C schools receive government funding, however they are administered and largely funded by the parent body. See Christie: and McKinney, C., 2017. Decoloniality and’ Model C’ schools: Ethos, language and the protests of 2016. *Education as Change*, 21(3), pp.1-21 at http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1947-94172017000300002

²⁵ #FeesMustFall was a student-led protest movement that began in mid-October 2015 in South Africa. See Greeff, M., Mostert, K., Kahl, C. and Jonker, C., 2021. The# FeesMustFall protests in South Africa: Exploring first-year students’ experiences at a peri-urban university campus. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(4), pp.78-103 at http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1753-59132021000400006

‘...try to live away from colouredness’. – Tuto (FGD 4; 24 December 2021).

‘...coloured identity formed from apartheid...I tried to distance myself from the history of being coloured...from what it is recognized as coloured...now I strongly identify as a coloured person.’ – Tammy (FGD 2; 22 December 2021)

While others work hard to prove that they are worthy of being validated as part of a certain identity group despite their physical characteristics suggesting otherwise.

‘I experience separation within the black space because of my complexion, [and] am treated differently because of my light skin and [I am] expected to have more privilege.’ – Pluto (FGD 4; 24 December 2021)

‘I have to prove my South African blackness because I am dark skinned. I carry my ID to prove I am South African but am also often asked what gender I am because I am so dark.’ - Wheelsntoys (FGD 2; 21 December 2021)

It was apparent across all the FGDs that race is often more overt than gender or sexual identity. Society burdens certain bodies, based on how they look, with an expectation to behave a particular way. If this expectation is not met, society tends to exclude these people. For example, Edward is accepted as a gay man in South Africa but is excluded as a foreign national as though blackness in South Africa is reserved for South African ethnicities only, and gayness is not acceptable for a Ghanaian.

'I am more comfortable constructing and expressing my queer identity and am openly gay in South Africa, but I feel excluded because of my darker skin...for being a foreign national and not a black South African' - Edward (FGD 2; 21 December 2021)

It was interesting to note the implied bias that whiteness was superior and consequently all things that assimilate to whiteness, for example physical characteristics, accents and language spoken were deemed more desirable. Some participants participated in this elevating of whiteness while others resisted it and felt like a race was being imposed on them. I found myself reflecting on how gender is imposed on people because of their sex and physical sexual characteristics and how heterosexuality is also assumed. Society expects an identity because of what it can see, and then believes this to be true. There are different pressures enacted on our bodies in different ways to push us to confirm to society's expectations. Any resistance to this pressure often results in exclusion. However, some participants wish to defy this narrative. As participants grew older they became more comfortable constructing and expressing their chosen identity rather than what was expected of them from society.

'...I was never black or white enough so grew up coloured but always found myself in between, and as an adult I have come to claim that space... living in South Africa as a mixed-race Namibian with Nama and Portuguese lineage, people often comment on my nice nose and nice hair. - Flyer (FGD 4; 24 December 2021)

'Though I am a Xhosa black woman, I didn't grow up as a typical black but was privileged and went to model C schools and spoke English all the time, [but] with age I have come to appreciate my ethnicity'. – Stella (FGD 4; 24 December 2021)

'I was not black enough... but I have grown my hair so you can see it is kroes. I speak isiXhosa to a stranger instead of English and then if the person cannot understand I accommodate them by speaking another language that we both understand... this is how I claim my Xhosa identity to avoid being assumed to be coloured' – Pluto (FGD 4; 24 December 2021)

It is evident that even though PoC share similar experiences, within blackness there are cultural dynamics that must be navigated. It was also clear that identity construction and expression is not static, and people continue to become and are endlessly engaging with newness. Across the different FGDs, assimilation to whiteness is expected of QPoC if they are to benefit from the liberalness of Cape Town. There are layers of oppression that QPoC experience which force them to grapple with their ethnicity and queerness, and often consider trading these aspects of their identity off against each other.

'Cisgender, white persona lead... they are the desirable identity... where do queer PoC fit and who are you?' – Dodo (FGD 1; 20 December 2021)

'... as a black queer, I experience an array of prejudices – from white gay guys because I'm black and again from black guys because I'm gay'. - Sawa (FGD 1; 20 December 2021)

4.1.3.2 Passing (as white or straight) to be comfortable in Cape Town

After grappling with identity construction and expression in the discussion the next two questions of the discussion begin to surface how identity is negotiated based on interactions with society. The discussions suggest that Cape Town cannot be described as a liberal haven but that there are pockets of acceptance that cut across racial and gender expression lines.

Fitting into societal expectations of race, gender and sexuality grant one access into certain spaces. In some instances, this privilege means not being exposed to anti-queer violence. The discussions suggest that certain bodies are more deserving of corrective violence as they disrupt the heteropatriarchal normative expressions of identity therefore participants who can pass – as either cisgendered, masculine lesbian or feminine gay, do so. The FGD conversations are suggestive of a normative and acceptable queerness.

‘...white gays in Green Point, coloured gays exist in certain spaces...’ - Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘...acceptance because Cape Town is a microcosm but there are layers that need to be worked through depending on if you are masculine or fem presenting’ – Citygirl (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

‘Racism and homophobia don’t change shape in the Western Cape.’ – Dodo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘I have a privilege of presenting as masculine and playing sport therefore I am accepted’ – Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘I can access privilege... not exposed to queer violence because I am cis and don’t have the stereotypical butch lesbian look, so I am not easily identifiable as queer...I don’t look how queer is expected to look’ – Mary (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

Participants described an ‘us and them’ in Cape Town and that racism penetrates queer spaces. I assumed that because of the collective struggles of queer-identifying people, safe spaces

would be created that cut across racial lines, however from the discussions this is not the case. Participants described always looking out for the other queers of colour and being hyper conscious of their race even though nothing is said to them by anyone.

4.1.4 How do queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious contexts in South Africa?

The second set of focus group questions focused on how queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in the context of a socio-religious populous. The questions to uncover these experiences are: *What life experience(s) as a queer-identifying person of colour has most significantly influenced the development of your identity; How has your experience(s) of living in South Africa (negative/positive) influenced your queerness; In what ways have your culture or religion influenced how you express your queer self; Would you describe yourself as living in or out 'the closet'; or Is this different in different settings; What are ways and places, if any, where you express your queer identity differently? ...for example, work, family, church/ mosque, gym; How has your queer identity or ways of expressing?*

From this, the following themes were distilled: Freedom with conditions, being different and othered and the consequences of being queer.

4.1.4.1 Freedom with conditions

It was clear across all the FGDs that different elements of our identities are brought forward while others are suppressed depending on the situation. Initially I expected that participants would list external responses - other people's views or behaviours towards them as informed or justified by religion, to be the reason for participants expressing their identity differently in different contexts. However this was not the dominant theme across the FGDs. Participants

discussed that it was the letting go of religion and religious beliefs that allowed them to become comfortable with themselves and be the same person regardless of where they found themselves, thus suggesting that is it internalised stigma informed by religion that results in an inability to consistently and fully express one's queerness.

'...I used to see myself as a chameleon as I would adjust my expression depending on the space I found himself in...I have since become comfortable being all of myself.. and am a black gay man in all spaces...' - Edward (FGD 2; 21 December 2021)

'It is exhausting to have to change who you are to accommodate other people' – Edward (FGD 2; 21 December 2021)

'... there was a realisation that religious beliefs were the reason why I felt uncomfortable with myself as I often had to step back into the closet when I went to church... since giving up religion, I am fully living out the closet' – Nails (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

'...I am not expected to be the religious leader as I am not white, and I am not heterosexual. I am always aware of my black body and experience moments of doubting himself which are compounded by my queerness... - Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

Given the perception of Cape Town as a queer-friendly space, there are QPoC living out their queer identity. Participants described these as small pockets of freedom and a growing emergence of QPoC in white queer spaces. Cape Town has aided participants to find some

level of comfort in expressing their queer identity as PoC and has influenced how they express it. Cape Town is progressive, and there are privileges that exist, but these are limited to affluent white spaces. The utopia of Cape Town as a queer safe haven depends on one's social class and access, which are rooted in socioeconomic factors as few safe spaces exist for QPoC in the townships. The safe spaces that exist are proximal to whiteness because they are better protected for queer people, to be comfortable one must accept the racial violence of being fetishized as a black person or be subjected to white guilt.

'To enjoy the freedom of expressing queerness as a PoC, is to accept that you will be the minority in a certain space, but it is easier to be queer than it is to be a PoC in Cape Town' - Citygirl (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

'There is an expectation to 'present as the type of queer that Cape Town is used to' in order to access these privileges' - Dodo (FGD 1, 21 December 2021)

The discussions suggest that participants' queer acceptance lives in dissonance to their race and ethnicity as the queer identity allows access to spaces that aren't accessed by people of colour, therefore there is an implied need to be overtly queer to make these spaces more welcoming.

'It's like you are dialling up the queer' - Pluto (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

It seems that this works both ways though as presented earlier, participants' attempt *passing* when they feel threatened because of their queerness.

4.1.4.2 *Different and othered*

Through the FGDs, I realized that being queer meant that participants were different from the dominant group, but this did not necessarily result in increased vulnerability. Participants struggled to name what made them different at a young age as they felt it so naturally, despite not fitting into the dominant narrative.

‘..always knew I was different but didn’t know it had a name’ – Sawa (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘I was called Tonti, who was an overtly gay man who wore female clothes... I didn’t know why... until in my twenties when I realized I was different because I was gay, and that Tonti was an openly gay feminine man in my community. As a child all I saw was a man in female clothes’ – Kewaru (FGD 3; 23 December 2021)

Participants described becoming acutely aware of their ‘difference’ because their sexuality didn’t fit the heteronormative expectations of their culture and/or race. The theme of internalised homophobia and self-loathing came up for all the participants at a young age. There are clear stages of self-emergence that occurred for all the participants across all the FGDs. Once they understood that they were different and that difference was the reason they were othered by their community, they started to explore what it meant to be queer and began consciously crafting a queer identity.

*‘I was very effeminate as a child and battled throughout my teenage years until university where I was exposed to queerness and **braveness** and how radical queer people were claiming their space were.’ – Citygirl (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)*

Though their queer identities continue to evolve and may not be constant across all the spaces they inhabit, it is deliberately decided; they choose how they want to be seen by the world. Each participant's experiences of othering are unique to their identity expression, relative to the experiences they are exposed to.

'The expectations around manhood result in a really tough journey' - Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 201)

The FGDs confirmed that participants' queer identity is constant, but its expression may not be, and its construction is influenced by the environments participants find themselves in. The majority of the participants were either 'found out' or were comfortable disclosing their queer identity (and expressing it) at university or once they were able to achieve financial independence.

'I was outed to my parents but made a decision to not deny anything...my mother cried and cried...it was a big step but worst-case scenario, [I] have a job [and] can survive'
- Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

'I have chosen to remain in the closet at home with my mother and keep my class position though I am out to the world' - Citygirl

What was also clear is that the process of being found out or choosing to come out has different consequences and is never truly over, because to the assumptions that are made by strangers based on how participants present to the world. Being queer is one aspect of queer-identifying

people's identity however society expects queerness to preformed in set ways that force its centrality despite the complex realities of QPoC's identities.

