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Challenging the Binary: A Photo-Narrative Exploring Sexual Fluidity and the Sexuality–Sex–Gender Continuum in Adult Women in South Africa.

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Declaration

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Abstract

This research explored sexual fluidity in attractions, associations and experiences relating to sexual orientation dimensions and sexual identity development in 5 sexually fluid, South African women between the ages 30–50 years. Prior to being interviewed, participants sourced and selected photographic representations of their experiences regarding their sexual identity development and sexual fluidity. The photographs were utilised during the narrative inquiry interviews to promote discussion and glean deeper understandings of participants' unique experiences. The interviews sought to explore participants' sexual fluidity in attractions, associations and experiences relating to their sexual orientation dimensions (sexual identity and attractions) and sexual identity development within the South African context.

Grounded in dynamic systems and queer theory, this study used a narrative inquiry research design to generate the narratives of participants. Sexual fluidity in attractions were reported by all the participants, with four out of five experiencing feelings of attraction to both women and men during adolescence and early adulthood. Sexual fluidity in sexual identity, based on experiencing changes in attractions, were experienced by four of the five women. The narratives reveal how upbringing, religion, patriarchy and psychological stress, associated with being sexually fluid, may inform sexual identity development among South African women. In addition, the findings from the study highlight the complexities and commonalities pertaining to the impact of the socio-political environment; the influence of internalised value systems; limited opportunities for exposure to LGBTQ communities and; the potential dangers and risks associated with same-sex relationships in South Africa. The implications of this research concur with the findings of Diamond (2008b), Diamond (2013) and Katz-Wise (2012), that sexual orientation is not fixed and even individuals that consider

themselves heteronormative may engage in same-gender sexual behaviour and relationships when prompted by situational or interpersonal factors (Diamond, 2021). Additionally, whilst South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions when it comes to LGBTQ rights, homophobia and hatred of the 'other' is rife (Nel & Judge, 2008; Wells & Polders, 2006). Future studies are required to investigate channels to reduce homophobia and bring South African attitudes in line with policies. Of primary importance is the assessment of how environment impacts and shapes sexual identities and sexual orientation, and how these may lead to social stress and marginalisation.

Keywords: sexual fluidity, sexual orientation, LGBTQ, South Africa, psychological distress, identity development, gender-based violence, shame.

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The Use of Terminology

The definition of certain terms used in this dissertation are relevant to the area of study. The literature discussed in this dissertation might have defined the population and sample of interest in different terms. These studies might have focused on either lesbian or gay or bisexual or sexually fluid people, or else have included broader definitions of people, such as LGBTQ individuals, which include transgender people. Different terms might also have been used, for example “homosexual” when referring to lesbian or gay individuals, or both. These original definitions used by the cited authors have been retained in the discussion in the current study, even though this study focuses on sexually fluid individuals.

The words photograph, photo and image have been used interchangeably throughout this document.

List of Acronyms

CHR	Centre for Human Rights
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual
DLGCHC	Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre
GLN	Gay and Lesbian Network
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HSSREC	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association
PsySSA	Psychological Society of South Africa
SASAS	South African Social Attitudes Survey
WHO	World Health Organization
TPHRR	The Triangle Project Human Rights Report

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 provides the reader with a general overview of the study, including the rationale for the research, and the contextual backgrounds in which the research objectives and questions are embedded. These are discussed under the headings: gender based violence (GBV), homosexuality in history, attitudes towards sexual orientation in South Africa, sexual fluidity and sexual identity development, psychological distress, and sexual orientation. Motivation for why this study is important and the need for further research is extrapolated, together with the research objectives and questions, which are outlined, and finally the dissertation layout is provided.

1.1 Rationale

According to Katz-Wise (2012), classic understandings regarding sexual orientation such as Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith (1981) and Money (1988), surmise that an individual's sexual orientation develops early in life and remains stable over time. These theories have been challenged over the last thirty years, due to the increasing frequency of contemporary studies such as those of Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2005; Diamond, 2008a; Diamond, 2012; Everett, 2015; Katz-Wise, 2012; Katz-Wise, 2015, which contrastingly report changes in an individual's sexual orientation over time (sexual fluidity). This study aligns itself with those of Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2005; Diamond, 2008a; Diamond, 2012; Everett, 2015; Katz-Wise, 2012 and Katz-Wise, 2015, and aims to explore sexual orientation, attractions and identity as dynamic rather than fixed and stable.

When referencing changes in sexual orientation over time, Diamond (2008b, p. 3) utilises the term *sexual fluidity,* which is defined in her research as "situation-dependent flexibility in women's sexual responsiveness", whilst Baumeister (2000, p. 348) utilises the term *erotic plasticity*, which refers to the "degree to which a person's sex drive can be shaped

and altered by cultural and social factors, from formal socialization to situational pressures". Motivation for this research posits that if sexuality is constructed over time, what "situations" (Diamond, 2008b), or "factors" (Baumeister, 2000), contribute to the manifestation of sexual fluidity in the South African context and, how have changes in sexual orientation contributed to adult female participants' identities, social standing and well-being.

According to Diamond (2008b), previous models of sexuality were based on men's experiences due to most of the research being conducted with men; as a result, women's sexuality largely remains poorly understood. Baumeister's (2000) extensive review and synthetization of accumulated evidence argued pervasive gender differences in erotic variability and flexibility. This research is urgent and important as there is need for deeper understandings regarding women's sexuality and according to both Baumeister (2000) and Diamond (2008b), women have more capacity for sexual variability than men.

Fluctuations in sexual desire and orientation requires reorganisation of an individual's overall identity as well as their positioning in society (Everett, 2015). Arguably undergoing a restructuring of sexual orientation, assimilation of personal identity, and prescribing to an unfamiliar group culture (in the case of transitioning from heterosexual to homosexual or from homosexual to heterosexual), may be construed as a stressful event (Everett, 2015, p. 37).

Despite the efforts of policy makers and LGBTQ organizations, homosexuality remains stigmatised (Reddy, 2001). According to Drescher (2015), historically, homosexual orientations were deemed to be morally wrong in Western culture, greatly due to the influence of religion. Whilst traditional values may vary from culture to culture, a dominant Western culture, heavily influenced by Christianity, colonialism, and patriarchal, paternal values, has historically discouraged homosexuality and other forms of sexual and gender diversity (Epprecht, 2006; Phillips 2003). Patriarchal, paternal values refer, within the context

of this research, to the dominant, oppressive institution where men hold all the power and women are deprived of that power (Lerner, 1986). Decolonialising and deconstructing this heterosexually dominant discourse, imposed by the dominant culture, utilises the exploration of other "non-Western" cultures that offer alternatives to mainstream gender and sexual binaries. According to Morgan and Wieringa (2007), same sex practices have been in existence in Africa for a long time. The aforementioned authors go on to advise that traditional same-sex marriages occur amongst the Kamba in Kenya and ancestral marriages between traditional healers (sangomas) in South Africa. In yet another example, Morgan and Wieringa (2007) report that the Damara community in Namibia are more accepting of non-heteronormative leanings, yet this does not mean that same-sex practises or marriages are easy or widely accepted. As another non-Western example, Morgensen (2011) highlights the existence of the two-spirit or queer Native American Indians who do not conform to rigid gender roles. In other research, Morgensen (2012) explains that whilst some Native American tribes do not conform to gender roles, the ones that do, specify a minimum of four genders, namely, feminine women, masculine women, feminine men, masculine men. Morgenson (2011) and Morgan and Wieringa (2007) dispel the myth of homosexuality in Africa as a Western, colonial import. To add, Morgan and Wieringa (2007) assert that it was homophobia that did not exist prior to colonisation, but that homosexual practises were intrinsic to Africa and became vilified as part of the colonial project.

One of the thrusts for discourses and movements that aim to decolonise Africa (and psychology), is the opportunity to reintegrate diverse forms of gender and sexuality back into mainstream culture (Tenenbaum & Singer, 2018). Marginalised sexualities or sexual minority groups refer to individuals not conforming to those constructed by popular society. Namely those who identify as queer, homosexual, bi-sexual, transgender, lesbian, gay, sexually fluid and any other non-heterosexual orientation, attraction or identity. As heterosexuality is most

often assumed, other sexualities are relegated to ‘other’, queer or minority status. Queer or lesbian women are often a silent and invisible minority within the broader definition of a heteronormative society, and in addition they hold the double minority status of being both lesbian, and female within a patriarchal society largely dominated by men (Wells, Kruger & Judge, 2020).

In 2018, the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), released a set of practice guidelines for psychological professionals working with sexually and gender diverse individuals. The development and roll out of such a document alone strengthen the motivation for further study of LGBTQ minority individuals. The PsySSA guidelines confirm the urgency of pioneering innovative research in line with the latest emerging literature and by redefining traditional linear models of sexual fluidity (McLachlan, et al., 2019). As mentioned, restrictive, heteropaternal, Christian narratives have, in the past, dominated South Africa and constrained growth in these areas, meaning that many therapists and health care providers lack competence and knowledge with regards to sexual orientation issues, hence having difficulty providing adequate services (Nel, 2007; Nel & Judge, 2008). The lack of training on sexual minority issues, combined with the minimal literature available on this topic within the South African context may be to blame for this deficit in healthcare (Coetzee, 2009; Nel, 2007). Advancing research into this under-studied area will inevitably ensure relevance and best practice, and although studies have been conducted on sexually fluid women in other parts of the world, few have been conducted in South Africa.

1.2 Gender-Based Violence

GBV can range from verbal abuse, bullying, rape, physical violence, and murder, but verbal abuse is the most common (Naidoo & Karels, 2012). In a society where heterosexuality is considered normal, same-sex attraction can be both frightening and

dangerous (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Toleration of gender and sexual diversity within South Africa is contentious, with the *corrective rape* (a form of sexual punishment by men towards lesbians in order to cure them of their sexual orientation) of lesbian women erroneously believed by some to be a cure for homosexuality (Naidoo & Karels, 2012; Mwambene & Wheal, 2015). In April 2021, a press statement by the Centre for Human Rights (CHR) at the University of Pretoria, condemned the spate of recent hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ persons in South Africa. The CHR statement names six individuals murdered between February to April 2021, because of their gender, sexual orientation or sex. The CHR statement has called for action on several levels including improved government policies, reinstatement of the National Task Team on Gender and Sexual Orientation-based Violence (which has been on hold since early 2020), the funding and restoration of functionality to entities tasked to investigate hate crimes, and the urgent implementation of sensitisation programmes to government institutions.

With GBV being a forerunner in the media, understanding gender and sexuality has never been more pertinent and topical. According to the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) conducted in 2015, a staggering 450,000 South Africans reported physically harming women "who dress and behave like men in public" in the 12 months preceding the survey, undertaken by the Human Sciences Research council (Sutherland, et al., 2016, p.3). Statistics such as these, leads one to ponder on the reasons behind such violent acts, and motivate for further investigation into GBV, especially within the South African context, hence providing further justification for this research project.

The following section explores a brief history of homosexuality from a Western cultural perspective to provide the reader with a broad contextual overview of the topic at hand.

1.3 History of Homosexuality

Throughout history Western discourse, heavily influenced by religion, pathologised homosexuality and deemed it morally wrong (Drescher, 2015). To the extent that homosexuality was classified a "sociopathic personality disturbance" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-I), published in 1952 by the American Psychiatric Association, (Drescher, 2015, p. 569). According to an article published on the American Psychiatric Association website, authored by Cabaj (n.d.), the categorisation of homosexuality followed the processes outlined below. In the second edition of the DSM (DSM-II), published in 1968, homosexuality remained listed as a psychological disorder. In the revised second edition of the DSM, published in 1973, homosexuality was reclassified as a "sexual orientation disturbance" (Cabaj, n.d.). According to Spitzer (1981, p. 210), this "represented a compromise between the view that preferential homosexuality is invariably a mental disorder and, alternatively that it is merely a normal sexual variant". Whilst not ideal this did legitimise homosexuality to a certain extent, in that it was no longer classified as a mental disorder or disease.

In 1980, the third edition of the DSM (DSM-III) reclassified homosexuality as "ego-dystonic homosexuality" and introduced "gender identity disorder" (Cabaj, n.d.). This was highly contested due to the implication that lack of heterosexual arousal may indicate pathology (Spitzer, 1981). The revised third edition (DSM-III-R) published in 1987, replaced the previous categorisation with "sexual disorder not otherwise specified" (Cabaj, n.d.). The fifth edition of the DSM (DSM-V), published in 2013, removed homosexuality as a mental disorder, replacing it with "gender dysphoria". Gender dysphoria does not seek to pathologise homosexuality but rather to describe people who experience significant distress with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

The removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973 (De Block & Adriaens, 2013), somewhat legitimised homosexuality by declassifying it as a disease or mental illness but, was short lived. However, South Africa, still in the throes of apartheid, immune to the liberation of homosexuality and other forms diversity, continued to be suffocated and delay sexual and gender diversity (McCormick, 2015). McCormick (2015) further documents that due to the oppressive, political anti-gay apartheid rule, gay and lesbian rights were only drafted into the Bill of Rights in 1990, a full 17 years after the 1973 alterations to the DSM.

It is suggested that the delay and reluctance of South Africa to (a) integrate homosexuality and other diverse forms of sexuality and gender into mainstream society; and (b) to promote *coming out* during apartheid rule, have contributed to and exacerbated feelings of discrimination, prejudice and stress among sexually and gender diverse individuals (McCormick, 2015). It can also be noted that whilst contemporary South African laws may promote gay liberation, a high degree of pressure to conform to traditional values remain prominent within South African society (McCormick, 2015). Typically, traditional values arise from, and are reinforced through, mainstream religious and/or cultural beliefs and practices, which South African communities are known to uphold (McCormick, 2015). Whilst scholars may have begun to understand sexuality and gender existing on a continuum, general society has not been so quick to embrace the advancements (Roberts & Reddy, 2008). Considering the above statement the following section provides a discussion specifically regarding the attitudes towards sexual orientation in the South African context.