'There is a box for queerness – either straight acting or super femme' - Sawa (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

'Before I realised that I was trans, [I] found safety in identifying as bisexual, which wasn't that gay, but just a little [gay]' – Pluto (FGD 4, 23 December 2021)

With coming out, or even being outed, one no longer has pretend. In all the FGDs participants discussed how meeting other queers normalised their experiences and confirmed that there was nothing wrong with them or their desires.

'I..had lived with a feeling of anxiety my whole life, then suddenly I was a gay and was choosing own my identity and though there was a multitude of feelings there was also a sense of calm.' – Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

Participants who 'pass' describe having to come out daily as they are assumed to be cis-gendered and heterosexual. They spoke of 'passing' as a privilege because they could choose not to declare their sexuality and thus avoid the discrimination that is often faced by more overtly flamboyant gay men or butch lesbians.

'[People were] ...aware of my difference. [I] didn't officially come out, the family found out. [It is] not easy coming from tradition and culture to feel free and comfortable with yourself [as queer].' – Tammy (FGD2, 21 December 2021)

‘[I]...moved from the stage of being in the closet, partially in, to not caring what others think’ – Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘[I was] ... out to friends first then family.’ – Sawa (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

In instances of acceptance from family, this is qualified by one’s external validation on economic scales. Socioeconomic factors that historically exist for PoC cannot be excluded and so queerness can be tolerated or accepted when the queer person contributes finically. Each participant had a different journey to disclosing their queer identity to their families, however it was evident that they recognised their difference from the heteropatriarchal norm from a young age and their identity construction and expression was affirmed by their experiences with other queer-identifying people.

‘I liked the company of men. I considered women my sisters. I thought I must be a girl because I like boys. I had not been exposed to gays. When I met gay people, I knew what I was’ – Edward (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘[I had] ...always been attracted to all things masculine and male. I told my mother that I thought I was gay but wasn’t sure... until I met other gay men and knew I was like them.’ – Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘I know that I am attracted to women, but I have never embraced it... [I am] still becoming and discovering self’ – Wheelsntoys (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘[I]... discovered when I was seven years old, as kids playing hide and seek, I always followed my female cousin and one day we started kissing...I date married women to hide my relationship with them, so I never had to come out to my family...’ – Tammy (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘[I] ... was attracted to women so identified as lesbian but I still didn’t feel comfortable...had a meeting with myself to consider all the possible consequences...a therapist once asked why you want to be something that the world hates – a black man, the enemy of the world is a black man... the answer was simple for me, this is not a choice, this is who I am.’ – Pluto (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

4.1.4.3 The consequences of being queer

The participants may have known they were queer from a young age, but the journey towards embracing their queerness and recognizing what accepting it and living it means has taken time. Explicit expressions of identity come at a cost and the casualties are not always the same, participants benefit from the sacrifice but don’t suffer equally. Those who choose to pass are not exposed to physical violence but experience their own internalized violence. The violence faced by out queer-identifying people is not only physical, with some participants describing environments that call for traditional values and that force them to mute their queer expression.

‘...I wear a cap and take off my wedding ring when meeting my dad.’ – Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘I have a knee-jerk reaction when at work...not wanting to create tensions. - Dodo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘I was 100% out of the closet in all spaces in South Africa, with work, friends, and family but in Ghana I enter back into the closet.’ - Edward (FGD 2, 20 December 2021)

Participants accepted that they express their identity differently depending on the situation they find themselves in. The closet acts as a metaphoric safe space that they choose to enter by expressing less overt queer behaviour in order to avoid feeling ostracized and othered because of their sexuality or expressions of queerness.

‘[I call it] ...dialling down the queer...’ – Sawa (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

The struggle to navigate space is ongoing. Participants discussed at length how they are forced to streamline their identity expression and are unable to be their full authentic selves in all spaces because seeing and normalizing queerness makes it safer to be fully queer but acknowledged that this comes with risks.

‘I move in and out the closet depending on the circle and who I am with. I am always aware of the aspects of my identity I let out the closet. They choose it as a space of safety...’ – Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

Some participants have multiple social media accounts that portray different elements of themselves. In some instances, even when they are with other queer people, participants choose to not say anything or express their own queerness overtly. I experienced participants struggle to articulate their feelings about the closet, as it can be a space of safety but sometimes felt like it was oppressive in some of the discussions.

‘...I hate that there is an idea of the closet. I am out the closet, but I used to be in while I was trying to understand why I was different...I refuse to not live life while others around me are’ – Pluto (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

‘I am out in public in Cape Town. I am very queer, very femme and my friends and chosen family know. But my actual family and blood family don’t know... [it] doesn’t feel like double life because Cape Town is my entire life therefore, I can live as I am.’
- Citygirl (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

4.1.5 How are queer people’s lived experiences impacted by their identity expression and what role does/can religion have in shifting these experiences?

In the same way that race, culture, and ethnicity are modifiers for queer identity, so is religion. The last set of focus group questions were focused role of religion on queer lived experiences. The questions to guide this section of the FGD are: *In a general sense, how has religion impacted your lived experiences as queer-identifying person...from childhood to now; What are the possible tensions, if any, between being queer-identifying person of colour, and your cultural or religious background; Are there any redeeming aspect of religion or culture that have, or you hope will let you live more authentically as a queer person; How does the cultural and religious language used by yourself and others (to refer to you or to describe you), influence your feelings about being queer; Are there any other thought or experiences that you want to add, that are related to the topics discussed in our session today?*

From this, the following themes were distilled: Letting go and sacrifice.

4.1.5.1 Losing My Religion

Many of the participants no longer had any religious affiliations because of the way they were treated by religious communities and faith leaders. They described how religion was often used to isolate them from their communities while encouraging violence and exclusion. For PoC it seems religion and culture are intertwined, and socio-religious norms are used to guide people's identity construction and expression. Participants shared that the greatest fear their families expressed was based on community perceptions - what would other people think.

'My mother's biggest concern was what will others think... religion was the source of anxiety about the dirty gay secret. – Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

'... [r]eligion wasn't main source of concern, but anxiety was around disappointing family that was religion or what society would think' – Sawa (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

All the participants had religious upbringings or had been exposed to religion through their family or parents but because they were unable to reconcile the religious teachings with their identity, most chose to abandon their religion.

'... religion made it very hard, growing up Muslim. I was outed by a religious leader. I don't identify as religious anymore. I believe in a higher power and connection but not organized religion – that is man-made.' – Yo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘...my mom took me to the Morman church. It was not accepting of me though [I] didn’t experience homophobia. I don’t like church... [I] long for spirituality.’ – Dodo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

‘... relationship with church has diminished. Tired of shame, but when I moved to Cape Town I wanted to know where the church was in order to give thanks. – Kewaru (FGD 3, 20 December 2021)

‘[I am] atheist now but [I] grew up in [the] Catholic church. [I] was an altar server late into [my] teens... I maintain respect and familiarity with the Catholic church, not itself as an institution but the community and ritual’ – Nails (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

‘[I] have always admired people who have been able to maintain faith and their religion and still be true to their queer identity because [it] was always my biggest struggle. Struggle only ended because [I] gave one up... [I] gave up Christianity.’ – Edward (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘... religion is the one thing I didn’t feel safe with because of hearing the things said from the pulpit towards queer people.’ – Tammy (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘...I am frustrated by the interpretation of scripture by religious leaders’ – Kewaru (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

From the discussions it is evident that participants' experiences of religion have not always been positive and life affirming. Some of the participants described having internalised the homophobia they experienced, and some were advised to rid themselves of their sexual orientation through prayer. The participants' queer identity is something that they have been aware of but have continually had to manipulate and mould depending on where they are in their own life and their level of resilience.

'My friend at university suggested that I pray out the gay demon' – Dodo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

'I was raised in a home where both my parents are pastors and despite being fully involved in the church, it never made him feel good but rather that I am a terrible person and am not good because the things I like are impure... had very difficult journey but life became so much easier when I gave up religion' – Edward (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

'[I was] ... always aware of gayness from childhood... [I] knew that I liked boys but that I was not allowed to... [I] always felt anxiety around homosexuality...[I] knew it was this evil thing' – Sawa (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

'[I] had deeply embedded homophobia because of church, but later accepted who I was... I dropped out of university in 3rd year, changed cities and started afresh as a queer man.' – Kewaru (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

‘Growing up all I knew was the word moffie which was used to describe effeminate men, which I didn’t associate myself with... there was very little information so whenever there was an article about gays, I held that close because it was how I felt I was... but the articles were often religious and negative’ – Flyer (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

It is difficult to understand the magnitude of the repulsion felt because of one’s SOGIESC. Many of the participants across the FGDs had negative experiences because of their queer identity and most of these negative experiences were associated with religion, either directly or indirectly. Their queerness was regarded as immoral and against G-d’s natural order.

‘I don’t understand how loving someone can make people react so violently in the name of religion. It is very traumatic how people react when you tell them that you are queer’. - Wheelsntoys (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘My mother’s immediate association of his gay identity was with HIV.’ – Yoyo (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

The comment by Yoyo in FGD group one sparked reflections from other participants about how queer identity is often portrayed as deserving of suffering and some of the verbal abuse they have been subjected to centres around how suffering is a punishment for sin:

‘...bad things happen to bad people...it is a cardinal sin and [you] will die a horrible disease death’ - Yoyo

4.1.5.2 *The rainbow crucifixion*

From the FGDs it was evident that the South African queer experience is complex, particularly that of PoC who struggle to navigate faith and SOGIESC. Though we are protected by a progressive constitution, we live in a conservative society that does not recognize the values enshrined in the constitution. There was consensus across all the FGDs that sacrifice, and suffering are consistent with queer identity. You must give up something to be your authentic self. This was particularly dominant with FGD group three who agreed that the theme that dominated their discussion was: *constantly having to leave to stay alive – sacrificing something for the sake of safety and comfort to be our authentic selves.*

From the discussions it became apparent that often the thing that was sacrificed in order to live authentically and without self-loathing was religion and social interactions with conservative communities. The alternative was to sacrifice your queerness and pray away the gay. This annihilation of a part of yourself in order to be accepted was consistent throughout all the FGDs.

‘I grew up with religion and it has shaped who I am but where my story differs is that I had good mentors who helped me shape my experience in the faith landscape... I assisted to read through a queer lens and bring my lived experiences to the text... I really grappled for many years and even left organised religions because I had made peace with the fact that I was queer, but I thought about how I could make things better and realised I could not make noise from the outside’ – Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘It is painful! And often I ask myself if I really need to put myself through this to liberate others. To sacrifice my own happiness... Yes, I negotiate my identity in different platforms, but I’d like to believe that my message is the same in all spaces...’ - Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

Participants discussed that it is difficult to marry religion and queerness because of the homophobic undertones that are ubiquitous in religious spaces, and that queer friendly churches are not queer churches, they merely exclude the parts that are used to discriminate. Some of the participants felt that they couldn’t be romantically involved with someone who is actively involved in religion and that the world would be a better place without religion.

‘...how could you place yourself in a setting where you are not wanted and are told you are an abomination. How does one happily exist in that space?’ – Nails (FGD 4, 21 December 2021)

‘...go to church thinking you are going to revive your soul but leave church feeling broken inside.’ – Tammy (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘God is supposed to be all loving, but you have to pray elements of yourself away... I am fine living in a world where there isn’t a fear of an all mighty’ – Wheelsntoys (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘...if I had the power to abolish religions, it is the one thing I would do. It would do us so well to be a non-religious state... could be more accommodating if [we] didn’t have

this bigotry from years ago that no one should be using’ – Mary (FGD 1, 20 December 2021)

4.1.5.3 Your own personal Jesus

Religion and religious institutions have power over society. Participants discussed how certain texts have evolved with the evolution of society, but scriptures used for homophobic reasoning are still stuck.

Nathan explained that we ‘...we shouldn’t be bound by text that was written for a context so long ago... take out what is pure and create life giving spaces... I always gets backlash and am told that I am misleading people and is going to burn...but realizing I can help others navigate the faith landscape makes me feel like I am fulfilling my purpose...’ – Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

‘... read according to lived experiences rather than the set of expectations that I need to live up to...’ – Nathan (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

There is much work (and sacrifice) to be done by those who remain in religious spaces. Those FGD participants who remained religious or in the ministry felt that they needed to find healing for themselves by helping others. Participants who grew up in religious households were able to quote specific instances of how religion had been used to hurt them.

‘I learnt a lot of my ministry in East Africa, but queerness was a taboo... cannot even mention queerness, [you] would be disciplined even for having a general conversation about queerness’ – Tammy (FGD 2, 21 December 2021)

*'I love being in ministry but feels like it is not a safe space for queer people' – Tammy
(FGD 2, 21 December 2021)*

*'I hold onto ministry to help those souls that are being broken by the church' – Nathan,
(FGD 2, 21 December 2021)*

'...religion made me feel more confused of who I was... because of I wanted to be perfect and proper and normal I prayed the gay away, cried, and experienced difficult emotions and when I slipped up and kissed a girl, I felt like I had done something wrong and was not worthy of God's love...' – Stella (FG 4, 24 December 2021)

Leaving or being asked to leave religious institutions has had a long-term negative emotional impact on participants and they shared how they have lost friends and family members because they were ostracised for being queer. They described difficulties making friends when they moved to a new community because they felt they were unwelcome in church, the place they would have made friends and where, prior to coming out they would have found community and belonging.

'[I]...made a decision to tell my mother that I was fixed now and closet myself when I am around my mother because I am not prepared to be kicked out again, so I live a double life... [I'm] not ready to compromise that relationship yet' – Stella (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

'[I was] ...kicked out and biblical text was used to justify... [I was] told I would go to hell despite being a good person, simply because [I'm] attracted to someone with the same body...' – Pluto (FGD 4, 24 December 2021)

‘...the church is an easy way to make community but in university I decided I was no longer participating in church and so I don’t have access to that avenue of making friends...’ – Citygirl (FGD 3, 23 December 2021)

Some participants yearn for spirituality and religious connection however when they go to church, even the less traditional churches that are accepting of diversity and welcoming, it feels like they are being fake. There is a void, and they seek spiritual connection. Participants crave spiritual connection to a higher power but cannot reconcile their identity politics and an inclusive narrative about the world with what is required by institutional religion.

4.2 Conclusion

The diversity of race, gender, queerness, and religion was well represented by the participants of the study. The majority of the participants were black gay men, which was fitting for the purpose of this study objectives as white heteronormative patriarchy considers black feminised bodies the most repulsive and these are the experiences, I wish to explore in answering the question of whether liberation is worth suffering for. Coloured and mixed-race women and other sexualities were also represented in the discussions and the only voices of PoC not included are those of Indian or Asian descent, who are an ethnic minority in Cape Town. Religious experience and belief were only represented by those with Abrahamic origins, however as a sample of the Cape Town populations this is representative as there is a statistically insignificant non-Abrahamic and Dharmic religious population in Cape Town.

The FDGs were a suitable data collection method, enabling participants to freely and honestly engage with each other. The space was sufficiently safe for participants to share their vulnerabilities and experiences of exclusions and trust each other and myself to hold the stories

of their lived and embodied experiences. The discussions flowed naturally as guided by the questions that I moderated and participants were able to agree on the theme that their FGD centred around. The process was therapeutic for participants and to my surprise participants passionately shared experiences of the hostilities they encountered at the hand of society as a result of conservative interpretations of religious texts.

From the FGDs there are key themes that emerged under each sub-research question discussion. **Queerness** as a theme emerged as individually expressed identity that is constructed diversely depending on the intersection of race, ethnicity, and culture. The data extracted from the FGDs illustrated that QPoC felt that their queerness was only one aspect of their identity, their experience of queerness is unique, and that queer as an identity category can hold multiple varying examples of what it means to be queer. From the discussion, it surfaced that race and subsequently culture and class act as a moderator to queerness and to resist exclusion, participants grapple with enacting or resisting the expectations placed upon them by society. **Passing** emerged as a theme used to access comfort and safety. The data from the discussions indicated that identity is constructed and expressed depending on one's acceptance or rejection of normative dominant white heteropatriarchal views. **Freedom with conditions** emerged as a theme as it became apparent through the FGDs that Cape Town is not a liberal haven for all queers, as QPoC must negotiate the various elements of their complex identities to feel accepted and affirmed. **Being different and othered** and the **consequences of queerness** were additional themes that were uncovered. As freedom of expression is negotiated in different contexts and participants felt that if they get this wrong, there are undesirable consequences. These consequences are largely influenced by religious beliefs around what is acceptable from bodies that present with certain physical characteristics. **Letting go** and **sacrifice** were additional themes that emerged from the discussions. The

negotiation of identity expression is sometimes seen as a sacrifice that is necessary to avoid harm or to qualify for affirmation, but also as an effort to transform harmful religious interpretations and practises. Participants were asked to discuss the redemptive elements of religion and to consider the times when religion, as a dogma or through the actions of people had a positive impact on their lives. This was to establish if religion as a sociology can transform to create space for queer bodies to matter.

Participants were able to share openly and comfortably despite being strangers to each other. They had similar nuanced experiences of being queer and of colour in Cape Town. They struggled however to identify any redemptive aspects of religion. The FGDs provided me with an opportunity to listen to the responses to my questions but also gave me the opportunity to understand the nuances, textures, and variations of how QPoC navigate a range of challenging social spaces. In the next chapter I will discuss the themes that emerged from the FGDs under each sub-research question in relation to the literature presented in chapter two in an attempt to answer the study research question.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the research was to determine through three research questions whether the liberation of QPoC in Cape Town, South Africa is worth suffering for by establishing what the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression are, establishing how QPoC negotiate their identity in different socio-religious contexts and by determining how QPoC's lives are impacted by religion and the role of religion in shifting these experiences. Discussions were held with fifteen QPoC through four virtual FGDs. The discussions were rich and FGD participants easily carried the conversation with the aid of the FGD questions. The themes that emerged from the FGDs were *Queerness*, *Passing*, *Freedom with conditions*, *being different and othered* and *the consequences of queerness*, *Letting go and Sacrifice*. I have categorised these themes as follows: 1. Queerness is fluid, 2. Econo-hetero-patriarchy and 3. The religious sanctification of suffering. *Queerness is fluid* includes the themes of Queerness and Passing, focusing on how queerness resists the category descriptions assigned to it by society. *Econo-hetero-patriarchy* includes the themes of Passing and Freedom with conditions, focusing on how passing can be considered as an element of expressing queerness by deceiving the heteropatriarchy, and through this deception gaining class privilege and finally, how race influences culture and religiosity and conversely class privilege shields us from some of the inherent vulnerability of identifying as QPoC. Lastly the *Religious sanctification of suffering* includes being different and othered, the consequences of queerness, letting go and sacrifice, focusing on how socio-religious societies treat QPoC as a result of our queerness and exploring the influences and impact of choosing to construct and express a queer identity as a person of colour and how this often comes with a sacrifice that is sanctified and normalised by religion.

This chapter will engage the findings through the theoretical framework described in chapter three; it will interpret the meaning of the results and place them into context with the existing literature presented in chapter two. I will look at the findings collected through the FGDs and determine if the research questions have been answered, highlighting unexpected and significant results.

As indicated in chapter three, my selection of Queer Theory and the Theory of the Sociology of Religion is premised on the three factors.

The first is the use of queer life narratives in this research. Using this framework, I highlight that alternative gender and sexual identities are normal and need not define the complexities of the categories of identification to be legitimised.

The second use of this framework is to shed light on resistance and the use of power. Using this framework, I expose the alternative uses of power and explore how QPoC are not merely acted upon but are actors themselves.

The third use of this framework is to trouble the notion that religion is to blame for the suffering of QPoC and expose the users and interpreters of religion as the true inciters of injury.

5.2 Queerness is fluid

In this research I aimed to explore QPoC's lived experience to determine how to truly construct a queer identity that is liberating, transformative and inclusive of all those who stand outside the dominant constructed norm of white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality. To do this I need to understand that queerness must be based on an intersectional analysis that recognises how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate and police the lives of QPoC.

As I reflect on the findings from the participants' discussions, I am reminded of the speech *Learning from the 60s*²⁶ delivered by Audre Lorde, a QPoC forty years ago, which remains relevant in today's context.

'There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.' – Audre Lorde²⁷

This understanding that there are interlocking systems of domination and simultaneous oppressions that create the conditions of our lives holds the answer to my research question. It is in combating these systems of oppression that our identity as QPoC is constructed, negotiated, and expressed.

5.2.1 How the binary is recreated in the queer

I realise from the FGDs that we all individually analyse our place in the world through a lens that focuses on the intersection of systems of oppression informed by our own consciousness. This consciousness springs from our lived experience existing within and resisting multiple interconnected systems of domination and oppression. As we embrace our queerness as freedom from the strictures of heteropatriarchy – as fluid and evolving, we experience a dramatic reduction in status and the protection we receive when we conform to heteronormativity. This loss of protection is experienced as rejection from our communities; the further we stray from the binary societal expectations on our bodies and our lives, the more

²⁶ Learning from the 60s is an address delivered by Audre Lorde as part of the celebration of the Malcolm X weekend at Harvard University. See <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1982-audre-lorde-learning-60s/>

²⁷ Audre Lorde 1982 – Learning from the 60s

vulnerable we are to violence and discrimination. Ironically, that increased vulnerability and exposure to othering also increases our ability to destabilise and resist heteropatriarchy, freeing us to realise our full human potential and allowing the beauty of our authentic lives to act as ministry and witness to the possibility of freedom.

In the discussions participants referred to their queer identity as a defiance of patriarchal heteronormativity rather than a fixed category of identity with rigid characteristics. Cohen (2020: 440) becomes a conversation partner here as their writings suggest queer as a label that symbolises an acknowledgement that it is by existing and through surviving daily, we embody the resistance to systems based on dominant constructions of race and gender ‘that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labour and constrain our visibility’. Cohen (2020) writes that the radical potential of queerness to challenge and congregate those deemed marginal lies at the intersection of our oppression. This resonates with what emerged from the FGDs as it is the essence of our difference that binds us together, not the difference itself.