1.4 Attitudes Towards Sexual Orientation in South Africa

Detailed records of the attitudes towards sexual orientation are documented by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) and published annually (ILGA, 2020). The attitudes are gauged on a nine-point scale ranging from

"constitutional protection" to the "death penalty" (ILGA, 2020, p. 340). Although South Africa rates in the "constitutional protection" category (ILGA, 2020), high levels of discrimination and homophobia have been recorded in quantitative studies conducted with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals living in metropolitan areas of South Africa (Sutherland, et al., 2016; Wells & Polders, 2004). The latest SASAS conducted in 2015, carried out by the HSRC, on behalf of the Other Foundation, tallied the general attitude of the population (surveyed 3 000 adults across the country) towards same-sex relationships, and their views and behaviour regarding a wide range of gender identity and sexual orientation issues (Sutherland, et al., 2016). The resulting report, named *Progressive Prudes, a survey of attitudes towards homosexuality & gender non-conformity in South Africa*, provides facts and figures on a larger scale than previously available. The report revealed that 51% of South Africans believe that "gay people should have the same rights as everyone else"; 55% would "accept a gay family member", even though 72% think that homosexuality is "morally wrong" (Sutherland, et al., 2016, p. 3). The results of this report confirm that although democracy in South Africa has brought about development in progressive policies and the legal rights of LGBTQ individuals, society generally remains largely homophobic. This has terrifying and life-threatening implications for sexually fluid women, especially within the South African context where any range of gender identity and/or sexual orientation that falls outside of the "norm" is critically frowned upon. The following discussion delves further into understandings of sexual fluidity and sexual identity development.

1.5 Sexual Fluidity and Sexual Identity Development

In 1948, the introduction of the Kinsey Scales (Bullough, 1998), contentiously posited sexual orientation as ratings on a scale; gauging individuals on a seven-point scale between

extremities of heterosexuality and homosexuality. The scales suggested that sexual orientation should be gauged on a continuum rather than as a binary, either or option, which was previously the standard.

As individuals grow and mature, development takes place in stages (Everett, 2015), and identity mobility has been found to be common throughout human development (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2008a; Katz-Wise, 2012). One study supporting this notion is Diamond's (2008a) longitudinal study documenting female bisexuality from adolescence to adulthood over a 10-year period. The findings in Diamond's seminal works, report that the women she studied experienced changes in their sexual orientation and sexual identity over time, thus affirming that sexuality and identity are constantly in a state of flux.

Whilst sexual fluidity is not restricted to women, both Diamond (2008b) and Baumeister (2000) estimate that women may have a greater capacity for change regarding their sexual identity and orientation. This study estimated that the more evolved participant would have more to contribute regarding their experience from heteronormativity to sexual fluidity. Therefore, it was anticipated that adult women would have deeper insights into their own sexual fluidity and a grounded perspective on sexual identity and orientation in general. Whilst several studies had been undertaken with adolescent women focussing on their sexual development, few had been undertaken with the focus on specifically adult women. Adolescence is a time wrought with hormones, hedonistic idealisms, and biological changes. Therefore, a study regarding the views, perspectives and insights of adult women was considered to be less marred by chemical imbalances, experimentation and hormonal pursuits, hence the rationale for including adult participants in the current study.

In light of the above discussion on sexual fluidity, reorganisation at a psychological level has to be considered, and although psychological reorganisation could alleviate cognitive dissonance, it may be linked to increased levels of stress and depression, especially

when transitioning towards a sexual minority status (Everett, 2015). Moreover, reorganisation at a social and community level may lead to the loss of social networks and resources, as well as exposing individuals to discrimination, abuse and violence (Katz-Wise, 2012). Mutative, as in adaptable or changing, sexual identities, particularly to same-sex-orientation launches individuals into unfamiliar and minority group territory (Everett, 2015). Leaving these individuals vulnerable to fear, discrimination and rejection from their peer networks and social groups (Everett, 2015).

It can be surmised that if an individual is struggling with a mutative sexual identity and unable to rely on the support of an existing social network, which endorses fixed sexual identities, the individual may seek additional support in order to deal with mounting psychological distress and depression (Everett, 2015). Considering the alarming SASAS statistics mentioned earlier, and the cited struggles of individuals faced with a mutative sexual identity, one can establish that serious concern and apprehension is justified for South African women who discard fixed sexual identities. Hence the following sections focus on psychological distress and how it is influenced by changes in sexual orientation, identity, and sexual minority group inclusion.

1.6 Psychological Distress and Sexuality

Everett (2015) identifies feelings of isolation, exposure to discrimination and charting unfamiliar territory as having the potential to elicit psychological distress. The angst, loss of identity and social stress associated with being sexually fluid, may negatively impact an individual's well-being and mental health (Everett, 2015). Everett (2015) adds, this may lead to a range of negative emotions, possible depression and even suicide. Everett's (2015) research concludes that there is a strong correlation between individuals navigating changes

in sexual identity towards same sex orientations and depressive symptoms. McCabe, et al. (2010) reported a significant link between stress (and substance abuse) due to cultural and environmental factors associated with being a member of a marginalised sexual minority group. This stress, anxiety, depression and suicide, was attributed to the discrimination, prejudice, rejection, humiliation, bullying and violence commonly experienced by the LGBT community (McCabe et al., 2010). Moreover McCabe et al. (2010) report that the prevalence of substance abuse disorders amongst LGBT adults are more than double that of heterosexual adults (27.6% versus 10.5%), further substantiating the emotional burden imposed on marginalised sexual minority groups.

The World Health Organization (WHO), claims that depression is the leading cause of disability and that over 300 million people are currently victims of the disease (WHO, 2019). WHO (2019) further emphasises that women are twice as likely to suffer from depression than men. Due to the past atrocities of torture inflicted on the LGBTQ community within South Africa, such as the Aversion Project (1971-1989), which inflicted barbaric measures on their patients in an attempt to cure homosexuality, and the ongoing violence towards lesbian women, such as corrective rape, protection of this sexual minority group has come to the fore (Pillay, 2018). Sadly, shocking reports of the continuation of the pathologising of homosexuality as a disease requiring a cure continues. An example, which can be witnessed as recently as April 2021, was reported by Timeslive (2021). The online article, posted by Timeslive, reported the banning of a Nigerian televangelist, TB Joshua, by the online video streaming platform, YouTube, as a direct result of his claims of being able to cure gay congregants.

The subsequent sections set out to round off preceding discussions by explicitly identifying why this study is important and motivating the need for further research.

1.7 The Objectives and Aims of this Study

The broad objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the phenomenon of sexual fluidity among adult women from a South African perspective.
- Explore any causality between psychosocial distress, narrow categorisations and repressions based on sexual diversity among adult women in South Africa.
- Examine how adult, sexual minority women, who have experienced sexual fluidity, interpret, and understand their identity development.

1.8 Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 offers a literature review, focussed on the discourse within available literature on sexual orientation, and specifically sexual fluidity, within both the global and South African context. Detailed discussion focussed on literature concerning sexual identity development and the effect of prejudice is also provided within Chapter 2. The Chapter is concluded by outlining the theoretical framework for the study.

The research design and methodology, sampling, trustworthiness, data collection and ethical issues analysis concerning this study are outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 highlights the research findings, specifically reporting on participants' narratives. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and draws on the body of literature to support or refute the findings of this study, using both dynamic systems theory and queer theory frameworks. Chapter 6 concludes the body of work by presenting the key findings, highlighting potential areas for future research as well as presenting the limitations of the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 sets out to review the extant literature and deductively present constructions of sexuality, beginning with understanding perspectives on sexual orientation across cultures. Homosexuality within the South African context will then be reviewed. Dedicated attention is given to providing an overview of the literature on sexual fluidity, the influence of power and religion, perspectives on sexual diversity in the South African context, and the subsequent burden of stress on minority groups. Following on from the above, the theoretical framework, namely dynamic systems theory and queer theory, will be discussed before concluding the chapter.

The rigid, restrictive categorisation of sex, gender, and sexual identity are undergoing an overhaul; as contemporary literature portrays sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender as existing on a continuum rather than as fixed dichotomous systems (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2005; Diamond, 2008a; Diamond, 2008b; Katz-Wise, 2012). Sex, for the purposes of this study refers to biological sex. This can be understood as sex assigned at birth by medical staff. Gender refers to an internalised sense of gender identity or expression. Savin-Williams (2005, p. 34) defines sexual identity as, "a socially recognized label that names sexual feeling, attraction, and behaviour", examples of these would be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and sexually fluid. The terms *sexuality* and *sexual orientation* are used interchangeably throughout this study and can be understood as "a socially constructed expression of erotic desire" (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, p. 4) or "the preponderance of erotic feelings, thoughts, and fantasies one has for members of a particular sex, both sexes, or neither sex" (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 28). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, sex is understood as biological, whereas gender, sexuality/sexual orientation and sexual identity are understood as socially constructed phenomena. Dynamic systems, and Queer theory provide the framework for this research and are discussed in more detail in

Sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2. Postmodern constructions of gender, sexual orientation, and identity, which strongly oppose previously held structural norms regarding heterosexuality and conservative conjugal sexuality, form the basis of this research. The following section provides a contextual background to conflicting perspectives on sexuality from firstly an African perspective. This is followed by an American Indian perspective and finally a Western perspective.

2.1 Perspectives on Sexual Orientation Across Cultures

2.1.1 African Perspective

Morgan and Wieringa (2007) advise that marriages between women have been recorded in approximately forty societies in Africa and that same-sex practices in Africa have existed since pre-colonial times. These include, but are not limited to: marriages between rain queens and traditional healers (sangomas); daughters of families without sons, in order to pass down inheritance and wealth and; rich women taking on a wife to help them with their chores (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007). The authors add that the arrival and influence of the Christian missionaries introduced the idea that same-sex partnerships were "immoral, satanic or a thing from the devil" (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007, p. 17). African leaders such as Moi (Kenya), Mugabe (Zimbabwe) and Nujoma (Namibia) have reinforced this message by vehemently denying same-sex practises pre-colonisation, arguing that "homosexuality is a Western perversion, alien to Africans" (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007, p. 281). This forced same-sex partnerships into hiding in order to avoid persecution, stigma and abuse (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007). Whilst their silence brought them safety, it also brought isolation and marginalisation (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007).

Wieringa, in Morgan and Wieringa (2007), highlights the lack of historical information gathered by anthropologists on women same-sex relationships and adds that

much of the 20th century anthropologists' writings on African, same-sex relationships lack direct observation. The author then deduces that this has resulted in gaps in the records regarding the practises, attitudes, experiences and emotions of women's same-sex relations. Whilst South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions when it comes to LGBTQ rights, homophobia and hatred of the 'other' is rife (Nel & Judge, 2008; Wells & Polders, 2006).

The growth in popularity and support for the LGBTQ movement in the South African context will be discussed in Section 2.5. First a review of another non-Western perspective on sexual orientation throughout history, that of the Native American Indian.

2.1.2 Native American Indian Perspective

As briefly mentioned in the rationale for this study (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1) some Native American Indian communities reject stereotypical gender roles in favour of the opposite gender (Escoffier, 1985). Escoffier (1985) illuminates that in some tribes, Native American Indian men that dress and perform female roles are called *berdache,* meaning "intimate male partner" (Escoffier, 1985, p. 123), and marry American Indian men. These men do not consider themselves homosexual and neither do their communities, although their sexual relations would be classified as homosexual acts (Escoffier, 1985). Since the 1990s the term *two-spirit* has been favoured over *berdache* (Williams, 1992), which inclusively incorporates all gender and sexually non-conforming (or queer) Native American Indians (Morgensen, 2011). Morgensen (2011) expounds that whilst some Native American tribes do not conform to gender roles, the ones that do specify a minimum of four genders namely, feminine women, masculine women, feminine men, masculine men. Instead of being stigmatised, these two-spirit members are held in high regard and are considered extraordinarily blessed and spiritually gifted (Williams, 1992).

Whilst there are societal differences in historical attitudes towards sexual and gender fluidity around the globe, the importance of the preceding perspectives (African and Native American Indian) is to highlight the normality of non-binary sexual orientation and gender constructs prior to the upsurge of Christianity, Westernisation, and other dominant homophobic discourses. Bringing the discussion back to Africa, McCormick (2015) speaks to the myth that homosexuality in Africa is a Western, colonial import. In concurrence, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.1, Morgan and Wieringa (2007) assert that 'homophobia' did not exist prior to colonisation and that same-sex practises were intrinsic to Africa. Dlamini (2006), Gaudio (1998), Tamale and Murillo (2007) purport that pre-colonial African societies practiced same-sex unions without stigmatisation; Reddy (2001) concurs with Morgan and Wieringa (2007) regarding homophobia being the colonial import and not homosexuality itself.

Morgensen (2011) denotes Western heteropaternal binary sex/gender systems as tools of colonial domination over the indigenous nations that were occupied. Adding to this Morgensen (2011) articulates the underlying message of the dominant narrative, through their acts and laws, was to discourage and discriminate opposing beliefs and to promote the coloniser's agenda under the guise of progress, from a primitive to civilised society.

Like Foucault (1978), Morgensen (2011) highlights homophobic discourses as mechanisms of power, therefore substantiating references made throughout this body of work to the role of power and religion in dominant discourses.

The following section seeks to provide an overview of the Western perspective on sexual orientation.

2.1.3 Western Perspective

According to Foley (1981), ancient history, specifically the Greco-Roman period, indicates that the cultural norms forming society were far removed from the ones underpinning Western society today. During this period, men had most of the power (religious, political, domestic), dictated policy and engorged themselves in the pursuit of selfish pleasures. These pleasures did not extend to include fatherly or husband duties as they are known today (Foley, 1981). This was a time of arranged marriages, where young boys were initiated into the world through "nurturant homosexual relationships with older men" (Foley, 1981, p. 31). Foley (1981) adds that there is speculation that women also participated in same-sex relationships in a similar fashion. These homosexual acts were recognised in ancient Greece as sexually valid, a way of teaching boys how to be good lovers, and the participants did not consider themselves homosexual (Escoffier, 1985). These societal norms continued throughout the Greco-Roman era and into the Western Roman era, up until the rise of Christianity (Trumbach, 1994).

The pattern of pedagogically explained homosexual relations within a heteronormative society continued through early Christian Europe and into the late Middle Ages (Trumbach, 1994). Throughout the periods, morality within Christian societies became divided regarding homosexuality and during the 1700s, members of society were required to conform to binary systems, whereby individuals had to identify as either homosexual or heterosexual (Trumbach, 1994). Desiring and having sex indiscriminately became taboo and the sexual rite of passage was reconstructed during this period, and redefined as deviant (Trumbach, 1994).

Sex and sexual discourses became taboo and were eventually policed in the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1978). Foucault (1978) reinforced that homosexuality only became problematic in the late 1800s and argued that repressive societies had socially

constructed sexuality as biological givens. Later, in the 1940s and 1950s, Alfred Kinsey researched and wrote the Kinsey Reports, two contentious books on human sexual behaviour. Kinsey's study was highly controversial due to the taboos and censorship surrounding sexuality during this time (Bullough, 1998). Bullough (1998) further advises that Kinsey's research was revolutionary, and highly provocative, due to the implication that homosexuality was simply another form of sexual activity. Kinsey not only paved the way for further research on sexuality but, of particular interest to this study, was fundamental in liberating female sexuality (Bullough, 1998). According to Bullough (1998), Kinsey was instrumental in challenging public opinions regarding sex, forcing medical and psychiatric fields to reassess their views, which ultimately influenced both the feminist and LGBT movement (Bullough, 1998).