Participants discussed that the expression of identity is negotiated within different contexts. There are spaces in which we express ourselves in different ways because of fear, respect or in some instances as a choice to let others in, allowing them to fully know us. This resonates with the work of Sedgwick (1991) which speaks to the ambiguity of sexuality and how its identifications continue to fluctuate. Sedgwick (1991) guides us into an understanding that these identifications can be strategically performed even though they are often ascribed. Our queer identity is fluid and part of that queerness is the ability to trick the heteronormative imperative into believing that we abide by its constructs and in so doing we are able to defy it and what it dictates as normal.

Queer Theory facilitates this by focusing on the varying degrees and multiple sites of power distributed within categories of gender and sexuality, thus destabilizing the notion that power is distributed according to the hierarchy of race, gender, and sexuality that positions cisgendered heteronormative white men at the top. Queer Theory enables us to remove the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality from the centre by highlighting that the binary is often recreated when we attempt to destabilise it. Often the deconstruction of gender and sexual categories is built around a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed not-queer.

5.2.2 The normative normalising of queer

It is evident from the literature reviewed and the FGDs that the hegemonic narrative among people of colour in South Africa is that queerness is Western and therefore un-African. Participants explained how their queer expression often conflicted with what was expected of them from their culture as a PoC from a specific race or ethnic group. There are certain expectations constructed by a heteropatriarchy that are placed upon bodies with certain physical characteristics. The defiance of these expectations is where we expect to find queerness. Msibi (2012) challenges my thinking by voiding the term ‘identity’ and using ‘identification’ to escape the perception that certain forms of identification are fixed and stable. Truly, queer identity is understood as fluid however it is often expected to fit a particular mould. From the FGDs it was apparent that this perspective needs to be troubled.

Participants described how descriptors such as gay and bisexual were easier and more comfortable, but the descriptor queer has proved more beneficial as it encompasses all the aspects of who they are. More importantly though, participants explained that queerness is affirmed by their expression rather than an overt declaration. In constructing their queer

identity, they were aware of the heteronormative gender and sexual expression that is expected of their bodies, and they can choose to conform or confound those expectations. In instances where they choose to conform and pass, this construction of an identity expression that does not adhere to the dominant queer expression should also be allowed to be queer - if queer is to be queer.

There are normative views about gender difference that are prescribed as appropriate for men and women in society. Though these are often broken, it is this ongoing gendering process linked to bodily expressions that exaggerate gender difference and create the impression that gender distinction is integral to the functions, importance, and uses of human beings in social settings. Some participants spoke specifically about how they felt pressure from society to align their gender expression with societal expectations. It is this gendering of objects and behaviours – drinking beers as masculine, but preferring sweet liqueurs as feminine, sitting with your legs crossed as feminine and sitting with your legs open as masculine – that contributes to seeing gayness as unmanly. It is evident from the literature that gender is not a natural characteristic, but rather a performance irrespective of one's biological or physical attributes (Butler, 1999).

5.2.3 Claiming and using the power of queer identity

Power is encoded in sexual and gender categories, dominating, and controlling bodies and forcing them to fit heteronormative ideals. Queerness allows us to claim this power by unveiling the normalising discursive processes that lead the production of the respectable gay, typically a white, middle-class man who has 'come out' and is in, or is aspiring to be in, a monogamous relationship (Milani 2014). By tapping into the full potential of queerness as a tool to disrupt and destabilise heteropatriarchy, we challenge the normalisation of the respectable gay that, through his existence gives birth to the deviant other – the queer who is

sexually promiscuous and/or does not want to come out of the proverbial closet. Interestingly, this deviant other may according to Milani (2014: 77) include ‘politically radical ... female black bodies that resist being tamed...’. This is reflected in the findings of my research, where transgender men of colour spoke freely about being born with female bodies even though they pass as a cisgendered black man, or the effeminate black gay man who still slaughters during traditional gatherings because it is his role as the man. This resistance to the norm is powerful. It is a power that can be deployed strategically and effectively even though it is held by less dominant groups. Ahmed (2006) helps us understand this as a queer phenomenology which reveals how queerness disrupts and reorders social relations by rejecting and disorientating them.

We have multiple intersecting systems of power that dictate our lives as various characteristics contribute to the sum of who we are including our race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion. Though each of these may be foregrounded strategically to make sense of certain situations, we are never only one element of our identity in isolation or one perspective of consciousness. Cohen (2020: 441) argues that ‘those who evoke a single-oppression framework misrepresent the distribution of power within and outside of [queer] communities and therefore limit the comprehensive and transformational character of queer politics.

Sibisi and Van der Walt (2021) describe the pervasive systemic nature of heteropatriarchy that expresses itself by insisting on placing masculine bodies in positions of authority and exclusively recognizing relationships that conform to heteronormative standards. Similarly, Milani (2014) notes that systems of heteropatriarchy have found their way into queer spaces by forcibly normalising queerness to align with the fixed binary understandings of gender and sexuality. This enforcing of strict gender binaries creates hostile environments, even in spaces

that purport to be queer. The systemic nature of heteropatriarchy was uncovered in the FGD engagements as participants spoke about the rules of engagement that define how their bodies are expected to behave even within queer spaces. There is an additional layer of expectation that is added onto their bodies because of their perceived or assumed race, and consequently ethnicity and culture, because of the pigmentation of their skin. Participants described how queerness is not acceptable in the spaces of people of colour, and how being a person of colour is not acceptable in queer spaces. As racial, gender and sexual minorities, we exist within multiple systems of oppression that constantly challenge us to nimbly adapt to the numerous privileges and constraints embedded in each of the social roles we occupy (Craven, 2018). I know this to be true as I am always aware of my blackness and there are moments when I doubt myself and my place in certain spaces and this doubt is amplified by my queerness. Similarly, participants spoke of experiencing racism and colourism within queer spaces in South Africa. Queerness is fraught with unspoken assumptions that to be queer is to be white or to aspire to whiteness. These racial tensions in South Africa are exacerbated in Cape Town and will be discussed in the next theme.

5.2.4 Econo-hetero-patriarchy

There is a tension between the identity we outwardly project and our self-declared identity. How the world sees us and therefore who and what expects us to be, versus how we see ourselves and how we choose to express ourselves. The dichotomy of obligation and choice is where I find the complexity of the participants discussions. The threat of physical violence, discrimination, and manipulation thrum softly but incessantly through all the complex beats of queer embodiment and desire. The tools of oppression are always with us, rendering the authentic expression of our black queer existence dangerous.

5.2.5 Now you see me, now you don't

I witnessed the tensions inherent in passing and reaping the benefits of straightness or whiteness, while suffering the consequences of the psychological and spiritual toll this takes on QPoC. To pass is to avoid the negative consequences of being identifiably queer, but passing renders you invisible, requiring hyper-vigilance to remain hidden. Participants described the use of explicit queer expressions to reveal their queerness and equally, the use of binary expressions to conceal their queer. Some participants work hard to prove they are worthy of inclusion in a particular identity group despite physical characteristics that might suggest otherwise, while other participants use subtle cues to signal their queerness without challenging the normative too much.

Across the different focus group discussions participants explained that their choice to pass and remain invisible, or to defy, come out and be seen is situational. This resonates with the findings of Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) presented in chapter two, which indicates that some queer-identifying people do not openly share their queer identity with their family despite being openly queer in other aspects of their lives. The family is often a source of financial and emotional support and to avoid being cut off financially and emotionally, exposing one to acute vulnerability, it is safer not to express one's queer identity. Socioeconomic realities cannot be ignored when discussing issues relating to QPoC who are, because of their marginalisation, often exposed to multiple vulnerabilities.

Religious views are carried into workspaces where power and status can be used to force queer bodies into heteronormative binaries to avoid the negative consequences of troubling these normative views. Ammerman (2014) is a conversation partner in discussing how we carry our values into social relationships in the workplace which may in turn influence how QPoC may

express themselves. This is captured in the FGDs as participants described how they left their sexuality at the door when they entered the workplace, or how they chose to remain ‘in the closet’ at home to avoid rejection and consequently the loss of financial support.

5.2.6 Money is the access card

The research has revealed that in many instances, instead of destabilising the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer identities have served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heteronormativity and everything queer. Cape Town is described by participants as a microcosm of South Africa, with all the complexities of racialised heteronormative privilege, preserving space and power based on socioeconomic realities that exist along Apartheid lines despite thirty years of democracy. QPoC are forced to navigate this complex web of systemic pervasive powers. Like Punt (2009), I found it difficult to determine where to begin to discuss sexuality and culture as this is a complex relationship, that is further complicated by the addition of religion. Participants described how racism permeates queer spaces and QPoC are continually looking for the other QPoC in queer spaces, which suggests that queerness alone is not sufficient grounds for connection because of the unique lived experiences that result from the intersection of race, class, and sexuality.

Across the different FGDs, participants noted that assimilation to whiteness is expected of QPoC if they are to benefit from the liberalness of Cape Town. This assimilation requires a certain class membership if one is a PoC. There are layers of oppression that QPoC experience which force them to grapple with their ethnicity and queerness, and often require trading these aspects of their identity off against each other. Sibisi and Van der Walt (2021) write that the body is symbolic of the systems informed by culture and religion that uphold society. This is where the sub-theory of Intersectionality Theory proved invaluable in conceptualising QPoC’s

experiences. Queer Theory is often limited as it attempts to interpret experiences of QPoC through a Eurocentric lens that dictates proper ways of being and knowing.

Despite the inclusion of the Equality clause in the South African Constitution, there is an argument from Livermon (2012) that its inclusion was a concerted effort to retain white minority power in post-apartheid South Africa by suggesting that even those most criminalised white bodies under apartheid rule (white queer-identifying people) would be safe in the post-apartheid state. For the majority PoC, queerness is racialised as white and blackness is heteronormative. To resist this reality is to be a QPoC with a class status that enables one to live a life assimilated to whiteness. In the discussions, participants shared that as they attained a level of financial independence, they became more comfortable constructing and expressing their chosen identity instead of performing the one expected of them. The majority of the participants were either 'found out' or were comfortable disclosing their queer identity (and expressing it) at university or once they were able to achieve financial independence. This financial independence introduces the class dimension to the intersection of queerness and race in a socioreligious reality.

5.2.7 Same but different

Livermon (2012) suggested that Queer relationships of colour in South Africa are often based on a strong butch-femme aesthetic, with butch and femme articulated around both gender performance and sexual roles. Masculine men and feminine women who identify as straight form relationships with gay-identified feminine men and lesbian-identified masculine women (Livermon (2012)). This was briefly unpacked by participants who felt that their attraction should assimilate to what heteronormativity would find palatable. For several participants in this research, this heteronormative mirroring was about finding ways to safely negotiate their

way towards fully embracing their queerness, rather than expressing an authentic attraction to the opposite gender expression, although this was the case for some. Similar with race, in white spaces participants foregrounded the elements of their identity that granted them access into queer white spaces. Cohen (2020) describes how white heterosexual privilege impacts and constrains the lives of QPoC, as does class and sexism. Therefore, when I used the closet in this research to facilitate a discussion about how we express our identity as QPoC, it became evident that the closet is a nuanced space where QPoC safeguard their most treasured identities.