The next section discusses power and religion, their impact on sexual orientation, homophobia and subjugation.

2.2 Power and Religion

From the previous discussion in can be denoted that the dominant Western culture, heavily influenced by Christianity, colonialism, and patriarchal, paternal values, has historically discouraged homosexuality and other forms of sexual and gender diversity (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007). According to Yip (2005, p. 49), "Christian texts such as Genesis 19 (Sodom and Gomorra), Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:18, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10, 18 are used as the primary basis of censure and condemnation of homosexuality".

Hunt and Jung (2009) comment on religious taboos being inflicted on human sexuality and how religions appoint themselves guardians of sexual norms. Michael, et al.

(1994) examine the relationship between sexual behaviour and sexual morality. Their studies delve further to reveal intricacies and insight into how social behaviour, which is moulded by society (religious or otherwise), profoundly affect not only attitudes to sex but, claim to predict how often people think about sex. Despite individuals turning away from religion, religion remains a powerful force that underpins values, beliefs, and behaviours (Hunt & Jung, 2009), thereby continuing to establish power and domination.

According to Warner (2012), thought leaders such as Foucault, Butler, Sedgwick and Berlant broached sexuality in relation to power dynamics, rather than to individual psychology or sexual orientation. The burgeoning questions for these scholars centred around why sexual discourses have (a) undergone such radical changes throughout the years (b) what has motivated this change, and (c) who or what has benefitted from the change(s)? Hunt and Jung (2009) surmise that sex is ultimately about power, pleasure and justice.

This researcher posits that when speaking to colonialization and establishing superiority and power over defeated indigenous communities, how better to establish control than to subjugate society to singular thinking patterns, reduce options, and corral subjugates into believing they have autonomy and choice, limited though it may be. Limited choices regarding sexual orientation and sexual identity development include binaries such as heterosexual or homosexual, male or female.

Individuals conforming to dominant discourses have little reason to contemplate their sexuality with any frequency. Those in the LGBT community, by contrast, frequently face prejudice, fear and hate based on their sexuality (Gaines, et al., 2005). The following section details a brief history and the strengthening of the LGBTQ movement from a Western perspective.

2.3 The LGBTQ Movement

The way we understand sexuality and gender has been undergoing a transformation since the publication of the Kinsey Report in 1948. As previously stated, Kinsey's theory, first published in 1948, gained traction in the 1960s, contributing to the sexual revolution with his discovery of a "gap between sexual norms and sexual behaviour" (Escoffier, 1985, p. 121). This gap is gaining ground with increasing vigour as the understanding of sex, gender and sexuality are actively undergoing an overhaul, with contemporary literature recurrently studying sexuality and gender on a continuum rather than as a fixed dichotomous system (Diamond, 2008; Diamond, 2012; Katz-Wise, 2012; Fausto-Sterling, 2019). As mentioned earlier dichotomous or binary system, for the purpose of this study, is one in which society categorises individuals as either heterosexual or homosexual (Katz-Wise, Williams, Keo-Meier, et al., 2017). Binary, like dichotomy, alludes to one of two, an either/or system. This study seeks to add to postmodern constructions, which strongly oppose previously held structural norms regarding heterosexuality that promote conservative conjugal sexuality (Foucault, 1978), form the basis of this research. However, with the mentioned rise of the sexual revolution in the 1960s, a broader outlook on sex, gender and sexuality emerged. This movement encouraged individuals to critically evaluate "forms of domination", "normative regulations" and "symbolic codes" (Escoffier, 1985, p. 164). Escoffier (1985, p. 164) mentions examples of forms of domination such as paternal, male superiority; normative regulations as the assumption of specified gender roles (woman at home and man at work) and; symbolic codes as ideologies relating to Christian marriages, child bearing and other imposed value systems. Furthermore, the sexual revolution promulgated equality of the sexes, encouraging freedom of expression and sexual liberation (Allyn, 2016; Escoffier, 1985). During the sexual revolution, clusters of individuals within the Western context, who did not subscribe to heterosexual norms and confinements regarding their gender and

sexuality, felt free to publicly start identifying as homosexual or queer (Allyn, 2016). Previously these individuals were forced to live in the shadows of society for fear of persecution, prejudice and rejection (Allyn, 2016). The sexual revolution shone a light into these shadows, paving a way for cultural transformation and the legitimisation of lesbian and gay community networks (Escoffier, 1985).

Even with the legitimisation, brought about by the sexual revolution, sexuality remained largely understood in a binary fashion. With increasing regularity, over time, research has emerged challenging this belief and finding that as we change and grow, so too do our attitudes towards sex, attractions, and desires (Diamond, Dickenson, & Blair, 2017). New ideologies and degrees of sexuality and gender continue to surface within contemporary literature, one of which is the study of sexual fluidity. Sexual fluidity can be understood as dynamic changes in sexual or romantic attraction, relating to changes in situational, environmental or relationship conditions (Diamond, 2008b). Whilst Diamond has written extensively about sexual fluidity, the concept of understanding sexuality on a continuum rather than a binary system could be considered an extension of Kinsey's seminal works. In 1948, Kinsey developed a seven-point scale (0-6) to measure sexual orientation (Weinrich, 2014), proposing that sexuality does not fit into neat binary categories and may be subject to change over time, challenging the heteronormative discourses and ultimately revolutionising the way society understood sexuality (Escoffier, 1985). According to Milhausen, et al. (2019), the fourth edition of the *Handbook of sexuality-related measures* contains information regarding 200 sexuality-related scales. The fourth edition has introduced over 90 new entries since the third edition and received 80 revised scales. Several scales have had to be withdrawn due to space limitations. Drawing from these and other researchers' works, it can be understood that limiting dichotomous understandings of sexuality do not reflect the lived experience or the current discourse. Hence the increase of research interest within this

field of study, with work such as that of Diamond's longitudinal study, published in 2008a, which sought to explore sexual fluidity amongst women from adolescence to adulthood. Increasing amounts of literature on patterns of sexual fluidity, such as the works of Diamond, provides much needed legitimacy of mutable boundaries and fluidity in attraction over time.

As mentioned earlier, the reconceptualization of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association (after categorising homosexuality as a pathology in the first edition of the DSM), came about as a direct result of the efforts of gay activists petitioning the American Psychiatric Association, following on from the Stonewall Riots in 1969 in New York city (Drescher, 2015). The Stonewall riots began as a resistance to the routine police raids of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, lower Manhattan. The incident became a catalyst for the American LGBT movement (Duberman, 2019).

2.4 Sexual Fluidity and Identity Development

From the research conducted by Diamond (2008a), referenced throughout the preceding body of work, it has been established that sexuality and identity are constantly in a state of flux. As individuals grow and mature, development takes place in stages (Everett, 2015). Recent studies have concurred that identity mobility is common during human development (Diamond, 2003; Diamond, 2008a; Diamond, 2008b; Everett, 2015; Katz-Wise, 2012). Both Diamond (2008a) and Baumeister (2000), make mention to the phenomenon of sexual fluidity, particularly amongst women and document the mutability of sexual attraction, orientation, identity, and awareness.

A positive sense of well-being has been linked to social support in areas regarding affirmation of sexual orientation and identity in the teenage years, as being beneficial in providing a more positive sense of well-being in adulthood (Doty, et al., 2010; Ryan, et al., 2010; Snapp, et al., 2015). Cass (1979), outlines the process of coming to terms with, and

openly declaring one's identity or sexual orientation, as being an integral part of successful identity development. As such sexually fluid adult women, having navigated through their sexual orientation and identity in their teenage years, may initially experience psychological distress due to the deconstruction and restructuring of their previously held beliefs about their sexual identity (Everett, 2015). Discordance caused due to dynamic systems, "ongoing interchanges between individuals and their environments" (Diamond, 2012, p. 74), can be reasonably estimated to cause distress, not only in oneself but also as a result of preoccupation with negative thoughts regarding caregivers' and communities' reactions to sexual orientation changes and sexual fluidity (Rosenberg, 2018).

Mutative, as in adaptable or changing, sexual identities, particularly towards same-sex-orientation, launches individuals into unfamiliar, minority group territory (Everett, 2015; Rosenberg, 2018). Everett further advises that these individuals may fear or suffer discrimination and rejection from their peer networks and social groups. Individuals struggling with a mutative sexual identity, unable to rely on the support of her existing social networks, which endorse fixed sexual identities, may be at risk of psychological distress and depression (Rosenberg, 2018). Whilst some women may be at ease with their sexual fluidity others may be dealing with psychological distress. Everett (2015) speaks to the discomfort, psychological distress and confusion that may surface when coming to terms with a change in sexual orientation and identity. These feelings of isolation, exposure to discrimination and charting unfamiliar territory have the potential to create immense psychological distress (Everett, 2015). The associated angst, loss of identity and social stress may negatively impact on an individual's well-being and mental health (Everett, 2015) leading to depression and even suicide. McCabe, et al. (2010) reported a significant link between stress (and substance abuse) due to cultural and environmental factors associated with being a member of a marginalised sexual minority group. This stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide was

attributed to the discrimination, prejudice, rejection, humiliation, bullying and violence experienced by the LGBT community (McCabe et al., 2010). McCabe et al. (2010) further report that the substance abuse disorders of LGBT adults were more than double that of heterosexual adults studied (27.6% versus 10.5%). This is echoed by Everett's (2015) study which concluded that changes in sexual identity towards same sex orientations was associated with depressive symptoms.

2.5 The LGBTQ Movement in the South African Context

Whilst the DSM legitimised homosexuality and declared it neither a disease nor mental illness in 1973, gay and lesbian rights were only drafted into the South African Bill of Rights in 1990, almost two decades after said alterations to the DSM. This researcher suggests that the delay and reluctance of South Africa to (a) integrate homosexuality and other diverse forms of sexuality and gender into mainstream society; and (b) to promote coming out during apartheid rule, may have contributed to, and exacerbated feelings of discrimination, prejudice and stress among sexually and gender diverse individuals. It can also be noted that whilst present South African laws may promote gay liberation, there remains a high degree of pressure to conform to traditional values within South African communities (McCormick, 2015). This is confirmed by statistics reporting that while 51% of South Africans agree that gay people should have the same human rights as heterosexual people, 72% felt that same-sex activity is morally wrong (Sutherland, et al., 2016). The data regarding these perceptions falls in line with the data regarding the lived experiences of LGBTQ people throughout the country, with 44% experiencing discrimination or abuse (verbal, physical, or other) in their everyday lives due to their sexuality (Sutherland, et al., 2016).

In an endeavour to counteract internalised patriarchal value systems and protect LGBTQ communities in South Africa, PsySSA released a set of practice guidelines for psychological professionals working with sexually and gender diverse individuals in 2018. The need for such a document strengthens the motivation and requirement for further study of LGBTQ minority individuals. The PsySSA guidelines confirm the urgency of pioneering innovative research in line with the latest emerging literature and by redefining linear models of sexual fluidity (McLachlan, et al., 2019).

Due to the past atrocities of torture inflicted on the LGBTQ community within South Africa, such as the Aversion Project (1971-1989), which inflicted barbaric measures on their patients in an attempt to *cure* homosexuality, and the ongoing violence towards lesbian women, such as corrective rape (a crime whereby lesbian women are raped by heterosexual men in order to correct or cure their homosexuality), protection of this sexual minority group has come to the fore, both internationally and within the borders of South Africa (Pillay, 2018).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

Postmodern constructions of gender, sexual orientation, and identity, which strongly oppose previously held structural norms regarding heterosexuality and conservative conjugal sexuality, form the basis of this research. The below discussion provides a contextual background to conflicting perspectives on sexuality from Western and non-Western perspectives. Reintegrating or incorporating marginalised ideologies into dominant discourses requires a framework that favours a post-structuralist approach, allowing for adaptations or constructions of reality rather than fixed, modernist approaches. The theoretical frameworks that forms the basis for the current research study are: Dynamic

systems theory, and Queer theory. Dynamic systems theory seeks to understand phenomena such as sexual orientation changes, sexual fluidity, and identity development in relation to interaction with biological, social, and psychological processes. Queer theory, which has its roots in Foucauldian theory, is a critical, constructivist theory that speaks to the social construction of sexuality (Sullivan, 2003).

2.6.1 Dynamic Systems Theory

"Development can only be understood as the multiple, mutual, and continuous interaction of all the levels of the developing system, from the molecular to the cultural" (Thelen & Smith, 1998, p. 563). Dynamic systems theory focuses on humans as dynamic, fluid and changing beings. Dynamic systems theory is not static and complements a study on adult women's sexual fluidity as it allows for influences such as environment or situations impacting development which act as agents of change (Thelen & Smith, 1998). Dynamic systems theory "places processes of change at the centre" (Diamond, 2012, p. 81), seeking to investigate how these contribute to stability and changes of female sexuality over time. Development implies growth or expansion. It is with this perspective that the current research places an emphasis on moving away from viewing sexuality and gender as a binary system towards viewing sexuality as fluid and continually adjusting (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Diamond, 2012; Katz-Wise, 2012). Drawing from the works of the following: Foucault's (1978) argument that sexuality and gender are socially constructed, the Kinsey Reports (1998) and the homosexual/heterosexual self-assessment scale, Diamond's (2008a) longitudinal research on sexual fluidity, Baumeister's (2000) study on plasticity, it can be surmised that these researchers concur that sexuality exists on a continuum rather than as a linear or binary categorization.

Following on from the ideas of growth, expansion, and fluidity it would be reasonable to assume that the aforementioned researchers do not view sexuality as fixed or stable. In fact, it could be deduced that they agree that sexuality has a dynamic quality, fluctuating and changing in response to different situations or in different contexts. A dynamic systems approach is considered fitting for research on sexuality and sexual identity as it does not seek to hold participants to fixed identities, sexual or otherwise. From the dynamic systems approach perceptions and reactions occur as a result of exposure to our environment, knowledge and introspection. Research stated throughout this body of work continuously affirm that sexuality and identity are constantly in a state of flux. As individuals grow and mature, development takes place in stages (Everett, 2015), and studies have concurred that identity mobility is fairly common during human development, including the mutability of sexual attraction, orientation, identity and awareness (Diamond, 2003; Diamond, 2008; Everett, 2015; Katz-Wise, 2012). A dynamic systems approach hence provides a basis for understanding this phenomenon of sexual fluidity.