From the relative safety of the closet, we determine the appropriate expression of gender and sexuality for the context we are stepping into. It became apparent that being outed versus choosing to come out have very different outcomes and consequences. It also became clear is that those consequences are never truly over. This resonates with the writings of Boe *et al.* (2018) that posit that in larger white dominated societies those who live in the closet are considered as living unhealthy and inauthentic lives. The process of coming out is constructed through experiences of white, middle-class men with little voice from QPoC and women (Boe *et al.*, 2018, Han, 2009; Rust, 2003,).

QPoC are wrestling with their own complicated desires around who they want to be and who society expects them to be. Through a queer lens, these instances of societies' expectations and individual desires reflect the ways in which we are dynamic rather than fixed, how we are responsive to others, sometimes moving with and sometimes against what is expected of us in each encounter. What I realised through engaging the existing literature and the content of the FGDs is that coming out can be liberating but coming out would not be necessary if larger dominant socioreligious structures did not impose a patriarchal heteronormative binary. Even

the in or out closet binary itself would not exist because being queerness is not about the right to privacy, it is about the freedom to be public.

The process of coming out for QPoC in Cape Town, South Africa comes with consequences that can be mitigated, or even avoided depending on class. Though all my participants expressed having experienced injury caused by discrimination, none had experienced the extreme violence that is meted out against queer bodies of colour in Cape Town. I use the word injury as influenced by Avilez (2003) who explains that like queerness, injury is not one-dimensional. The bodies of QPoC are always on the verge of injury. Avilez (2003) uses injury and not death because the overemphasis on death obscures the nuance and complexity of the multiple kinds of vulnerability minorities face. Despite this injury, participants felt that with coming out, or even being outed, one must no longer pretend. In all the FGDs participants discussed how meeting other queers normalised their experiences and confirmed that there was nothing wrong with them or their desires. This finding confirmed trajectory of The Cass Identity Model described in the literature.

5.2.8 Middle- and Upper-Class ticket to Freedom

The FGDs suggest that race influences class and privilege and has a significant role to play in the lived experience of a QPoC. Participants of the FGDs were acutely aware of and outspoken about the privileges attributed to white bodies who identify as queer, and the safety found in queer white spaces. This perception of safety in predominantly white spaces stands in stark contrast to the 2003 Sizzlers massacre in Sea Point, an affluent predominantly white neighbourhood in Cape Town which resulted in the murder of nine gay men and the serious injury of another in what the Lesbian and Gay Equality project described as a hate crime. Even the queer white spaces, the threat of homophobic violence is ever-present.

The anomaly of the Sizzlers massacre stands in stark contrast with the increase in homophobic hate crimes in Cape Town which are disproportionately perpetrated against QPoC. Nkosi and Masson (2017) suggest that the reason for the high numbers of homophobic hate crimes against people of colour is that homosexuality is more acceptable in urban, less traditional parts of South Africa. The perceived utopia of Cape Town, the queer safe haven depends on the social class, which is rooted in socioeconomic factors. The safe spaces that exist are proximal to whiteness and there are few safe spaces for QPoC in townships. To be relatively safe from homophobic hate crimes one must subject oneself to the racial injury of the white gaze that fetishized the black body. The findings suggest that queer acceptance lives in dissonance with race and ethnicity because it is the queerness that grants QPoC access to white spaces and the implications thereof is to express that queerness in a manner that renders it recognisable. Class privilege is a cornerstone of much of Queer Theory. Queer Theory calls for the elimination of fixed binary categories that ignore the traditional social identities and communal ties that can be important for survival.

My multiple identities locate me and other QPoC on the margins of society, my economic advancement, my physical protection, and emotional well-being is constantly threatened, whereas for those in stable categories and named communities whose histories have been structured by shared resistance to oppression, there is a relative degree of safety and security. But even within these named communities, there are versions of domination and normalisation being replicated and employed as more privilege is assimilated to marginal group members use their associations with dominant institutions and resources to regulate and police the activities of other marginal groups. As Cohen (2020: 450) writes, '[e]ven within marginal groups there are normative rules determining community membership and power'. What the findings of the FGDs indicate is that QPoC are collectively wrestling with competing discourses around

identity, notably the normative discourses that situate queerness as inherently problematic and emerging discourses of disruption that embraces queer as normal.

The socially constructed identity categories that I have discussed here – race, ethnicity, and gender – are indicators of economic resources because these categories represent economically disadvantaged groups in South Africa. Furthermore, these economic disadvantages are magnified for intersectionally marginalised individuals such as QPoC (Crenshaw, 1991; Crave, 2018). This is articulated by Sibisi and Van der Walt (2021:78) who write that ‘[t]he body is inscribed into the hierarchies, the inequalities, the roles, the norms, the do’s, and don’ts of society. As such not the body itself, but what the body should or ought to be, shifts into focus’.

5.2.9 Shifting the needle

According to Cohen (2020) the basic fabrics and hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to persist and operate efficiently need to be challenged or queerness will merely be assimilating and replicating dominant institutions. Livermon (2012) is a thinking partner in this work as they acknowledge that QPoC can do little on their own to overturn centuries of capitalist exploitation, but that we can and do is create spaces for ourselves to be respected and accepted as QPoC in our communities. Livermon (2012) encourages the addition of racial analysis to queer analysis as it reveals how white queer bodies are emblematic of human rights protections used to position South Africa as a progressive queer friendly space. The reality though is that narrative is true only for white queer bodies, while QPoC are perceived as a threat to African culture and tradition, and the policing of queer bodies in a post-apartheid South Africa falls disproportionately on QPoC.

Violence is a powerful tool used to maintain patriarchy and its vicious sexist and homophobic mechanisms (Msibi, 2012). Our class group either shields us from or leaves us vulnerable to this violence associated with being queer and of colour. Further research should explicitly explore the impact of econo-hetero-patriarchy and the lived experiences of QPoC according to the class divide. It is evident from the findings of this research that Cape Town is a liberal haven for QPoC, provided they can afford to assimilate to the suburban Cape Town life.

5.3 The Religious sanctification of suffering

Astbury and Butler (2005) write that anti-gay sentiment is compounded by a strong patriarchal Christian ethic that considers queer encounters as sinful and wrong. Therefore, heterosexist and homophobic reactions are seen as upholding religious beliefs and are therefore something to be proud of and actively encouraged. Weber's (1963) early arguments for the Sociology of Religion as a reflection of the economy is useful here as it serves as a guide to understand how religion provides meaning to how we navigate existence. Religious beliefs influence how we behave and as argued by Davies (2017) form the central framework that explains what is happening, why it is happening and what the consequences are. Across the different FGDs, assimilation to whiteness is expected of QPoC if they are to benefit from the liberal protections of Cape Town. Participants described explicitly that they experienced an array of prejudices from white queer-identifying people because of their skin colour and again from PoC because of their queerness. To enjoy the freedom of expressing queerness as a PoC, is to accept that one will be the minority in certain spaces, and interestingly, because of class, it is easier to be a middle-class queer person than it is to be a working class PoC in Cape Town.

Livermon (2012) reminds us of the contextual privilege of South Africa, as unlike QPoC elsewhere in the world who are subjected to exclusions of their racialised or queer bodies,

QPoC in South Africa have the possibility of full recognition from the state and protections of the constitutions. The findings of this research suggest that this possibility is perhaps more theoretical than realistic. QPoC in South Africa are protected by progressive constitution but are governed by a conservative population that does not internalise the values of the constitution. The intersection of race with queerness adds an additional burden for QPoC. Lewis (2003) suggest that PoC disapprove of homosexuality more strongly than white people and that PoC are less likely to be socially involved in queer communities and experience racism in interactions with white queer people.

In reflecting on the findings of this research, I concluded that perhaps we choose our battles but ultimately not our war. As I return to write about the next theme that emerged from the research, being different and othered, the consequences of queerness, letting go and sacrifice which I consolidate as the religious sanctification of suffering, I am stuck in this frame of mind. Society is gendered and the dominant discourse informed by patriarchal heteronormativity is that all genders are cis, and that the sexuality of that gender is heterosexual. Queer bodies exist within societies where their gender and sexual identity is predetermined by the spaces that they inhabit, making it difficult to build an identity outside of the confines of societal norms and the unattainable standards of femininity and masculinity. This is not only challenging and uncomfortable for bodies that naturally destabilise these heteropatriarchal ideals that are maintained and enforced by cultural and religious narratives, it is life-denying.

5.3.1 Choosing the battle

Warner (1993: xiii) writes in the introduction of *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* that

‘...every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatisation is connected with gender, the family, notions of individuals freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social displace, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeals but always with consequences...’.

Therefore, in constructing, negotiating, and expressing identity as a QPoC, the battle we are fighting around race, class, gender, and sexuality is every-present as it is through our collective efforts that we struggle to navigate the warzone of heteropatriarchy. In the literature discussed in chapter two Ammerman’s (2007) writings on how institutions produce and enforce patterns of meaning and action, as well as the ability of individuals and collectives to improvise and sustain alternatives offer a helpful analytics framework for the FGDs. Although society is governed by heteropatriarchal rules and expectations, as queer-identifying people, we have agency that allows us to exercise choice. In the FGDs this choice was discussed at length as it comes at a cost.

According to Waidzunas (2015) Christian queer-identifying people live painful lives in which they cannot freely express their identify without fear of condemnation. Similarly, Livermon (2012) explains that queer visibility for QPoC is not only about being accepted but also about defying and subverting blackness in a transformative way that realises the liberation that is promised by the constitutions, thus granting freedom its substantive meaning. South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, affording queer-identifying persons equal and equitable rights, and most religions in South Africa preach an underlying principle

of compassion and love. Most of the South African population believes in community-mindedness and the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation (Battle, 2009). It speaks about our interconnectedness, yet queerness is somehow so distasteful that it is excluded from this reality. Contrary to the argument presented earlier, Livermon (2012) suggests that even middle-class QPoC struggle to access the rights enshrined in the constitution, not because of a lack of material resources but because of a lack of cultural resources. The otherness of our queer bodies of colour informs the vulnerability we experience in the process of navigating queerness as patriarchy is deeply informed by culture, religion, and African traditions (Sibisi and Van der Walt, 2021). The ideal construction of masculinity demanded by patriarchy is not only unattainable, but it is unrealistic, fuelling violence and aggression in those who struggle to meet its standards (Sibisi and Van der Walt, 2021). The findings of this research suggest that this violence and aggression is also enacted on queer bodies who choose not to meet its standards in their expression of identity.

5.3.2 The religious fight

The research findings suggest that most queer people know they are queer from a young age though they may choose not to express their queer identity because of the negative connotations that society attributes to being queer or the acts of homophobia transphobia and homophobic and transphobic violence they may have witnessed towards openly queer-identifying people. Here Craven (2018) is a reflection partner as they suggest that aside from the differential availability of economic resources, religiosity is an important cultural feature and that the importance and practise religion vary in relation to race, ethnicity, and gender. This factor cannot be ignored in defining the standards of normalcy and the subsequent stigmatisation of queer-identifying people in communities of colour.