Dynamic systems theory was originally developed by physicists and mathematicians seeking to model and explain the emergence, stabilization, change and destabilisation of complex patterns over time (Diamond, 2012). According to Diamond (2012), this theory has been applied to various phenomena in the human sciences including cognition, emotion, personality, etc.

From a dynamic systems approach phenomena are observed as emerging, stabilising, changing and restabilising as a "result of ongoing interchanges between individuals and their environments" (Diamond, 2012, p. 74). Growth and expansion imply change, change is a requirement of life but can be difficult to resolve, especially when one is reviewing phenomena as complex as sexual orientation and identity (Everett, 2015). Finding oneself in the unfamiliar territory of being attracted to someone outside of one's usual instinctive

predisposition, in contradiction of upbringing and religious values (Worthington, 2004), can be challenging, overwhelming and anxiety producing. Conversely, it could be considered freeing, exciting and elicit a sense of finally belonging.

Contributing to the discussion regarding growth, particularly regarding life experiences adding to an individual's maturity, this study identifies adult women, as the target participants. It is posited that if sexuality is constructed over time, it would stand to reason that the more evolved participant will have more to contribute regarding their experience from heteronormativity to sexual fluidity. Women with more life experience may also have deeper insights into their own sexual fluidity and a less distinct perspective on sexuality in general. Whilst some women may be at ease with their sexual fluidity others may still be dealing with psychological distress. Everett (2015) and Rosenberg (2018) speak to the discomfort, stress and confusion that may surface when coming to terms with a change in sexual orientation and identity. It is specifically the change factor underpinning sexual fluidity, that supports the current study to fall within the theoretical framework of dynamic systems theory.

2.6.2 Queer Theory

Queer theory emerged in the 1990s incorporating feminist and gay/lesbian ideologies and challenges regarding the socially constructed nature of gender, biological sex, sexual behaviour, and identity (Callis, 2009). Queer theory was founded on Jacque Derrida's theory of deconstruction and Michel Foucault's theory of Social Control (Sullivan, 2003). The works of Foucault (1978), Butler (1990), and Sedgwick (1990) were instrumental in the development of queer theory.

According to Sullivan (2003), this critical, constructivist theory speaks directly to the social construction of sexuality and seeks to understand sexual identity, human sexuality and

gender, and deconstruct social constructs such as homosexuality and heterosexuality. Sedgewick (1993) proposes that it transcends gender and sexual orientation, reaching further into other socially constructed categorisations such as race, ethnicity and other "identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses" (1993, pp. 8-9). According to Jagose (1996), the term 'queer' has become an umbrella term for all gender or sexuality related terms, or groups not conforming to heteronormative discourses. Likewise, Parker (2004) advises that the word queer is difficult to define and often holds a pejorative connotation, although Parker (2004) also maintains that it is considered by some to be intentionally controversial, seeking to examine constructions of what is considered as normal, abnormal and why. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004, p. 129) concur with Parker's latter statement and offer that, "[q]ueer has come to be associated with a new militancy in gay and lesbian politics – a determined push for visibility and a celebration of the transgressive". Ultimately, it is a term that, by its very use, questions "conventional understandings of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories, oppositions and equations that sustain them" (Jagose, 1996, p. 97). Honeychurch (1996, p. 339) adds that "by taking a queered position in social research, the researcher challenges the dominant worldview in what may be known, who may be the knower, and how knowledge has come to be generated and circulated". According to Callis (2009), queer theory therefore challenges normalised constructions of reality and interrogates Foucauldian notions of power.

To review the above, rather than a dilute, obscure theory, queer theory is exciting in that it is boundless, challenging and relentless in its challenge of constructions of reality. Deconstructions and persistent questioning of what constitutes 'normal', alter the dynamic from being defined by the dominant discourses to "authoring and authorising [one's own] experience" (Honeychurch, 1996, p. 342).

Furthermore, queer theory argues that the promotion or construction of sexuality as binary widens the homosexual/heterosexual gap and promotes heteronormative discourse (Valocchi, 2005), often leading to the inhibiting of non-heterosexual identity development (Katz-Wise, 2012). Marginalised non-heterosexual identities, portrayed as abnormal and undesirable due to the internalization of heterosexual discourses (Butler, 1990), place limits on a person's potential desires (Valocchi, 2005). According to Ludwig (2011) the root of the stigma is in the perception of heterosexuality as the default mode of humanity. Meaning that a shift in the constructions of sexuality and gender could potentially alleviate stress caused due to conforming to prescribed societal roles, in order to avoid shame, stigmatisation and victimization (Ludwig, 2011).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the literature, with the aim of introducing readers to the conversations surrounding the integral elements of this study. Centrally, sexual identity is presented as a fluid and continuous construct rather than fixed and stable, as it was previously understood. Whilst change can speak to a period of growth and development it can also be a source of distress (Haas, et al., 2010). According to Diamond (2012, p. 75), numerous studies have recorded "larger changes in sexual attractions and behaviour among women than among men", again motivating for this study's focus on sexual fluidity amongst adult women in South Africa.

Further adding to the motivation for this study is the urgency for an examination into the constructions and confines of the dominant discourses utilising queer theory. Entities and belief systems that seek to control and define what is understood as normal, moral and right need to be re-examined as humanity and expressions of humanity are not a one size fits all. Seeking to control others' thoughts, desires and proclivities can ultimately be construed, in

their extreme forms, to be weapons of manipulation and oppression (Foucault, 1978). This study seeks to investigate how constructions of reality influence participants' behaviours, realities, notions of self and others, emotions and relationships. How each participant views the constructions of reality and the internalisation of imposed values in relation to their sexual orientation is key in understanding the challenges of sexual fluidity in adult women in South Africa.

The next chapter presents the research methodology implemented to collect, interpret, validate, and report the data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 includes a comprehensive discussion of the methodology used for the current study. The chapter discusses the research questions, research design, data collection method, sample sampling method, data analysis, as well as the relevant ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Objectives and Questions

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.8) the broad objectives of this study were to: explore the phenomenon of sexual fluidity among adult women from a South African perspective; explore the self-reported links between psychological distress and sexual identity crises, conformity, traditions, and cultural heteronormative perspectives among sexually fluid, adult women; and examine how adult, sexual minority women, who have experienced sexual fluidity, interpret and understand their sexual identity development.

As informed by the above objectives this study aimed to answer the following critical research questions:

- How does sexual fluidity among adult women manifest itself in the South African context?
- What self-reported links do sexually fluid, adult women make between sexual identity crises, conformity, traditions and cultural heteronormative perspectives, and psychological distress?
- How do adult, sexual minority women, who have experienced sexual fluidity, interpret, and understand their sexual identity development?

3.2 Research Design

The research reported in this dissertation is qualitative in nature and utilised a narrative inquiry research design aiming to provide insight into a relatively unknown area (i.e., sexual fluidity among South African adult women). Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (specifically text and photographs within this study) to understand and explore concepts, opinions and/or experiences (Patton, 2005). Qualitative research is best suited to this specific research study as it allows for the gathering of in-depth insights into a specific phenomenon or experience, so as to generate new ideas within the field of study.

The specific research design utilised is a narrative inquiry design, and although photo-elicitation was utilised (as a method of inviting conversation) in conjunction with the narrative inquiry, the visual data was not analysed, but rather was used as a way of eliciting verbal data, thereby enriching the narratives. According to Copes et al. (2018, p. 476), "photo-elicitation is a qualitative interview technique where researchers solicit responses, reactions, and insights from participants by using photographs or other images as stimuli". The use of photo-elicitation in conjunction with the narrative inquiry supports the constructivist philosophical underpinnings of this study in that the use of photographs presented the researcher with multiple ways of knowing (Anderson, 2002; Heisley, 2001). By combining photo-elicitation and narrative inquiry, more critical explorations were enabled, than would be possible using only one research design method (Anderson, 2002; Smith, 1998). The objective behind combining photo-elicitation and narrative inquiry was to increase authenticity in the storytelling, provide deeper understanding of participants' narratives and promote dialogue.

The use of photographs in the interviews, is argued to be effective to personal identity narratives, especially for sensitive content such as sexuality and attraction. Padgett, et al.

(2013) remark that photo-elicitation interviews, although substantial as an independent data collection technique, provide added depth to participants' narratives when used alongside traditional interview methods, hence the combination of photo-elicitation, and narrative inquiry.

In essence, narrative inquiry, which makes up the research design of the current study, can be summarised as, an understanding that is created of the social phenomena under study, through the co-construction of a story between the researcher and the participant, within a broader social context. The narrative inquiry approach seeks to understand phenomena produced in relation to interpersonal and social structures (Esin, et al., 2014). Narrative inquiry is an inductive theory that seeks knowledge through understanding (Hatch & Wisniewski, 2003), with specific focus being placed on the preservation of the participant's narrative. With the main objective being to facilitate better understanding of human phenomena and human existence; through highlighting the significance of the lived experience in participants' final stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). This process encourages understanding of why and how things happened, why participants acted in certain ways and requires "the configuration of the data into a coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). Knowledge and reality are constructed through meaning making, Mattingly and Garro (2000, p. 1) articulate, "narrative mediates between an inner world of thought-feeling and an outer world of observable actions and states of affairs". Narratives are therefore ways in which individuals construct meaning. By telling one's story, individuals create their own versions of reality. A narrative approach is "interested in the states produced socially by the narratives" (Esin, et al., 2014, p. 204) and not the internal states themselves. Sexual identity development can be explored through the stories people create or construct about themselves. These stories encompass not only expressions of internalised states but also illuminate their worldview, both physical and social (Esin, et al., 2014). Sexual identity development can be explored

through the coming-out stories of participants and the effect of such on their own self-structure as well as in relation to others (Katz-Wise, 2012).

Mishler (1995) acknowledges that there is a difference between the 'telling' (researcher's narrative) and the 'told' (raw data from the participant). Essentially the 're-told' story is a "series of temporally ordered events" (Mishler, 1995, p. 90) and the interpretations of the researcher. This places responsibility on the researcher to exercise caution when constructing and retelling participants' stories. Applying theoretical, methodological, and interpretive considerations, whilst simultaneously narratively relaying participants' lived experiences, assists the researcher in creating a balance and a reflexive base for accurate storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Subsequently, the uniqueness and meaningful composition of data elements to generate a narrative from the data is not only its power but also its failing. For this very reason, Lincoln and Guba (1986), as cited in Hatch and Wisniewski (2003), specify trustworthiness and authenticity as critical to the narrative analysis process. Trustworthiness to be discussed within Section 3.6 in more detail.

Balancing a combination of social constructivist views by combining queer theory, dynamic systems theory with a narrative inquiry design as a way of understanding each participant's lived experience is posited to best understand and effectively research each individual's life story from their unique perspectives.

3.2.1 Researcher Reflection

In attempt to rationalise the decision of combining the use of photographs together with narrative inquiry the researcher felt it necessary to provide some clarification. Photography has always been a passion for the researcher, and the belief that "a picture is worth a thousand words," is something that has always held true for this researcher. Having spent over a decade as a professional photographer, it was fortuitous that an exploration of

the literature, on photo-elicitation and visual methodologies in qualitative research, revealed advantages and supported the use of photographs (Glaw, et al., 2017) in the field of psychology, especially with regard to understanding meaning in individuals' lives in the field of psychology (Steger et al., 2013). Photographs are believed to contribute in uncovering a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and emotions of participants, and the value they contribute to the trustworthiness and rigor of the study. Additionally, the role of photography is accentuated within social activism (Panke, 2016), which is particularly relevant to a study on sexual minority groups, hence motivating for the use of photo-elicitation as an extension of the narrative inquiry research design utilised.

3.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used for participant recruitment for this study. Purposive sampling is a targeted choice of participant by the researcher (Tongco, 2007). Tongco (2007) elaborates that the researcher deliberately seeks out participants that have the knowledge or information required to answer the research questions. Terre Blanche, et al. (2006) add that purposive sampling provides suitability for an in-depth study on the topic of interest, benefitting from participants available and willing to participate. Furthermore, Atkinson and Flint (2004) suggest the suitability of this method, of non-probability sampling, when the aim is to construct specific knowledge rather than generalise to a larger population. Purposive sampling was considered ideal for this research as it would single out key informants to provide valuable insight into sexual fluidity development within the South African context. The aim was for self-identified sexually fluid adult women to be referred to the researcher via staff members from the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre (DLGCHC), the Gay and Lesbian Network (GLN) in Pietermaritzburg , and the researchers own social (digital) networks.

Once ethical approval (Appendix B - Research Approval Dated June 2019) for the study was granted from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC), (Appendixes B and C), both the DLGCHC and the GLN were contacted. The GLN responded within 24-hours of the request for assistance and an advertisement was distributed via social media and in print form throughout their network (Appendix E: Gatekeeper's permission (GLN). All the respondents met the inclusion criteria necessary for the study (i.e., women who self-identified as sexually fluid, between the ages of 30 to 50 years of age living in South Africa). In total, five respondents agreed to participate in the study. All participants were educated to a higher level. Only one of the five respondents identified as a Black South African woman, the other respondents identified as White South African women.

The downfalls of small sized samples, common to qualitative research, lie in the commonly held belief regarding the fact that they lack generalisability, may be prone to bias and are only employed to generate hypothesis for future research (Ruddin, 2006). Ruddin (2006) echoes Terre Blanche et al. (2006) and reiterates that in-depth knowledge, gained in small sample studies, are fundamental to the attainment of context-dependent knowledge and thereby contribute substantially to the creation of theoretical knowledge. Coyle (2007) adds that large numbers of participants is less important than the abundance of rich, topic relevant discourses required to satisfy the study requirements and answer the research questions.

3.3.1 Research Participants

Five self-identified, sexually fluid women were interviewed for the study. In order to retain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were assigned to participants. Below follows a short narrative detailing participants' demographic and socio-economic detail as it pertains to the study.

Adele (Participant code: DZI 1) is a professional woman, with a tertiary education background, living in Gauteng, South Africa. At the time of the study she was divorced and mother to a young daughter. She was also in a committed but relatively open relationship with a male, and was open to relationships with women, with the consent of her male partner. Adele had a single same-sex experience at the age of 19. Adele's parents are still married to each other. Adele's heteronormativity is assumed by her family and the expectation is that she will meet and marry a male suitor.

Kerry (Participant code: DZI 2) is a professional woman, with a tertiary education background, based in KwaZulu-Natal. At the time of the study she was in a long-term lesbian relationship, with no children and no plans to have children. Kerry's parents were still married and were reported to have strong traditional, Christian beliefs. Kerry's mother discouraged deviance from societal imposed gender-roles, placing restrictions on her daughter regarding gender expression during childhood and adolescence.

Bongisiswe (Participant code: DZI 3), or Bongi as she is referred to within this body of work, is a professional woman currently running her own business in KwaZulu-Natal. Bongi has a tertiary education background. At the time of the study, Bongi had no children and no immediate plans to start a family. She was the only Black South African woman who participated in the study. Bongi's parents are still married to each other. Bongi's heteronormativity is assumed by her family and the expectation is that she will meet and marry a male suitor.

. Bongi advised she was in a committed, but relatively open relationship with a woman. She is open to relations with both men and women.

Christine (Participant code: DZI 4), or Chris as she is referred to within this body of work is a professional KwaZulu-Natal based woman, with a tertiary education background. At the time of the study, Chris was married (second marriage) to Tanya (who was also a

participant in this study), and was the mother of three children, two sons and one daughter. Her daughter and one son are biological, from her previous marriage.

Tanya (Participant code: DZI 5) is a professional KwaZulu-Natal based woman, with a tertiary education background. At the time of the study, Tanya was married to Chris (second marriage), and mother to three children, two sons (one is biological) and a daughter. Tanya's parents were married until her father passed away.

3.4 Data Collection

In-depth narrative inquiry, individual interviews, in conjunction with photo-elicitation discussions were utilised in collecting data for the current study.

As previously noted, once approval for this study was granted by the HSSREC, the researcher requested that GLN distribute and make the researcher designed flyers available (see Appendix D) to suitable research participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants and researcher were unable to meet in-person. Hence, when the researcher was contacted by potential research participants, as per invitation on the flyer, the researcher arranged to meet with the potential participants to discuss the study via the Zoom video conferencing platform or via telephone call. During the meetings, the researcher read through and explained the information contained in the information sheet and informed consent form (see Appendixes F and G). Following this the participants were encouraged to ask questions before deciding whether to participate in the study. It was stressed that no adverse repercussions would be inflicted on any participant who did not choose to participate in the study. It was also communicated that no reward would be offered for participation in the research. When each potential participant fully understood the nature and purpose of the research, she was then invited to consent to participate in the study by digitally signing the

informed consent document. A copy of the information sheet and informed consent were provided to each participant (Appendixes F and G).

Upon receiving the signed informed consent documentation from prospective participants, the researcher provided each participant with a brief photo-elicitation and narrative inquiry orientation (which included instructions on the ethics of photographs in qualitative research, to be discussed in detail under the heading ethical considerations). After the photo-narrative orientation, the participants were then invited to take or source approximately 5-10 photographs over the next three weeks, that reflected their experiences and insights regarding sexual fluidity.

The following prompts for picture selection were provided to the research participants (see Appendix H: Photo-narrative orientation and prompt):

- What self-reported links do sexually fluid, adult women make between sexual identity crises, conformity, traditions and cultural heteronormative perspectives, and psychological distress?

  Select an image which best illustrates any obstacles/barriers/personal conflicts faced or felt during questioning/transitioning/experimenting.

  Select an image which best illustrates any achievements/realizations/triumphs overcome, faced or felt during questioning/transitioning/experimentation.

- How do adult, sexual minority women, who have experienced sexual fluidity, interpret, and understand their sexual identity development?

  Select an image which best illustrates how you understand and interpret any sexual identity change or application of labels during your lifetime.

After three weeks passed, each participant was invited to attend a photo-elicitation and narrative inquiry interview with the researcher, again via the Zoom platform.

Participant's photograph submissions, sourced by participants in response to photograph prompts outlined in Appendix H and restated above, were discussed briefly, and participants were then invited to ask questions. Once the preliminaries were concluded, the interviews began with the participant being asked to begin to tell their story regarding their sexual fluidity development, drawing on their photograph submissions for inspiration and stimuli. The questions and sequence included in the narrative inquiry photo-elicitation interview schedule (provided to participants prior to study participation) (see Appendix I) was followed, and natural conversation flowed from the interaction with the researcher. Participants generally drifted between their internet sourced photographs, interweaving and accentuating their narratives, whilst sharing their experiences with the researcher. Finally, participants were asked to name or caption their photographs for reference purposes. The narrative inquiry interviews continued for an average of 60 minutes each.

The researcher aimed and succeeded in gathering rich, detailed data. It is believed that the intensity of emotion, negative or positive, was revealed through each participant producing personally meaningful photographs, and narrating a story about these photographs in a one-on-one Zoom interview with the researcher. The researcher aimed to empower the participant(s) by encouraging the expansion of the narrative(s) in areas as guided by the participant(s) themselves, utilising their sourced photographs (see Appendix H) as prompts. Giving participants control over the recounting of their narratives enabled participants to narrate their life stories on their own trajectories, thereby empowering participants. Participant guidance was achieved through the use of photographs, selected by the participants to represent relevant junctures in their journey to, or experience with, sexual fluidity. Collectively, these photo-narratives opened a window into understanding the plasticity (Baumeister, 2000) or fluidity (Diamond, 2008a) of women's sexuality and their understanding regarding the ebb and flow of their mutable attractions. As previously stated,

the transcripts were analysed using narrative analysis, which focuses on "the stories of individuals as a story with meaning" (Blumenfield-Jones, 2005, p. 25).

3.5 Data Analysis

Narrative analysis as defined by the works of Ketelle (2010) and Moen (2006) were utilised to analyse the data collected through conducting semi-structured interviews. In short, a narrative can be defined as a story, in this case each participant's narrative is made up of a combination of the text from their interview transcription and the photographs/images they chose to present in response to the prompts provided. In this study, the visual data was not analysed in its own right, but rather photo-elicitation was utilised as a way of eliciting verbal data, thereby enriching the narratives. According to Kim (2015), a photograph used in photo-narrative inquiry needs to be interpreted not as an object or photograph, but rather as it is perceived by the participant.

Narrative analysis looks at the whole story, pulling together pieces of a plot, which are assigned meanings within the overall narrative, eventually culminating in the rich, subjective data of a lived experience (Ketelle, 2010). As explained within the research design section of this chapter, narratives can be complex and the use of a secondary form of data complements, prompts and completes the picture, hence the addition of photo-elicitation as a complementary research design, and data collection element (Roth, et al., 1996).

The first step in analysing the collected data was deciding on the unit of analysis. Literature reports that there are two principle units of analysis when utilising a photo-narrative analysis: categorical or holistic. For the current study the holistic approach was selected as being more suited, in that holistic analysis will explore significance and change in the context of one person's life, and the effect of change on identity (Gilbert, 2008). As informed by Kim (2015), the photographs supplied by the participants were not interpreted as

an object or photograph in-itself, but rather as it is perceived and how it was conversed by the participant. The participant-provided photographs were discussed, during the interview and this discussion of each photograph was led by the participant. The photographs were also coded into descriptors as per the names given by the participants. In addition, the photo-elicitation interview questions and subsequent discussion was recorded, and transcribed (Ketelle, 2010).

The second step to data analysis was to listen and re-listen to the audio recorded interviews, whilst alternating between the photographs and the participant provided analysis of each photograph. On the initial listening/reading/viewing, the researcher made notes regarding initial thoughts, responses, emotions and points requiring further inquiry. On subsequent immersion, focus was placed on the content of both the narrative and the photographs. Further attention was paid to the use of discourse; how the participants communicated their message such as tone, pauses, tempo, language, emphasis, emotion, and gestures. An example of this could be the use of profanity to express strong emotion, or the need to create emphasise, in areas of the narrative. These techniques assisted greatly in understanding the story from each participant's perspective. Further analysis focused on what was omitted from the narrative, the congruence of image to text and how the colours, shades and content of the photographs contributed to the narrative. The analysis of participants' narratives followed the guidelines provided for more traditional narrative analyses (Ketelle, 2010; Moen, 2006). The photographs were re-examined alongside the transcripts of the textual data using narrative analysis. This meant that the story of each participant was constructed through carefully analysing and documenting the narrative with an emphasis on answering the research questions and identifying commonalities, uniqueness, and contrasts in participants' experiences. Raw textual (and photographic, in the case of a photo-narrative approach) data was summarised by the researcher and condensed to answer the research

questions; in this process, the researcher made decisions and assumptions regarding areas of importance within the study (Hatch & Wisniewski, 2003). Hatch and Wisniewski (2003, p. 23) go on to state that "the final story must fit the data" whilst still maintaining order and meaning. As discussed previously in this section, narrative analysis is essentially a story, unlike analysis of the narrative which aims to dissect and thematise the narratives. Simply stated, when using a narrative analysis approach, data is analysed utilising participant's stories as a whole, rather than fragmenting the data by coding and analysing the data as themes.

3.6 Trustworthiness

The incompatibility of a modern, positivist approach to qualitative research lays bare the idealistic notion of objectivity and with it the associated validity, reliability, and rigor adage. In keeping with the postmodern, constructivist approach, the validity, reliability, and rigour of this study were reinforced through the more assimilated criteria of trustworthiness as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Trustworthiness is key in judging and justifying interpretations in qualitative research. Schwandt, et al. (2007) stipulate that research needs to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable to maintain trustworthiness.

According to Shenton (2004) a study could be said to be *transferable* if findings can be transferred to other populations or different contexts other than that of the original study. Transferability is maintained in that this dissertation, and a possible follow up published article, outline detailed information regarding the methodology process that was followed within this study. This will allow other researchers to conduct similar research (if needed) within another similar context.

Credibility on the other hand refers to the researcher carrying out the study in a way that does not discredit findings, as well as the degree to which findings are approved by those

who generated the data (Shenton, 2004). In this research study the researcher maintained credibility by engaging with the data for an extended period of time as a way of becoming oriented in the situation of the participants (Anney, 2014). Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify the act of asking clarifying questions regarding participants' answers to enhance credibility during the data collection process itself. These measures were obtained in the study by persistent observation, member checks, and triangulation. Member checks were carried out in the form of informal but in-depth clarification of facts of participant stories and meanings during data collection and throughout the analysis process including the presentation of findings and soliciting feedback. Additionally, data triangulation was achieved by utilising a variety of data sources (Terre Blanche, et al., 2006). Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). The convergence of information from different sources seeks to test validity of the data (Carter, et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher triangulated the following sources: (1) audio files and transcripts from the audio files; (2) notes made by the researcher at the time of the individual narrative inquiry interviews; (3) participant sourced photographs in response to photograph prompts (see Appendix H) and; reaching mutual consensus on the accuracy of findings with the research participants. In addition, reflexivity, which seeks to ensure credibility by creating transparency in the research methodology, process and analysis, was also utilised. Reflexivity is understood as continuous self-reflection by the researcher to create awareness at all levels regarding the study and execution thereof (Darawsheh, 2014). Flick (1999) advises that it is important for the researcher to self-reflect on thoughts and feelings regarding participants, the interactions between the issue and the researcher, the researcher and the potential readers. The researcher therefore examined thoughts and emotions regarding at multiple levels including: the research, potential readers, the phenomenon being studied and participants.

This was achieved by: (1) multiple readings of the transcripts; (2) the taking and reviewing of notes made by the researcher during participant interviews; (3) note taking and reviewing during subsequent listening and transcription of the audio files and; (4) journaling throughout the duration of the study (following receiving ethics approval for the study)." (see p. 45).

The third criteria, *dependability* which refers to the consistency of a study's findings (Morrow, 2005), was supported by providing a dense description of the methods used in data analysis, gathering and interpretation (Anney, 2014). All participants attended a pre-interview orientation, each participant provided internet sourced images, each participant attended an individual Zoom interview utilising narrative inquiry. Following the interview each participant attended a feedback session to authenticate findings and provide clarity or correction to data. Providing a dense description of the process followed, as detailed in in this Chapter, in conducting the proposed research study, creates a clear path for other researchers to audit one's findings thereby enhancing both dependability and *confirmability* (Anney, 2014).

Lastly *confirmability* refers to the objectivity of the proposed research study. In order to aim for impartiality and be impartial to the outcome of the research, the researcher is required to acknowledge own preconceptions and to operate in as unbiased and value-free way as possible. Objectivity will be achieved through outlining a detailed account of research activities and procedures as well as the management of subjectivity through practices of bracketing, reflection, supervision and journaling (Morrow, 2005).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Before the commencement of this research study ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC), (Appendixes B and C). In addition, gatekeeper permission for

recruitment advertising was secured in writing from the director of the Gay and Lesbian Network (GLN) in Pietermaritzburg (Appendix E). As soon as prospective participants contacted the researcher all necessary documentation containing details on the nature and purpose and of the research study as well as what will be expected of them should they choose to participate were dispatched. Those participants who indicated their interest to continue by participating in the study were prompted to sign the voluntary informed consent document, and the researcher encourage participants to ask questions should anything be unclear. The specific ethical considerations surrounding the use of photographs (and other visual methods) in research were also detailed within the study's information sheet, and photo-narrative orientation document (Appendix F & H). The photo-narrative orientation and prompt provided to all participants included information regarding copyright laws and the use of internet sourced images for use in research and education, and as such guided them on how to ethically source the photographs that they wanted to use and refer to throughout the data collection process. All participants elected to source images from the internet rather than author their own photographs, making documentation such as photographic release forms and authorisation to photograph individuals, redundant.

Upon completing the informed consent document, the researcher and participant arranged a date and time that was convenient for the participant and scheduled the online Zoom interview. The researcher ensured privacy on her part by placing a do not disturb sign on the outside of the room where the interviews took place and locking the door. Also, the privacy precautions as suggested by Zoom, which included locking the meeting once the participant was accepted into the virtual meeting room via an invitation only virtual waiting room, was implemented. Participants were responsible for their own venue choice, and the privacy thereof. The interviews were audio recorded only, hence no video footage of the participants themselves were recorded, and participants agreed to the audio recording in

writing when signing the informed consent documentation. The study posed no risk of physical harm, however the potential for emotional risk is always present within the social sciences exploring on affective and experiential content, this risk was also clearly defined to participants in the informed consent document. In the case that any adverse emotional reaction would occur counselling services were made available through the GLN crises support line, fortunately this contingency plan was not necessary. The researcher remained empathetic throughout the data collection process and was sure to emphasise the aspect of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study. Upon collecting the necessary data only, the researcher and research supervisor had access to the raw collected data. The data and specifically identifying information were kept in the strictest of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were given to participants upon transcribing the audio recorded interview data. Duplicate copies of the audio recorded data were destroyed upon completing the transcriptions. One electronic version of each audio recording was kept on the password protected computer of the researcher only. The photographic data that was collected from participants was stored alongside the original audio recordings and text transcriptions of interviews, on the password protected computer of the researcher.