The literature reviewed in chapter two suggests that heteropatriarchy is deeply informed by culture, religion and African traditions and that queerness is deemed antithetical to the cultural and religious values systems of Africans as it is an imposition by Western nations (Nkosi and Masson, 2017; Sibisi and Van der Walt, 2021). The findings of this research indicate that QPoC are taught that queerness is contrary to the will of G-d and exists outside G-d plan for us. For fear of being considered unnatural or ungodly, the expression of queerness is censored. Subhi, Geelan, McMahon, Jusoff, Mohamad, Sarnon, Nen, Hoesni, Chong, Fauziah and Alavi (2011) found in their study that the most prominent concern of their participants was the fear that they would go to hell or that God had rejected them. Feelings of guilt and shame were common as participants felt judged by their religious communities and were made to feel less than human. In my research participants did not speak of direct instances where their congregations targeted them, but the shared how subtle undertones of homophobia made clear they were unwelcome. From the FGDs it is evident that participants experience of religion has not generally been positive or life affirming.

In the literature I referred to the legal matter between queer-identifying Methodist minister De Lange and the Methodist church of South Africa. The judgement in that matter that opened the door for religious institutions to discriminate against queer members of the congregation without fear of legal consequence, hiding behind a nefarious legal precedent based on freedom of religious belief. It was seen as a victory for churches and suggests that religious freedom and the autonomy of the church are of greater constitutional importance than the values of equality and dignity.

Religion is often used to condemn queerness and justify injury towards QPoC. Paradoxically, religious institutions are also seen as a spaces for community and acceptance. The loss of religious community experienced by research participants that abandoned organised religion was profoundly mourned during our discussions. Rather than being open to all who seek to belong to the congregation of G-d, patriarchal heteronormativity is seen as a synonymous with the reproduction of the family.

5.3.3 Letting go of toxic theology

Majority of the negative experiences of the participants of this research were associated with religion either directly or indirectly. Some participants moved away from culture and/or religion to distance themselves from this, while others tried to eliminate the queerness through prayer or not expressing this element of their identity. These findings were consistent with the literature reviewed especially the writings of Crockett *et al.* (2018) that gave examples of how people were forced to choose – either their religion or their sexual identity, while Winder (2015) introduced the intersection of race, explaining how religious institutions serve as moral pillars for communities of colour and how belonging to these religious communities as a queer-identifying person, involved facing harmful homophobia. Valentine and Waite (2012) explained the concept of intersecting multiple identities and the complex intersectional realities that contrast with lived experiences. Religious affiliation is often the basis for recognition so to surrender this affiliation is to trade a core aspect of one's identity for another.

There are QPoC who are forced by the church to surrender their identity in an effort to be worth of G-d's love, QPoC who try to pray away the gay and cannot find themselves represented in scripture. These people are often subjected to physical and mental health consequences (Lewis *et al.*, 2006) as they contort themselves to fit the mould of the dominant heterosexual norms

(Phejane, 2020). In surrendering, they are denied and removed from their place and belonging in society (Butler, 1999). Sadly, there are members of our queer population who become collaborators. They do not only refrain from expressing their own queer identity, but police other queer bodies to conform to gendered reproductive binaries.

Even within the queer community, QPoC who are religious described encountering hostile reactions from other QPoC who are critical of how religion and religious institutions uphold a white heteronormative social order. Perhaps we can consider this resistance. Where QPoC challenge the system and encourage alternative ways of practising religion, like the work of Van der Walt (2017) that argues that intercultural bible reading creates an opportunity to question the heteropatriarchy that is often based on the exclusive practise of bible interpretation, and invites queer-identifying people who have been pushed to the margins, excluded from society and silenced to be seen and heard by creating a safer, more supportive environment where the ideologies that inform othering can be named, dismantled and deconstructed, or what Davids *et al.*, (2019) consider to be the embodied reclaiming of life affirmations by embracing our queerness and redefining what is normal and sacred in religious spaces.

In one of the FGDs, participants felt that their safe space (the church) for making new acquaintances was taken away because it is where they faced anti-gay sentiments, and instead of giving up their queer identity, they gave up their religious home, only to later return to it or find alternative ways of engaging with religion and G-d. These findings are similar to those of Valentine and Waite (2012) whose lesbian and gay faith focus group respondents described how they either withdrew from antireligious queer spaces in order to not compromise their religious beliefs or by creating their own space to maintain a sense of holistic identity. Schuck

and Liddle (2001) found that respondents from their study of joint religious homosexual congregations, which was helpful as they did not feel judged and condemned by members of these congregations. Sibisi and Van der Walt (2021) investigated these queer religious spaces created by queers for queers and found that even within these queer churches there is a fixation of one's gender representation rather than their spiritual needs. From the FGDs it was evident that those who left organised religion still sought a space for spirituality while those who remained, did so in an attempt to find their own healing through helping others like them navigate toxic theology. Perhaps this is resilience – accepting the injury as part of the journey towards resistance. We must be resilient to resist, but we don't have to resist to be resilient. To be resilient is to choose to survive. Eliminating toxic theology is generational work and those who remain and are resilient pave the way for others to be able to resist in the future.

The writings of Rotolo (2007 and 2021) help us understand this better, illustrating that how people relate and understand religion is fluid and dynamic and so rather than focusing only on the binary of people being religious or not, there should be space to consider various ways of being religious and how various spiritual beliefs, practises and ideologies intersect with people's lives in ways that are meaningful. Choosing to remove oneself from the violence of religion because of one's queer identity does not mean a loss of religion but rather an alternative invocation of it, a choosing of the way, rather than following it as described by Ammerman (2014).

5.3.4 Building or finding resilience

One of the participants explained how he expresses his queer identity because he wants to be seen and known as queer but has actively decided to remain in the closet at home. This is an expression of what Alonzo and Buttitta (2019) found in their study, where participants were

not openly queer with their closest family members, despite being comfortable with their queer identity to themselves and in other queer-friendly spaces. These social anxieties can be associated with dependency as the majority of the participants expressed that as they grew older and became more financially independent, building alternative support structures outside of organised religion, their confidence to face the social and religious anxieties associated with identifying as queer became more bearable.

The findings of my research suggest that QPoC are tenacious. Queerness is a means of exercising power and where there is power, there is bound to be resistance (Pickett, 1996). Religious leaders are often aware of the need for sensitivity to the cultural contexts of its congregation but are wilfully blind to queer cultural contexts, as if they have neither legitimacy nor respectability. According to Countryman and Ritley (2001) religious spaces must become aware that just as they cannot treat PoC as defective white people, they cannot pretend that queer people are defective cisgendered heterosexuals. There is a tendency to tolerate rather than integrate, which became apparent from the FGDs and an expectation that QPoC ought to be grateful and meekly submit to whatever ‘lingering indignities’ come with it (Countryman and Ritley, 2001: 5). Subhi et al.. (2011, 13) conducted a study exploring the challenges faced by Christians who are homosexual in their attempt at reconciling their sexual orientation with their religious and spiritual beliefs. Their results showed that the church proposed that the best way to deal with homosexuality is for the individual to deny and overcome their homosexual feelings. Similarly, Nkosi and Masson (2017) found that the most common source of conflict for Christians who were trying to accept their sexual identity was religious teachings about homosexuality. All the participants from their study had experienced discrimination and prejudice from the church (Nkosi and Masson, 2017). These toxic theologies discourage social inclusion and compassion and force QPoC to choose between their faith and their identity.

5.3.5 Sanctifying sacrifice

Accepting queerness is an emotional journey that is made more difficult when the place of safety and comfort becomes the source of conflict. Many of the participants in this research have lost friends and family because of their queer identity. The predominant message from religion is that the concepts of queerness and faith cannot coexist. For the participants who grew up in religious homes this resulted in an inner turmoil and conflict with G-d. Ultimately though, for majority of the participants in the study the result was to cease fellowship. The choice by my research participants to leave organised religion because of its toxic theology is consistent in the findings of Winder (2015) whose writings suggest that the homophobia experienced in these religious spaces is intolerable. Leaving organised religion however does not translate into losing their spirituality but rather a prioritisation of their personal experiences of faith. Participants describe abandoning their religion and religious beliefs to free themselves to be comfortable with their authentic selves, achieve a consistency of self-expression across the spaces they inhabit.

From this I deduce that the harm done by the church extends far beyond the immediate consequences of limited religious affiliation, denying QPoC the freedom to fully express all the complex aspects of their identity. All the participants had religious upbringings or had been exposed to religion through their family or parents but because they were not able to reconcile the religious teachings with their identity, most chose to leave their religion, with those who remained enduring the suffering of the church's life-denying dogma. Queer identity is often portrayed as deserving of suffering. Sacrifice is consistent with queer identity. You must give up something to be your authentic self. This glorification of suffering is sanctified as a holy

privilege for Christians who are encouraged to suffer as Christ suffered²⁸²⁹ thus making it difficult for QPoC to resist it.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter was an opportunity to reflect on the findings of the research against the backdrop of the literature presented in chapter two using the theoretical framework presented in chapter three. I discussed queerness as a fluid identity that is constantly evolving, resisting definition. Using queer and Intersectionality Theory I was able to unpack the interlocking systems of domination and oppression and begin to imagine an alternative for QPoC in South Africa. Queerness threatens systems of heterosexual privilege, white supremacy, and male domination. From the study it was evident that queerness itself has succeeded in remaining queer - undefinable, ever changing and uniquely expressed, interpreted, and understood. I then discussed econo-hetero-patriarchy, reflecting on the paradox of passing – by avoiding the acute negative consequences of being seen or accepting the chronic consequences by remaining unseen and invalidated as worthy of life/existence. Heteronormativity works to support and reinforce racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation, particularly in Cape Town. A certain class membership is required to attain access into queer spaces as a PoC or black spaces as a queer-identifying person and surrendering class membership is complexly situated in our identity expression. Class is often the buffer to vulnerability but is only accessed or maintained if one is queer in a manner that is accepted within the confines of the heterosexist binary. While QPoC hold rights enshrined in the constitution, the definition of freedom expands beyond what is codified in law. QPoC forge possibilities of belonging freely in Cape Town through a deliberate destabilising of heteronormative notions of queer and black identity. What the researched

²⁸ Philippians 1:29 - For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on His behalf

²⁹ 1 Peter 2:21 - For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you

highlighted was that to experience freedom as a QPoC in Cape Town, queer bodies of colour are forced to either deracinate queerness or divorce ourselves from non-confirming gender expressions and sexuality. The possibility creating space for redemptive life affirming theology was discussed by interrogating the use of the Sociology of Religion, exploring how some QPoC surrender or become collaborators with toxic theology, while others have found coping mechanisms that build resilience, allowing them to resist in their own ways. Religion should be about affirming the spark of the divide that animates all human beings, asserting that G-d did not consult cisgendered heterosexuals when creating us. As I discussed the findings, I realised that the challenge of religion is that it focused on QPoC as the problem rather than identifying religiously-infused patriarchal heteronormativity as the problem. The relationship with religion for QPoC is complex and to achieve a free South Africa, religious resources need to go beyond resilience and begin to resist life-denying theologies.

6 CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Religion is woven into the fabric of our society to such an extent that it would be impossible to imagine life without it, but perhaps there is a possibility of imagining a life that fully embraces our diversities because of it. From the research study, it is clear that religion forms the basis for our moral views, guiding our daily interactions whether we are religious or not. Religious beliefs are imposed upon us, casting us as the villains in other people's stories without our consent.

South Africa is a young democracy grappling with brutal violence and injury towards QPoc. Ironically, the God known for leading the oppressed out of bondage towards freedom is being used by so-called prophets to justify oppression. Though this paper focused on the Sociology of Religion and not any one religion, the majority of South Africans are Christian, therefore religiosity in a South African context is not removed from the social function and performance of social constructs of cultural values. If we are to realise the rainbow nation envisioned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the church's task cannot be to impose the ready-made Eurocentric theology of the coloniser but must evolve into an inclusive theology that embraces all South Africans in their diversity, including QPoc.

The purpose of this research was to determine if liberation is worth suffering for by exploring how queer-identifying people of colour living in Cape Town, South Africa construct, reconstruct and express their identities throughout their lives across various socio-religious contexts.

The research questions that have been answered are:

1. What are the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression in Cape Town South Africa?
2. How do queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious contexts in Cape Town South Africa?
3. How are queer people's lived experiences impacted by religion and what role does/can religion have on shifting experiences of identity construction, negotiation and expression experiences in Cape Town, South Africa?

6.2 Summary of chapters

In chapter one I presented the rationale and motivation for the research by describing how patriarchal practises are socialised across South African cultures and how the interpretations of scripture inform a dominate heteronormative narrative that is enforced onto all bodies. I examine how patriarchy not only controls the hierarchy of human value but governs what are considered acceptable sexual and intimate relations, producing a binary centred on reproduction. I highlighted the stigma faced by QPoC and revealed how religion is used to dehumanise us. I introduced the intersection of race, class and gender and contextualised it in a post-apartheid South Africa, exploring whiteness and white supremacy from a religious perspective. In addition, chapter one presented the research design and explained the structure of the research.

In chapter two I reviewed the literature landscape for the study, focusing on the key research used by Queer Theory and the Sociology of Religion to make meaning of their work in the study of heterosexual norms and homophobia, internalised stigma and shame, queerness,

queer-identity formation and expression, the role of religion in liberating, social and cultural norms as reinforcers of patriarchy as an underlying system of domination, the role of language in the construction and expression of identity, the closet and coming out and inviting in, and South African legislation and the Constitution in relation to the human dignity and equality of queer-identifying people. In reviewing existing literature, I considered the complexity and nuance of the closet and the violence often associated with queer identity construction, negotiation, and expression. From the literature reviewed I was able to understand the scale of existing knowledge and identify gaps that this research would aim to fill. The literature provided a comprehensive framework for understanding queer identity and offered an opportunity to explore the impact of class on QPoC, influences and uses of power and our ability to shield ourselves from religiously-infused vulnerability that promotes the self-sacrifice as holy rather than profane.

In chapter three I explored the theoretical frameworks the study would use to guide the research and analyse the findings. In my attempt to understand whether QPoC are prepared to sacrifice themselves for systemic change and liberation, in socioreligious contexts I explored how Queer Theory, and the Sociology of Religion could be used. Using a Queer Theory perspective, I explored identity as fluid and performed in a manner that is responsive to institutional settings, physical environments, and relational contexts in which QPoC are located. Recognising that I intended to consider QPoC, it was important to understand the impact of the intersection of race with queer identity. Queer Theory has often been criticised for not representing the unique experiences of PoC, so Intersectionality Theory was used as a sub-category of Queer Theory to do this work. Using the Theory of the Sociology of Religion, I aimed to understand how religion and religious experiences impact the lives of QPoC. I drew on Queer Theory to understand how societal norms are influenced by and influence, are impacted by and impact

queer identity construction and expression. I drew on the Sociology of Religion to understand how queer identity is negotiated in different socioreligious contexts with varying socioreligious pressures. In chapter three I also presented the research paradigm and explained the methodology in detail before presenting the ethical considerations that I had taken and the risks that were foreseen. I explained the research goals and objectives and how data would be collected through FGDs to answer the sub-research questions and explained the sampling framework. I further explained how thematic analysis would be used to interpret the data to discuss the findings and find a suitable conclusion to the study.

In chapter four I presented that data collected through the FGDs. I conducted four in-depth FGDs with QPoC living in Cape Town, South Africa over a period of four days. Listening to the voices that are often silenced as unworthy, I gained insight into the experiences of a sample of QPoC which served as the starting point for reflection. From the FGDs I was able to generate rich data that I analysed thematically, sorting it into the following six themes: Queerness, Passing, Freedom with conditions, Being different and othered, The consequences of queerness, Letting go and Sacrifice. It was a beautiful experience to be a part of as participants openly and comfortably shared aspects of their nuanced experiences of being queer and of colour in Cape Town, South Africa.

In chapter five I discussed the findings of the research in relation to the literature explored and the theory that guided the research methodology. Here I highlight how non-normative constructions of gender and sexual identity can defy the hegemonic norm. Acknowledging that there are a multitude of consequences that arise from our resistance to the binary I expose alternative uses of power and how QPoC are not merely acted upon, but exercise agency and choice in constructing, negotiating, and expressing their queer identities. I then interrogate the

notion that religion is to blame for the suffering of QPoC and explore how religion is used by those who victimise QPoC to justify the injury. I challenge us to reimagine the category of queer, not just as an umbrella term for SOGIESC but as a way of destabilising the notions of belonging associated with racist heteropatriarchy.

6.3 Key findings

The research questions of this study have been answered by the findings of the four FGDs held with fifteen QPoC in Cape Town. The key findings that relate to these research questions are presented here.

6.3.1 Class access to safety

From the research it is evident that the link between identity and behaviour to power is not as clear and linear as some queer theorists suggest. Heteronormativity works to support and reinforce institutional racism, patriarchy and class and therefore must form part of how we trouble the construction of the white supremacy, male domination, and capitalist advancement. While QPoC may theoretically enjoy the protections of the South African Constitution, accessing those protections is dependent on both class privileges and gender conformation. For many QPoC the protections offered by the Constitution have little meaning in their lives.

As a result of the consequences of apartheid, majority of PoC in South Africa live working class lives. Therefore, though Cape Town is considered a liberal haven for QPoC, space is only reserved to those who can afford to assimilate to the whiteness associated with it. This whiteness in a post-apartheid South Africa is often associated with middle- and upper-class lifestyles. Queerness is accepted in Cape Town if it is attached to a white body, while PoC are expected to conform to the heteronormative ideals. To be accepted in queer communities

requires that QPoC negotiate the expression of their race which comes at a cost. Sacrifice was a consistent theme for QPoC in this study, as they were forced to choose between giving up their faith or family to live queer lives, or their surrendering their authenticity to be accepted by religion. The burden of this sacrifice is potentially lessened by the economic benefits afforded to QPoC in better class positions thus limiting the vulnerability our queer bodies of colour are exposed to.

6.3.2 For you and for me and the entire human race

Queer is not another alphabet identity: it is radical destabilising resistance, a symbol of the struggle against heteronormative culture. Violence in South Africa is institutionalised and as QPoC we have been forced to adapt to the casual cruelty and institutional violence meted out against our queer bodies because of our non-normative identities. Our queerness exposes the erasure of queer bodies of colour and their achievements. Our queerness must remain radically outside the norm to give insight into the complexities of power that impact our lived experiences at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race. It is necessary for us to use redemptive methodologies of theology that enable us to see ourselves in the great narratives of literature and scripture and bring our lived experiences into the interpretations of religious texts. Though the closet may help us prepare for a world beyond its boundaries, we cannot thrive in the dark. The closet is the antithesis of freedom, it is the absence and defiance of God's plan. Our role as QPoC in South Africa is to decolonise the minds of our people and return us to the path of freedom like the prophets of old, calling out the false gods of capitalism and the false prophets and their salvation for profit theology. To do this, we do suffer, so that those that come after us can be free.

6.3.3 Surrender, Collaborate, be Resilient or Resist!

QPoC are invited through injury to act. Ernest Hemingway reminds us in *A Farewell to Arms* that,

'The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these, you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.' — Ernest Hemingway

It is apparent from the lived experiences of QPoC in this research that being broken is currently the only path to become stronger. We learn resilience through our contextual lived experiences. So, when I ask if liberation is worth suffering for, the simple answer uncovered through this research is yes.

There are few QPoC who remain faithful to their religious obligations, genuinely devoted to G-d trying to live out both the religious dogma and the truth of their own lives. These resilient few are crucial to the evolution of queer resistance, as many QPoC are still forced into exile, becoming refugees from religious institutions that will never accept them, or remaining hidden, silent, fearful collaborators to heteropatriarchal power.

6.4 Recommendations

Through this research I identified a need for research examining the impact of class on the lived experience of QPoC and how this influences their identity construction, negotiation, and expression. Race alone does not sufficiently surface the complexity of being a PoC in post-Apartheid Cape Town, South Africa. Systemic realities relating to class inform othering, stigma

and dehumanisation are life-denying and contextual and the impact is informed by the inescapable econo-hetero-patriarchy. Further research needs to explicitly look beyond race to understand the anxieties faced by QPoC in socioreligious contexts and consider the interlinking systems that result from the historical and cultural burdens of our race.

In pursuance of this, it surfaced clearly that participants in this research had been able to find resilience and negotiate their identity expression in ways that felt safe and comfortable. Participants in this research represented a population of QPoC who identified as queer and were therefore able to reconcile their identity – they were the queers who survived. I believe that the findings are limited by this sample and there would be value in exploring the views of QPoC who have given up their queerness in favour of acceptance into religious institutions—those who have surrendered or become collaborators.

Beyond resilience lies resistance – QPoC claiming power results in a constant interaction, negotiation, and competition among forces as the powerful always seek to become more powerful. Therefore, future research should consider the potential that forces may combine in complex arrangements to achieve more power and that this could be possible with redemptive theologies that use the relational nature of power.

6.5 Conclusion

This paper has presented the findings of a research study aimed at exploring the resilience of queer-identity negotiation in a reactionary religious South Africa. It has explored the existential threats of queer identity expression in the context of socio-religious cultural values. Reflecting on how the paradox of South Africa, the most progressive constitutional democracy in Africa has some of the highest crime statistics against queer-identifying people, the data showed that

QPoC suffer injury not limited to, hate crimes, homophobia, and internalized stigma, when expressing their identity in heterosexist spaces that are influenced and sustained by religion and culture, but by sacrificing religion and the safety of family in exchange for their queerness. The data showed powerful intersections between various forms of identity – race, gender, and sexuality, which in turn suggest a uniformity of the experiences of queerness as a result of the pervasive nature of patriarchal heteronormativity. There is a desperate need for alternative theologies and Queer theologians to lead religious institutions in order to centre and represent marginalised communities, allowing us to become dialogue partners in theological excavation, integrating historically inherited theology with new sites of struggle and moving us closer to deciphering G-d's plan.

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8 ANNEXURES

8.1 Annexure I: Participant invitation letter



COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

Dear: Queer friend of a friend

RE: Participant invitation letter

My name is Charlene Donald from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's College of Humanities School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (my contact details are charlene4ukzn@gmail.com; +27824674657)

You are invited to consider participating in a study that involves research focusing on understanding the dynamics of how queer identifying people negotiate their identity construction/formation and expression in the context of the socio-religious cultural values of South Africa, as a progressive constitutional democracy with some of the highest hate crime statistics in the world. The aim and purpose of this research is to understand what queer-identifying lived experiences are, and how these impact how queer-identifying people live their lives – either in- or out- “the closet”, to influence religion to use its power to affirm life.