There are two important notes to consider in terms of the use of images complementing the participant narratives. Firstly, as all participants elected to source their images from the internet, the authors/owners of the images were traced via Google reverse image search processes. All efforts were made to discover the original authors/owners of the images and references have been provided, including links to where they can be found on the Internet. Where the author was undiscoverable, the website identified by a Google reverse image search has been referenced. Secondly, the participants were encouraged to caption the images. These captions or descriptors were intended to provide context and deeper insight into the inner world of each participant. Therefore, the images have been named according to

the participants' descriptions, but this is not necessarily the name given to the image by the authors of the original image(s).

3.8 Conclusion

Throughout the entire data collection process, the researcher ensured that participant informed consent was continuously negotiated on an ongoing basis with the research participants. And at any point of the research process, participants were encouraged to reflect on (the extent of) their participation in the study, ensuring that voluntary informed consent for participation in this research study was ongoing.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study. In line with a narrative analysis style, each narrative has been constructed and presented using a narrative tone. The narratives aim to present the experiences of each of the participants (Willig, 2013). The photographs, submitted by participants with the aim of representing and complementing their individual experiences regarding their sexual fluidity within the South Africa context, are presented within the narratives. These images have been captioned collaboratively, between each participant and the researcher, except for Tanya who submitted images with captions.

Each narrative ebb and flows with its own unique perspective and each interview represent a complete story in itself, this is captured in full detail within the below narrative of each of the study participants. The prefix DZI (Durban Zoom Interview) forms part of each participant code.

4.1 Adele's Narrative

Adele, a refined looking and neatly dressed woman, politely engaged in convivial conversation at the start of the interview with the researcher. She exuded an air of sophistication, independence, and self-confidence. Adele's agreement to participate in the study was largely due to her desire to better understand herself, and hopefully decode her curiosity regarding a same-sex attraction between her 19-year-old self and her then, best friend, Cheryl. Contrary to the initial confidence displayed, Adele approached the interview shyly, admitting that she had not discussed her sexual fluidity, curiosity, and experience with many other people. In fact, she advised that prior to agreeing to participate in the study, she had not discussed it with anyone beside Cheryl (approximately 18 years ago).

With some hesitancy and uncertainty, Adele began by sharing that she had been divorced for several years and had a young child from a previous marriage. She was currently

involved in a committed, long-distance relationship with a British man and has been for the past three years. Judging by the increase in flow of conversation and noticeable relaxation in Adele's body language, Adele gaining in confidence, advised that she grew up in a small town and is part of a close knit, Christian nuclear family unit. Her upbringing did not allow for challenging socially constructed norms such as heteronormative relationships, marriage and bearing children. She was instilled with a sense of duty, "getting married was more of an obligation, you know, to do what everybody expects you to do" (Adele DZI 1: 205). Nothing could have prepared her for the "fireworks" (see Figure 4.1 below).

Figure 4.1

Fireworks

(Koepfer, 2017)

Opening-up about her sexuality, Adele shared the excitement surrounding being drawn to Cheryl in a non-platonic way. The chemistry was captivating and intoxicating; both young women abandoning their conservative upbringings to cling to each other in stolen moments. "It was definitely spur of the moment, you know, we definitely had not spoken about it before the time and yah, it just kind of happened. Like I said, it felt, it was a shock, but at the same time it felt right" (Adele DZI 1: 50). Discussing the chemistry and the

associated ‘fireworks’ image (Figure 4.1), Adele added, “it was definitely a feeling of elation” (Adele DZI 1: 62). Whilst the attraction was undeniable and mutual, according to Adele it was beyond both her and Cheryl’s comprehension to consider the relationship as anything more than a transient dalliance.

> We, we discussed it, but we both decided it was more of a very casual exper..., you know, casual kind of thing. It was never, we never discussed being in a relationship. You know or taking it further. Because both of us were in very, came from very conservative households. So, it wasn’t even an option for us (Adele DZI 1: 104).

Eventually the relationship fizzled out, the friends drifted apart but, to this day Adele struggles to understand the intensity and chemistry of her feelings for Cheryl during this period. Still trying to make sense of the relationship and her sexuality, she recalls feeling confused about her identity, “I didn’t know if I was either way or both ways. So, that was, that was quite, it was quite a confusing time of my life” (Adele DZI 1: 211). She added, “so, I did struggle. I struggled for a long time with that” (Adele DZI 1: 215). Meeting and marrying her ex-husband, Dean, brought Adele’s confusion regarding her sexuality into even stronger focus. Not only was Dean conservative, he was also extremely religious. The rigid views of the church further drove Adele into conflict with what she felt was right and what she was instructed was right. “It was a struggle to really do the right…, but then have these thoughts in your head” (Adele DZI 1: 379). She added, “it felt like it was something unnatural that I needed to just try and block out and because they, the church speaks a lot about demons, so, if you are gay then that is a demon” (Adele DZI 1: 395). Adding to Adele’s struggle with sexual fluidity and religion she continued,

> I've always struggled with religion and my family, my close family, aren't terribly religious. I grew up in a Catholic household, but eventually my parents just kind of, you know, became less strict with their religious views. And then when I met my ex-husband, we were also not very religious, but then we started going to church and he became very religious and, definitely, I've always struggled with it [religion]. I could never really, I don't know, I just felt like all the rules didn't make se... You know the things that, seemed very strict, I don't know, I was just not convinced. But I always tried to do the right thing and, uhm, become more religious and read the bible and things like that. And I really, when it comes to religion, I don't think there's an…, you know you can't…, there's no in-between. You either follow the rules or you don't, you can't .. So, that, yah, it's, it was a struggle, it was a struggle to really do the right thing, but then have these thoughts in your head and… (Adele DZI 1: 367).

Adele recounts feeling she had to weigh up her options regarding her future, considering her need to please her parents.

> Well it, it, at one point when you start imagining how your life would be if you were to go down that road. Uhm, it's definitely, you definitely faced with feelings of shame, because you raised in a certain and those who raised you a certain way are shameful if there's something wrong with you. If you are inclined in that way (Adele DZI 1: 331).

Adele went on to describe how she feels that her family beliefs, small town values and limited exposure prevented her from looking outside the mould of her upbringing. Removing herself from her family home, moving to a larger city, meeting a variety of diverse

people, travel, education, and divorce sparked internal dialogue around her sexuality and the magnitude of her feelings for arguably her first love. Speaking of love, at the time of the interview, Adele was in a committed relationship with a man who she says does not seek to constrain her. She felt that if she would like to embark on a relationship with another woman, that she would be free to do so. She attributes this fact to her current partner being British and therefore perhaps more open-minded in his views regarding her need to not limit herself sexually and relationally should the opportunity arise.

Now, approximately 18-years later, Adele muses on the intensity of her feelings for Cheryl and wonders about how she may act differently should an opportunity present itself today.

> So, that's more, erhm, that is, more or less how I'm, my current state is. I'm inquisitive and I definitely feel like, you know, for me it's not a bad thing. My, my parents will still not accept it, but I feel like there's nothing wrong with me. It's not that, it's not a shameful thing for me, it's more… umm, so, because of that I feel more, you know. It's easier for me to engage in it now, because… and I'm inquisitive. So, I definitely feel like, you know, if the opportunity ever arises I would definitely, you know, yah… (Adele DZI 2: 446).

Never once did it occur to Adele that she could openly admit to caring for this other woman as more than a friend, let alone consider a future as part of a same-sex relationship. Interestingly, according to Adele, relationships outside traditional man/woman combinations, were beyond serious contemplation. "It's really difficult to step out of that erhm, you know, break the rules and upset your parents" (Adele DZI 1: 123). So, whilst Adele recollects on

how a same-sex relationship was incomprehensible, her musings speak as loudly to her need to conform, as a need for resistance.

It is understandable that internalisation of strong feelings of shame, impending judgment and fear of committing a sin, prevented Adele from self-exploration. Furthermore, Adele is private about her sexuality and understandably conservative with regard to what she shares with her family considering their views. Her concerns regarding fear of abandonment and stigmatisation, of bringing shame to her family implied that it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for her to broach the subject of sexual fluidity with them. It was implied that it would be one thing to be sexually fluid and be open about it in the city, but it would be another to be as authentic in her hometown with her family.

> Definitely, I, uhm, I've been to a couple of European countries and it just seems more accepted there. It's just, you can really be yourself. I come from a small town and if you don't fit into a mould, you just don't fit in, at all. And it, you really are judged and, you know, you just won't make friends. And I've stayed in Gauteng for a couple of years now and it really, you can wear what you want, you can hang around with who you want, and you really are, have more freedom to be yourself. But then you still go back to your hometown; visit family and you know… So, you have to really find a balance between the two. If that's even possible (Adele DZI 2: 231).

Whilst her deep feelings for her friend, at 19 were very real and she felt excited by them at the time, she had never, or perhaps never allowed herself, to feel that way about another woman since.

Adele's life experiences, and change in geographic location, have opened her mind to the possibility of future same-sex attractions and the realisation that you do not have to be either gay or straight, that sexually fluid is a category too.

4.2 Kerry's Narrative

Kerry is an athletic, Nordic looking, post-graduate educated South African woman. She identifies as not only sexually fluid but also gender fluid. She states that she presents as more feminine some days and more masculine on others. Kerry is a seeker of knowledge and her critical mind desires to leave no stone unturned. She is currently tackling a doctorate degree and not only speaks with an air of authority on matters relating to her specialities (religion, social science and political studies), but also to her lived experiences regarding restrictive socially constructed discourses. Kerry's story begins with St Anthony (see Figure 4.2). She advises that not only is he an important figure in theology (her original career choice), but the image of St Anthony and the demons, named *the temptation of St Anthony*, has always held a special place for her.

Figure 4.2

St. Anthony

(Schongauer, 1480)

The engraving by Martin Schongauer, depicts St Anthony's attempt to ascend, plagued by demons determined to drag him down and away from divinity (Martin Schongauer: Temptation of St. Anthony, 1480-1490). Kerry elaborates that the image speaks to identity development and a sense of being distressed, "beyond functioning" (Kerry DZI 2: 133),

> …in the sense of the continuous sort of narratives that you're told of what is right, what is this. So, those kinds of things are continuously coming at a person. As far as developing their personal identity. So, in that way, not necessa..., I wouldn't describe it as in a turmoil, perhaps inner conversation around those kinds of things and what is influencing it (Kerry DZI 2: 134).

Kerry's complex attachment to meaning in the image of St. Anthony is further investigated,

Interviewer: Looking at the image, it looks like he's [St. Anthony] being pulled in all sorts of different directions. Is that how you would say that you felt?

Kerry: I think that's how I would say the narratives of hegemonies affect each and every individual every day (Kerry DZI 2: 160).

Kerry's profound answer determinedly articulates her rejection of passively accepting the popular narrative and reinforces her belief that there are no "should and should nots" in life,

> I think it's more that I, I, I don't think that there is an original, uhm, "what I want to do and what I don't want to do", it's fed by those things [narratives of hegemonies]. So, yes, in that way how we formulate what is okay for me to do and what is not okay for me to do, is influenced by these dominant narratives all the time. Which in this particular case would refer to gender or sexual, uhm, yah. Yah, identity or fluidity (Kerry DZI 2: 166).

This battle between conforming to social norms or following her inner compass, has been a constant thread throughout Kerry's journey. Like Adele, Kerry was brought up in a small town with strict Christian family values. She always felt a little different and rejected dolls, frilly dresses, and fluffy toys. Kerry laughs as she recounts cutting her sister's Barbie dolls' hair short, joking that she was expressing her gender fluidity at an early age. Her

greatest desire as a young child was to receive a Hot Wheels garage for her birthday (see Figure 4.3), instead she unwrapped a bright pink Barbie car. To this day, Kerry admits she still desires the Hot Wheels garage, a link to her inner child's desires, approval, acceptance.

Figure 4.3

Hot Wheels

(Taboada, n.d.)

Kerry recounts feeling very relieved when her little sister was born, as it took some of the pressure off her to wear the frilly dresses and play with dolls. During school Kerry had dated boys, as she intimates, was expected of her. In her final school years, she became involved in a relationship with a lesbian woman almost ten years her senior, which did not end well. After school, Kerry travelled to America and was exposed to a plethora of diversity. She took this opportunity to live authentically, unburdened by the expectations and traditions of her family and community. On returning to South Africa, Kerry chose to pursue a career in theology and minored in psychology. The sciences contradicted each other in areas Kerry was grappling to make sense of. Her theological studies were leading her down a path towards life as a pastor, where she was required to sign a document prohibiting her from deviating in any way from a traditional, heteronormative lifestyle. Binary belief systems

dominated her religious studies, either you were gay or straight, male or female. Kerry submitted an image of a male and female toilet motive, captioned “male or female” to illustrate her thoughts (see Figure 4.4).

On initial inspection, this image appeared relatively simplistic in nature, but Kerry highlighted elements of the image that brought many other factors into play. “I chose that particular image also because it appears to be drawn on a chalkboard, and what is on a chalkboard is not permanent” (Kerry DZI 2: 628). Kerry emphasised the significance of education in the need for individuals to be able to try and understand, rather than passively accept what is taught. This one image encapsulates not only Kerry’s fluidity but also her needs, the limitations of fitting into a binary, of being boxed in, the non-permanence of identity or gender, that knowledge and experience are required to evolve, the effect of chalkboards and education and their role in our knowledge and experiences.

Figure 4.4

Male or female

(Alifuddin, n.d.)

Kerry could not bring herself to sign the aforementioned document prohibiting her from deviating in any way from a traditional, heteronormative lifestyle, and in that moment of integrity lost her career, friends and mentors. She is quick to advise that her fluidity did not cause her distress, it was more the consequences of being non-heteronormative that caused distress.

Kerry: Um, So, uhm, effect of livelihood, effect of social exclusion, etcetera. Would definitely have caused, uhm, or definitely did cause psychological distress then.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kerry: But not, I would not say based on the orientation. The orientation in a completely different setting could have had very different consequences. So, I would have said due to the secondary effects (Kerry DZI 2: 546).

Concurrently Kerry was involved in a queer theory discussion forum at her university and became acquainted with the local gay and lesbian communities. Around this time Kerry was sexually fluid, having feelings for both men and women, then she met Hayley. Hayley was the first person Kerry was prepared to disrupt her life for. Hayley was very much part of the lesbian community and Kerry was introduced to rallies and lesbian culture in Johannesburg.

So, I think Hayley, uhm, was really my big coming out experience. Uhm, it was the first person that I felt, erhm, a attraction to that was worth the disruption of my entire life. Uhm, so, the, the really going against the heteronorm in that. This would change

> my life, this would be, uhm, yah, that real coming out moment was in my relationship with her (Kerry DZI 2: 682).

While theology, philosophy and psychology all play important roles in Kerry's life, none is more leading then her internal compass. Kerry does not buy in to the nature/nurture debate nor does she buy into the right and wrong debate.

> I don't have a preference in the argument: I was born this way or chose this way. I, I'm on both. So, I don't necessarily think sexuality is out of our control. I don't think gender orientation is out of our control (Kerry DZI 2: 191).

She ascertains that heteronormative discourses pepper our value system, thinking patterns, consciousness. Whenever challenged Kerry goes back to what feels right for her and feels that life is like an open road (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5

Open Road

(Plenio, n.d.)

Kerry describes how she views her life as an open road, that there is no destination, there is a journey and it is dynamic. Kerry's message is deeper, almost that although she has goals, there is just the open road ahead and it is full of possibilities.

> Yah. So, in that sense, yah fluidity is not just a gender or a, uhm, sexual thing. It's a life thing, uhm, that our progression through life should be fluid as far as being able to grow and change and hopefully grow and change. And not regress and change (Kerry DZI 2: 735).

Kerry's ideas around her chosen images were well developed and complex. The images resonated with her at multiple levels, weaving deeper understanding into not only her inner journey. What resounds clearly with regard to Kerry is her desire to grow, to learn to embrace her life without boundaries… always seeking first with her heart.

4.3 Bongi's Narrative

A striking and attractive woman, Bongi exudes confidence and energy. She comes across as friendly, articulate and professional. She speaks with authority and her open-mindedness and views appear fresh and contemporary. Her images and thoughts on how her sexuality evolved are entwined interchangeably, following each other in quick succession at the early stages of the interview. Bongi began by talking about what she calls her own politics and beliefs, and how she views that ultimately, "love is love" (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6

Love is Love

(PinClipart, 2021)

Bongi advises that she chose the image, “love is love” to demonstrate how she intellectualised the belief that love is not defined by gender but had assumed a heterosexual default. “I don’t have any issues around homosexuality, I think you love who you love and people are attracted to souls, and they come in different bodies, and that attraction is conditioned by society” (Bongi DZI 3: 25). Bongi advised that until her first romantic same-sex attraction, she assumed a heterosexual default, automatically assigning female interactions as friendships. This view has since changed.

Bongi’s story begins approximately 3 years ago, whilst presenting and facilitating a conference in West Africa. She met and befriended Ileara, another woman also presenting at the conference. Bongi exclaims incredulously that she “missed all the signals” because she was living in what she describes as a “heterosexual bubble” (Bongi DZI 3: 52). Bongi is now in her second “queer” relationship but does not limit herself to any specific gender in a partner.

Whilst her parents are unaware of her fluidity, she states that it is more a family culture consideration rather than a concern about being rejected or judged. “My father, long time ago was kinda like he wants to be introduced to the person I’m gonna like marry and

whatever. He's not into boyfriends and other things along the way. So, I haven't told my parents" (Bongi DZI 3: 234).

Bongi continues to explain that "for them [her parents] it [sexual fluidity], would be quite a shift" (Bongi DZI 3: 241), and states "I don't know if my parents would be able to *get* sexual fluidity" (Bongi DZI 3: 242). She also feels that whilst being fluid does not directly affect her identity, it may bring some of her actions and choices under scrutiny and create distortion regarding her reasoning and life philosophies. For example, Bongi feels that marriage is patriarchal and, that announcing her sexual fluidity may lead her family to false conclusions.

> I'm also like nearly 40, unmarried and whatever. The other side I feel like if I do say I'm dating women, it'll be like "oh that's why she didn't get married." "That's what she's been all along." You know? (Bongi DZI 3: 275).

Bongi states that when and if a relationship is significant enough for her to bring to her family's attention, then it does not matter about the gender of her partner. Should her significant relationship be non-heteronormative then it will be worth the explanations required, but at this stage it would be culturally inappropriate and unnecessarily unsettling. As a means of explanation regarding how she understands herself and her identity, Bongi advises that her horizons have broadened and that she feels that in essence she has not changed, rather she feels she has grown.

> …so, my identity, did I feel like my identity shifted? It expanded in the sense that, yah. It expanded in the sense of practically, but I didn't feel like I've come home. It

> didn't feel like I've necessarily left anything, you know. I haven't left, I might date a man again (Bongi DZI 3: 180).

Unlike some of the other participants, Bongi was content in her heterosexual bubble and did not yearn for something or need to "come home" (Bongi DZI 3: 181). Bongi has felt growth within herself because of her experiences but does not feel burdened by or alienated from her environment as a result of her choices. Bongi is fortunate, in that her friends are not fixed in binary belief systems, "my circle is cool and stuff. And like that, there's no one who I felt nervous to find out [about my sexual fluidity] or be shocked or, you know" (Bongi DZI 3: 216). Bongi's experience of acceptance and LGBTQ community differs from the other participants in this study, she stated the following.

> South Africa, there's a massive queer community here. I mean it's just, it's also kinda in a way trending. So, like every, maybe it's also my circles or whatever, so, like every second person is queer at the moment (Bongi DZI 3: 309).

Opening up about a recent romantic holiday she went on, Bongi relives how she and her current partner, Sade, experienced acceptance in both the greater Durban area and in a smaller town environment. Bongi acknowledges that she is privileged to live in town and not a rural community and makes mention of the oppression and violence towards gay women in townships and rural areas. She feels this acutely as her current girlfriend, Sade, is from Nigeria, where being homosexual is illegal. She feels quite enabled by the Black, queer community and recognizes that the path has been paved by the struggles and courage of celebrities that "opened and paved the way" (Bongi DZI 3: 320). Bongi names, Zanele

Muholi, Thandiswa Mazwai, Somizi Mhlongo and Claire Mawisa as examples of pioneering LGBTQ celebrities.

On the subject of beliefs and traditions being an obstacle to her fluidity, Bongi states that her family are open minded and that the beliefs within the family system are varied, from Marxist communist to Christian, to traditional and ancestral beliefs. There appears to be an underlying message within Bongi's family structure of free thinking and acceptance; a real emphasis on critical thinking and forming your own opinions. Bongi identifies as "Eastern, new age, Buddhist" (Bongi DZI 3: 379), which she understands as "developing your own spirit" (Bongi DZI 3: 382).

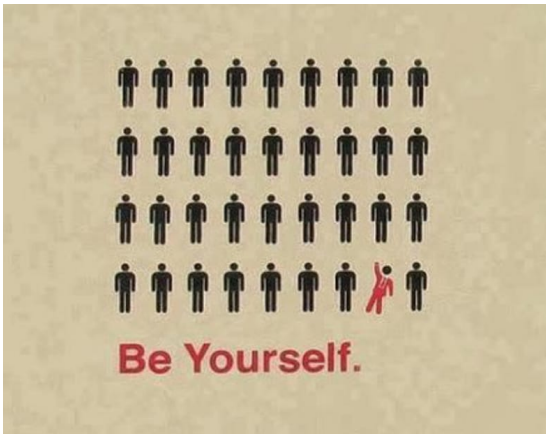
In concluding Bongi's interview it appeared that aside from the potential discomfort in educating her family around her choices, there were no other obstacles experienced or anticipated. Her images and narrative outline a desire to live life to its fullest. She describes her sexual fluidity awakening as a "whole new world" (Bongi DZI 3: 72).

4.4 Chris' Narrative

Chris presents as an energetic and engaging woman. She identifies herself as brave and unlike all the other participants interviewed, was never afraid to be perceived as different. In fact, she revelled in being unpredictable and rebellious. More than simply being different, her message is "be yourself" (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7

Be Yourself



(Lovethispic, n.d.)

Chis identifies as the red figure in Figure 4.7 and describes herself as having, "that sort of screw you attitude, go out there ruffle some feathers, I don't care, this is me. And if you don't like it, too bad" (Chris DZI 4: 391). She attributes her ability to exercise the freedom to be different to the fact that her family were always supportive of her.

Chris laughs as she recounts that until she met her wife, Tanya (also a participant in this study), she identified as heterosexual, although she notes that in looking back, this was not the case. On discussing her first recollection of being attracted to a woman she stated,

> I was just excited, and I didn't put any label to myself. I didn't think anything different of myself, in fact I still thought I was straight really. Right up until I fell in love with Tanya, I considered myself straight, but looking back I was no way straight, you know, not at all! I was very fluid (Chris DZI 4: 91).

In Chris' engagingly dramatic style she excitedly recalls that her reaction, to her first attraction to a woman, was instinctual. Her conversation is entertaining, her laugh frequent

and infectious. She begins by setting the scene at a social event when she was approximately 17 years old. She vividly recalls the excitement of being immediately attracted to a woman on the dance floor. Chris emphasises that she did not think twice about making her attraction known and was jokingly, dejected by the ensuing rejection. Chris recounts always having a fascination for women.

> I was always fascinated by women. Especially lesbians! I was always very fascinated by them. And I think I would have been, er, intrinsically drawn to that sort of lifestyle. But there was just none of that in.., where I grew up at that time (Chris DZI 4: 123).

Chris confessed that much of her sexuality was entangled with vying for her father's attention. Her complicated relationship with her father spurred Chris to express herself more flamboyantly, desiring to provoke reaction to elicit the desired attention. "No one had seen me with a girl before, and they were all very, very sort of like shocked and like 'oh my God', you know?" (Chris DZI 4: 80). She added, "I like to be a bit different, you know, uhm, so, being different didn't worry me. I'm a very brave person, like, if, I'm like fuck it; if it's gonna happen I'm gonna do it anyway" (Chris DZI 4: 186).

Chris dated both men and women thereafter but still believed she was heterosexual. She states regretfully that she lived life quite "unconsciously" (Chris DZI 4: 85) and did not question her sexuality even when she moved to London, after completing her education, and being drawn to the LGBTQ community. Chris mused that limited exposure to the LGBTQ community, certainly within South Africa, delayed her realisation that she was not, in fact, heterosexual. Whilst Chris may have been blind to her sexually fluid proclivities, her family was not. When Chris met, and fell in love, with Tanya she was not afraid to let her family

know. According to Chris, “my family were not phased at all, not phased at all, my father had died by then, […] but he wouldn’t have cared either” (Chris DZI 4: 205). She added, that neither her friends nor her siblings were surprised and in fact they divulged that they had always suspected her fluidity. Chris’ reaction to their disclosure was met with mild frustration, “guys if you knew I was into girls why didn’t you tell me, because I wasted all this time on men” (Chris DZI 4: 211). According to Chris the only real obstacle to her future happiness was her failing marriage.

> So, uhm, when I got together with her we became best friends, and I started falling in love with her; it was that feeling of being completely overjoyed, and happy. Not, not scared, uhm, yah. I wasn’t worried about what society would say or my family’s thoughts. I was lucky in that way; I was just happy. The only problem was that I was married. So, there was a major issue there (Chris DZI 4: 148).

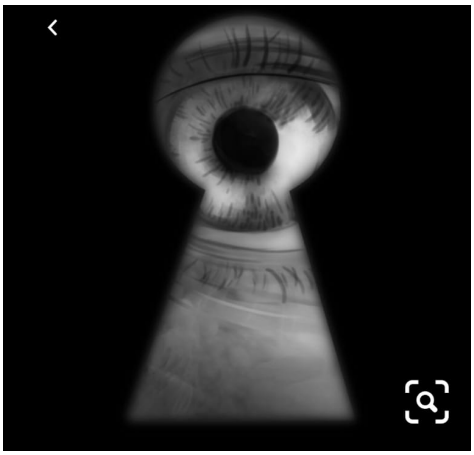
Chris advised that her relationship with her husband had been declining for several years and the friendship that sparked between her and Tanya merely highlighted the marriage deficits. In her words, “but, er, look our relationship was so messed up, anyway, you know, Tanya was just a catalyst for what happened” (Chris DZI 4: 226). Unable to stay in the marriage Chris filed for divorce and left with their two children. Chris interestingly did not indicate any negatives regarding the divorce, focusing on the positives of finding joy and feeling overjoyed.

In the beginning, Chris embraced her new identity with confidence, with no fear of rejection, stigmatisation, or inner conflict. Once the initial excitement dissipated, Chris became aware of microaggressions towards same-sex couples. She acknowledges that even though she likes to stand out in a crowd and has no issue regarding curious inquiry, the

disgust of some individuals disturbs her. “I understand people starring out of curiosity, I do, because it’s different, but when you get the disgusted looks, that’s when I get angry” (Chris DZI 4: 493). Two of Chris’ images, spoke to her strong feelings regarding feeling judged, “through the keyhole” (Figure 4.8) and “judging eyes” (Figure 4.9). The monotone images themselves contain a sense of foreboding and interestingly both these images conceal the identities of the onlookers.

Figure 4.8:

Through the Keyhole



(Owlcation, 2020)

Figure 4.9:

Judging Eyes

(Awesome Inc, 2013)

> You can't help but noticed you are scrutinized wherever you go, when I'm with Tanya. And that whole, uhm, that still today, you know. You go into a restaurant and people are looking at you. You turn around, people are looking at you (Chris DZI 4: 466).

Chris further muses that when "being married to a woman; you come out all the time" (Chris DZI 4: 506). She feels she often needs to explain and tolerate awkward comments or judgements which heterosexual couples are immune or oblivious to. Chris stressed that there is a privilege to being considered "normal" and conforming to socially constructed norms. The narrative revealed that Chris felt that heterosexual couples do not understand or even at times acknowledge this privilege or the benefits of not feeling continuously judged or scrutinised based on who you choose to love.

On discussing being sexually fluid in South Africa, as opposed to other parts of the world, Chris acknowledged that there is judgement towards sexually divergent individuals in all parts of the world, using London and rural England as an example of how opinions vary,

even within countries. Chris added, “we [as South Africans] are used to being judgmental, you know… uhmm, with our history, you know, political history, etcetera, you know. And, and we’ve got a very conservative Christian base” (Chris DZI 4: 571). Chris is a scholar of religious studies and voiced that she felt a “lot of anger towards the Christian community” (Chris DZI 4: 586).