The study is expected to enrol 15 participants in total who will make up 3 groups, of five people each, that will meet once off for a maximum of ninety minutes online using the Zoom Application for a focus group discussion (FGD). The participants will be expected to engage with each other and a FGD facilitator on themes relating to the areas of research. Each focus group will be asked to agree on one key theme that dominated their discussions and keep a

written diary over a period of one week where they write a daily reflection of their experiences in relation to the agreed theme.

If you choose to enrol in the study you will be expected to remain in the study for a minimum of two weeks, for 90 minutes on one day and a maximum of 15 minutes for the succeeding days.

This process may be therapeutic; however, it may trigger negative emotions if you are reflecting on a negative personal experience. Psychosocial support services will be made available to you, should you require and request these. We hope that the study will benefit you by giving you a platform to share your voice and be heard. You will be provided with data to facilitate your participation in the study.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSSREC/00003589/2021).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at +27824676457 or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

The participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of withdrawal from participation you will not incur any penalty and all your data will be destroyed confidentially. If you choose at any point to withdraw from the study, kindly inform myself (the researcher) in writing. You are asked to respect the views of other participants and to treat all information shared as part of the FGD as confidential. Your

participation will be terminated if you breach confidentiality and/or should you not submit your daily written reflection for three days or two consecutive days.

No costs will be incurred by you as a participant of this study as you will be provided with 10GB of mobile data to participate virtually.

To ensure and protect your confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym name to use online. Your written reflections will also be saved using the pseudonym name ascribed to you. The FGD recording and your written diary reflections will be kept safely in a password protected folder.

The data will be kept for a period of five years post completion of the study and will thereafter be destroyed.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and this letter of invitation does not obligate you to take part in this research study. To participate, you will be required to provide written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions of the study.

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will find our request favourable.

Yours sincerely,

Charlene Donald
Research Student

Prof Charlene Van der Walt
Supervisor

8.2 Annexure II: Focus Group Discussion Protocol

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Online Protocol

Research Topic: Is Liberation worth suffering for? An exploration of the impact of religion on the process of queer identity construction, expression and negotiation in Western Cape, South Africa.

Thank for you agreeing to participate in the research study. As part of the data collection, you are requested to participate in this FGD, where you will reflect on your thoughts, feelings and actions relating to specific personal and/or experiences.

This process may be therapeutic; however, it may trigger negative emotions if you are reflecting on a negative personal experience. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need any psychosocial support as this will be made available for you.

In preparation for the FGD kindly download the Zoom Application. You will be given a meeting ID and passcode before the FGD. Please ensure that these are kept confidential as only invited participants taking part in the research study are welcome to join.

FDG Online Protocol:

- Kindly ensure you log on 3 minutes before the scheduled start time.
- Kindly ensure you have stable internet connection and are connecting from a quiet place where you will be able to speak freely and comfortably.
- Kindly rename yourself with a pseudonym provided and indicate your preferred pronouns (for example: Josephine, she/they).
- If you are comfortable, please keep your video on, however please keep your microphone muted at all times unless you are not speaking to ensure clear audio.
- To assist the facilitators, coordinate the discussion please use the “raise hand” function if you would like to input in the discussion, however if your video is on, you may physically raise your hand.

The FGD is scheduled for 90 minutes and we will use the questions below to guide our discussions. Please review them and think about your own lived experiences and/or experiences that you have witnessed and draw on these in the FGD. Please respond to all the questions as honestly as possible. If you are unsure of the meaning of the question, please ask the FGD facilitator to assist in clarifying.

We aim to create a safer space so please respect each other's responses and ensure that you keep the content of our discussion confidential. The meeting will be recorded however the recording files will be for the sole use of the researcher.

As the researcher, I recognise that the FGD will require a level of vulnerability and trust of the whole group, I do not exist outside of this conversation and am embedded within the discourse as it is a part of my lived experience as well. I am invested in developing a better understanding of queer identity construction and expression, as I myself am a queer-identifying woman of colour. My identity is subjective and influenced by the context in which I find myself. I acknowledge the construction of my identity as fluid and on-going, and how I express it, is influenced by the space(s) in which I perform it.

If at any point you feel distressed or emotional, there trauma counsellor – Anita Simon, who is also a TRE (tensions release exercise) and QEC (quantum energy coaching) provider who is available throughout the data collection period. Her contact details will be shared with you at the onset of the FGD and she will be available throughout the discussion to support you if you need. In addition, you will be encouraged to attend a debriefing with her after the FGD.

Through the FGD I hope to begin to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the social, religious, and legal anxieties related to queer identity construction and expression in South Africa
2. How do queer people negotiate their identity construction and expression in socio-religious contexts in South Africa
3. How are queer people's lived experiences impacted by their identity expression and what role does/can religion have in shifting these experiences

Lived Experiences

- a. What is your racial/ethnic background and how has it shaped who you are as a person today?
 - i. (follow up: could you recall an incident that has been affirming/denying?)
- b. How do you identify on the LGBTQ+ spectrum and how did you come to identify as such?
- c. What has been your experience of living as a queer person in South Africa?
- d. What level of *acceptance* or *hostility* or *indifference* have you experienced from your family or community towards you as a queer person?
- e. What role, if any, has religion played in your life, as a queer person. (follow up: could you share an example of a positive/negative experience)?

Identity construction

- a. What life experience(s) as a queer identifying person of colour has most significantly influenced the development of your identity?
- b. How has your experience(s) of living in South Africa (negative/positive) influenced your queerness?
- c. In what ways have your culture or religion influenced how you express your queer self?

Identity negotiation(s)

- a. Would you describe yourself as living in or out “the closet”? or Is this different in different settings?
 - i. (follow up: explain why this is so)
- b. What are ways and places, if any, where you express your queer identity differently?... for example, work, family, church/ mosque, gym
 - i. (follow up: What are the reasons for this; could you share an example)
- c. How has your queer identity or ways of expressing yourself in social and religious contexts evolved throughout your life?

Role of religion, society, legislation and culture

- a. In a general sense, how has religion impacted your lived experiences as a queer identifying person... from childhood to now?
- b. What are the possible tensions, if any, between being queer identifying person of colour, and your cultural or religious background?
- c. Are there any redeeming aspect of religion or culture that have, or you hope will let you live more authentically as a queer person?
 - i. (follow up: Please explain and/or share an example)
- d. How does the cultural and religious language used by yourself and others (to refer to you or to describe you), influence your feelings about being queer?
- e. Are there any other thought or experiences that you want to add, that are related to the topics discussed in our session today?

8.3 Annexure III: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled *Is Liberation worth suffering for? An exploration of the resilience of queer identity negotiation in a reactionary religious South Africa* by Charlene Donald, under the supervision of Professor Rico Settler.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study to understand what queer-identifying lived experiences are and how these impact how queer-identifying people live their lives – either in or out “the closet”, to influence religion to use its power to affirm life, by collecting data through FGDs and written reflection diaries.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (provide details).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my focus group discussion	YES / NO
Video-record focus group discussion	YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes

YES / NO

Information Explanation
The above information was explained to me by:
The above information was explained to me in: <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Afrikaans <input type="checkbox"/> isiXhosa <input type="checkbox"/> isiZulu <input type="checkbox"/> Other: and I am in command of this language
OR , it was comprehensibly translated to me by:

Voluntary Consent		
I, _____, hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above-mentioned research.		
Signature:	OR , right hand thumb print	Date: / /
	Witness signature:	

Investigator Declaration	
I, _____, declare that I have explained all the participant information to the participant and have truthfully answered all questions ask me by the participant.	
Signature:	Date: / /

Translator Declaration	
I, _____, declare that I translated a factually correct version of: all the contents of this document all questions posed by the participant all answers given by the investigator	
In addition, I declare that all information acquired by me regarding this research will be kept confidential.	
Signature	Date: / /

8.4 Annexure IV: Referral Pathway



REFRRAL PATHWAY

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research titled *Is Liberation worth suffering for? An exploration of the impact of religion on the process of queer identity construction, expression and negotiation in Cape Town, South Africa.*

Please note that:

If, as a result of your participation in the research project you find that uncomfortable feeling or memories are triggered, and that you wish to speak to someone about this, provision has been made for you to immediately contact a trauma release counsellor Anita Simon on +27840150166 who will be on standby during the focus group discussions. The Uthingo Network will offer full support to you during this process, ensuring that there are measures in place to support mental and emotional well-being. They will reach out to you to check on your well-being, however, should you prefer to contact them directly you may do so on +27 33 342 6165 or email info@uthingonetwork.org.za

Should you wish to independently contact a counsellor, I recommend Life Line Western Cape Counselling Centre who offer confidential and anonymous counselling.

Lifeline Western Cape Counselling Centre provides free specialist psycho-social counselling to everyone who have experienced trauma.

Details for Lifeline Western Cape are as follows:

- Telephonically between 10h00 and 22h00 on +27 21 461 1111
- Via WhatsApp 24 hours on +27 63 709 2620

*Due to Covid-19 restrictions, no face-to-face counselling services are being offered.

Yours sincerely,

Charlene Donald

Research Student

Prof Rico Settler

Supervisor

8.5 Annexure V: Letter of Support from Uthingo Network



12 December 2021

University of KwaZulu-Natal
School of Theology – Gender, Religion and Health Department

To whom it may concern

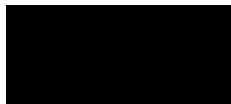
The Uthingo Network (UN) has received an application from a master's student, Charlene Donald, Student number 221116845, at the UKZN Pietermaritzburg Campus, to support her research by providing counselling services to participants should they require.

Her research topic is: *Is Liberation worth suffering for? An exploration of the impact of religion on the process of queer identity construction, expression and negotiation in Cape Town, South Africa*. The study will engage queer individuals and we are aware that the questions asked, have the potential of bringing up experiences that might be stressful, upsetting, and traumatic to the participants.

We have read her application letter and the ethical considerations the student aims to cover while conducting her research with her participants. Considering the sensitivity of the content to be discussed, the Uthingo Network will offer full support to the participants and the researcher during this process, ensuring that there are measures in place supporting the mental and emotional well-being of the participants, offering psychosocial support through the process of research and follow-up sessions after research has been conducted, should it be required. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, we understand that face-to-face counselling may not be feasible, however, telephonic counselling will be provided at no cost to the participant.

We thank you for considering the Uthingo Network, it is always a pleasure having a helping hand in discovering new knowledge pertaining to issues regarding the LGBTI+ community and society as a whole.

Yours sincerely



Tracey Sibisi
PROGRAMMES COORDINATOR

PO Box 100969, Scottsville 3209, Pietermaritzburg
19 Connaught Road, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 3201
Tel: +27 33 342 6165
www.gaylesbian.org.za – E-mail: info@uthingonetwork.org.za

The Uthingo Network is a registered Non-Profit organization which is tax exempt and has Section18(1) status.
All donations to the Network are tax deductible in terms of Section18(1) at the Income Tax Act 1962, as amended.