> Most Christians I’ve been in contact with are very, it’s, it’s a sin [being gay or non-conformist], and that just doesn’t sit well with me. I can’t understand how I can be friends with somebody who thinks my love, my relationship is ultimately abnormal and a sin. So, yah. I’ve got a lot of anger towards the Christian community, because of that (Chris DZI 4: 588).

Chris also feels passionately that the South African education system is dominated by religion and notes that the curriculum promotes indoctrination of heteronormative family ideals. Chris yearns for a more diverse narrative throughout the school curriculum, which would help children questioning their orientation, or exposed to sexual diversity, to feel normal.

4.5 Tanya’s Narrative

Tanya means business! Presenting as highly intelligent and driven, Tanya was well prepared for her interview. Her images were ordered in sequence, complete with captions. She spoke openly and earnestly. Tanya is athletic and describes herself as relatively gender fluid, choosing to emphasise either feminine or masculine traits depending on her preference on any given day. She grew up in a very traditional, patriarchal, Christian nuclear family

environment, Afrikaner father and a young "subservient" English mother (Tanya DZI 5: 10). Tanya remembers always feeling "different" but was never able to fully understand why she felt that way, "I always knew from a very young age there was something a little bit different about me, uhm, I couldn't put a name to it. I didn't know what that meant, it just felt like a bad thing" (Tanya DZI 5: 16). Tanya's small-town upbringing did not allow for diversity in any way and discussing sexuality was taboo. "Anything out of the norm or spectrum of not being straight was just not discussed, you weren't exposed; that's it" (Tanya DZI 5: 22). Tanya remembers always feeling like an outsider, never wanting to get close to anyone for fear of rejection or judgement, "I was a bit of a social nomad; so, I would move amongst groups" (Tanya DZI 5: 73). Being different or "off" and perceiving this differentiation as "bad" created an out-group environment for Tanya; "when I looked at other girls, I wouldn't look at them as identifying with them as they are something like me. I would rather…, they would excite me in a very different way, if that makes sense. Like not in a friendship way" (Tanya DZI 5: 29). The inability for Tanya to normalize her feelings or have a safe place to explore her sexuality left Tanya feeling isolated, and alone in shame.

Tanya notes that during this confusing time there were no references to homosexuality on television or in the media which may have assisted in helping her understand her feelings. During her teenage years, homosexuality tentatively appeared on television and Emma, an older girl in town came out as gay. On hearing about this, Tanya's mother stated, "if you ever come home and tell me you are gay I will disown you" (Tanya DZI 5: 96). For Tanya's mother, it was all about appearances, all about the dress (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10

All About the Dress

(Daphnesecretgarden, 2021)

Tanya describes how her mother wanted her to be a princess and tried to make Tanya wear frilly dresses and bobby socks (such as those depicted in Figure 4.10 above). “My mom wanted so badly for me to be this little princess and she had in her mind this dream of what she wanted her daughter to become one day” (Tanya DZI 5: 85). “What you wore and how you were perceived by the outside world was everything” (Tanya DZI 5: 220).

When Tanya protested, she was rejected by her mother and punished. Tanya, referring to Figure 4.10 elaborated, “this speaks to my mom’s ideology of what she wanted me to be and I remember very clearly being young and it was a birthday party, and I wasn’t allowed to go unless I wore ‘the dress’” (Tanya DZI 5: 204), “she was constantly trying to get me into a bloody dress” (Tanya DZI 5: 208).

> It’s like, as an adult looking back that for me felt like I was a transvestite, like I did not belong in that dress! Everything about it was wrong. And I gave up going to the party. And I sat in the corner, I was 7 or 8. And I said: “I don’t care I’m not going to

> the party and I will not put on this dress", and I stuck to my guns, that was it! And I would not put it on. Even, I mean my matric farewell, it wasn't done that you didn't wear a dress, and she wouldn't let me go unless I wore a dress. So, this dress concept throughout my childhood was such a big deal, you know (Tanya DZI 5: 210).

Interestingly, whilst Tanya feels that she was shrouded in confusion, her defiance indicates that she had some clarity into what was not congruent with her identity and was able to reject the imposition, even at considerable cost.

> This was a big deal for me; this dress concept or whatever. And this image spoke to me, because it's the girl in the dress kissing another girl and that was so, you know, it doesn't matter what you put on, you can put on a dress, it doesn't make you straight, you know. And that's what this was about (Tanya DZI 5: 234).

Blazing into her teenage years provided new challenges, boys, girls, and the dating conundrum. Tanya dated boys during school, but her focus was always on sport and academia. She threw herself into both environments and excelled. When she was about 16 years old, she began a relationship with the aforementioned gay girl in town, Emma, approximately 6 years her senior. Tanya feels that this relationship was emotionally abusive and that it set her back in terms of discovering her true sexual identity. The relationship was carried out in secret and Tanya recalls feeling "intoxicated" by Emma, "that was my first real experience of what love is, but heartbreak at the same time" (Tanya DZI 5: 122).

After high school the family moved to Durban and Tanya found the experience liberating. She eventually met and married Tim. Not only did he "tick all the boxes" (Tanya DZI 5: 163) for her parents, but Tanya found him exciting and attractive. They had a lot in

common and up until this stage Tanya had found relationships with women to be disappointing. Aside from her relationship with Emma, other same sex relationships had been more about women experimenting or posturing with her in an attempt to glean male attention. Tanya's image, "white picket fence" (Figure 4.11) encapsulates how she views the picture-perfect scene as more of a farce, citing that it is all smiles in the front but there is a darkness looming behind. "Look how happy they are, and it's such a lie" (Tanya DZI 5: 251).

Figure 4.11

W*hite Picket Fence*

(Hercules Fence, n.d.)

Tanya feels that the birth of her son changed her relationship with Tim. Her focus became her son and the connection between herself and Tim was lost. From the beginning of their relationship, Tanya had been honest with Tim in that she had always been attracted to women and he had consented to her exploring that side of herself in the future, if the opportunity came along. On becoming friends with Chris and developing romantic feelings she discovered that Tim was not on board after all. With a failing marriage dangling in the balance, Tanya tried to reconnect with Tim, but they had drifted too far apart. Tanya and Chris connected in a way that Tanya had been craving her whole life. "It was amazing, and I

was like: ‘why did I wait this long?’, it’s insane” (Tanya DZI 5: 451). Referring to Figure 4.12, which Tanya labelled “pride with a bang”, Tanya explained that not only did the image have a sexual connotation to it, for her, but also represented the “explosion of gayness” (Tanya DZI 5: 492) she and Chris experienced together.

Figure 4.12

Pride With a Bang

(Wallpaper Safari, 2021)

Tanya: So, this image, [Figure 4.12] reminded me a bit of a vagina in a weird way. […] So, I did put a lot of thought into these pictures.

Interviewer: Yes?

Tanya: So, the nucleus of this picture, the middle part, for me kind of represents that female form.

Interviewer: Okay?

Tanya: And the colourful burst from that, this explosion of gayness ‘cause that’s what we experienced when we got together.

Interviewer: Okay?

Tanya: We were just so gay with each other. And I don't know if I'm explaining myself properly. But like, it became everything (Tanya DZI 5: 485).

Tanya expressed feelings of fear and excitement during this period but unlike Chris' family, Tanya's family was not accustomed to divergent or non-conformist behaviour from Tanya. Unable to tell them face-to-face, Tanya wrote them a letter telling them about her relationship with Chris. She did not hear from her parents for approximately six weeks, finally her father called. Tanya's father claims to have sensed the diversity in Tanya and accepted her relationship readily. His relationship with Chris was reportedly so strong that Tanya notes good-humoredly, "it's like he likes her more than me and it irritates me sometimes" (Tanya DZI 5: 530). Tanya's mother took it a little less well, questioning her parenting and trying to understand where she went wrong. "Chris and I have been together for 8 years, but we are still having those conversations about [how] nothing caused this [being in a same-sex relationship], I just am this" (Tanya DZI 5: 540). Tanya wistfully states "it's not about me growing up, it's about them growing up" (Tanya DZI 5: 526).

Whilst Tanya's father came to terms with her sexuality and her mother continues to try to understand, Tanya's brother and sister-in-law have disowned her for her life choices. Tanya feels that Chris was worth all the discomfort, coming out to her family and risking rejection. On asking Tanya to speak to her final picture she elegantly describes what could be interpreted as a journey, full circle to living her truth. Tanya describes the sparkler in Figure 4.13 below, as Chris' energy and spark in her life. Tanya notes that the static image represents the hope that the spark will never burn out. Tanya also noted an admiration of the pictured individual and identified with the androgynous, authentic nature captured in the photograph.

Figure 4.13

Authentic Self

(Palmer, 2017)

> I think that's representative of me, you know. Not the funkiness, I wouldn't say I'm funky, but I definitely have a certain kind of way of being and dressing, and presenting myself… erhm, and I like how he's looking forward, you know, and, and that sparkler is lighting up all the dark around him. So, he's in this glow (Tanya DZI 5: 904).

Tanya takes the time to wistfully muse on how the individual in the image is contemplatively looking forward to the future and how the image is the "antithesis" of the first image she submitted, "alone in shame".

Figure 4.14

Alone in Shame

(Hermogenes, 2021)

Figure 4.14 depicts a lonely, misunderstood (in Tanya's case), child hunched over and cuddling a soft toy. The expression of bright colour on the child's socks is prominent and central to the image, against the stark room. The rainbow colours, perhaps a demonstration of defiance and LGBTQ leanings. By contrast Figure 4.13 presents a confident individual looking wistfully ahead, bathed in the warm glow of the sparkler being held up.

"So, it's this mix, you know, of gender and representation [Figure 4.13], and it was the antithesis to my first picture [Figure 4.14]" (Tanya DZI 5: 915).

Talking to gender and being sexually diverse in the South African context, Tanya speaks to the difficulty in finding friends in the gay community. She also speaks to the diverse cultures within South Africa and acknowledges the difficulties of being non-conforming, "I think in the South African context there's very little freedom to be your authentic self" (Tanya DZI 5: 1004).

Like all the participants in this study, Tanya does not reject the idea of being in a relationship with a man in the future. For Tanya it is important to be with someone that fulfils her emotional needs and to be her authentic self.

> …being in a relationship with a man, doesn't really excite me, terribly. So, I doubt I'd go back to being with men. But if I was to meet a man that fulfilled what I needed in a person, emotionally, I could certainly be involved with a man again (Tanya DZI 5: 968).

4.6 Conclusion

Throughout the above findings discussion participants' stories and concepts of sexual fluidity development and identity adjustment, within the South African context, have been narrated. In addition, each narration relates the participants' personal understanding of the impact of upbringing, religion, and microaggressions to their developmental process. The chapter also provided deep insight into each participant's narrative, brought to life through participants' own words and their selection of images. Next chapter, Chapter 5 examines the narratives (i.e., the findings) theoretically, while providing links to the objectives and research questions of the study.

Chapter 5: Findings Discussion

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study. Guided by the research objectives and questions (Section 3.1) the below body of work sets out to discuss participants' sexual fluidity manifestations, the influence of upbringing, religion and patriarchy, sexual identity development, and the psychological stress associated with being sexually fluid. Throughout these discussions reference will also be made linking back to the theoretical frameworks (dynamic systems theory and queer theory), as outlined in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2. The findings are supported by the literature and are discussed in more detail below, beginning with the manifestation of sexual fluidity in the South African context.

5.1 Sexual Fluidity Manifestation in the South African Context

This section discusses how participants perceived their sexual awakening, or the manifestation of sexual fluidity in the South African context.

The findings of this study, as discussed in Chapter 4, are supported by the literature. This is evidenced as follows: Chapters 1 (introduction) and 2 (literature review), introduce the concept of a delay in acceptance of non-heterosexual sexual orientation and identity in South Africa due to conservative traditional, religious, and historical underpinnings. These remain intact, even within contemporary times (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007; van Zyl, 2011).

Concurring with the literature, in Chapter 4, participants advised that growing up in small, South African towns with traditional, religious family values played a part in most of the participants' reluctance or inability to pursue or follow their same-sex attractions. Participants acknowledged that both implicit and explicit societal expectations/limitations prevented them from pursuing non-heteronormative relationships and integrating sexually fluid identities into their self-identities until adulthood. Diamond (2008a) speculates, that whilst the capacity for sexual fluidity might be biologically based, it is often triggered by

social factors. Therefore, individuals brought up in cultures with rigid ideas about sexuality might have a lesser chance of exploring and ultimately discovering their capacity for fluidity. Diamond's (2008a) implication speculates that sexually fluid women may be living under the auspices that they are heterosexual women, when in fact they may not be more fluid and unaware of such, due to a lack of exposure, knowledge, or conceivable options.

On conversing with participants about how they felt living in South Africa affected their self-expression and sexual identities, the responses were mixed. Instinctively participants initially felt the need to compare South Africa with other countries: Tanya mentioned Russia as an oppressive and homophobic society, and Bongi spoke about Nigeria in the same light. As Bongi's girlfriend resides in Nigeria, where being homosexual is both illegal and dangerous, Bongi felt the oppressiveness and fearfulness of homophobia acutely. Participants acknowledged the different attitudes to sexual fluidity within South Africa itself, notably Bongi and Tanya were sensitive to the plight of sexual diversity in Black, Indian and Muslim communities within South Africa, and Muslims worldwide. Sexual diversity in some communities within South Africa is dangerous and can result in violence or even death (Morgan & Wieringa, 2007).

Violence against LGBTQ community members is deemed as a hate crime, and a 2014 report by the Centre for Risk Analysis at the South African Institute of Race Relation (IRR) confirms that violence and discrimination is still rife in South Africa despite progressive policies, the (Lynch, et al., 2013) These hate crimes include atrocities such as secondary victimisation of LBGT, rape; corrective rape; oppression and violently enforced compulsory heterosexuality. Although these atrocities were not overtly reported by participants in this study, it does not mean that these atrocities do not warrant concern. These violent, discriminating and oppressive acts, which are alarmingly frequent in South Africa, can reasonably be estimated to inhibit sexually fluid manifestation in South Africa (van Zyl,

2011). Participants in this study, namely Bongi and Adele, are reluctant to come out as sexually fluid for fear of the social consequences. None of the participants acknowledged a fear of physical violence as a concern within their direct environment in South Africa, however verbal abuse, discrimination and feeling judged was experienced by all participants at some point in time due to their sexual identity.

Reviewing homophobia experienced within the South African context, reference is made to Chapter 2, specifically the Progressive Prude (2021) survey data, which reported 44% of LGBTQ experiencing discrimination or abuse (verbal, physical, or other) in their everyday lives due to their sexuality. Findings within this study are consistent with the literature (Everett, 2015; Haas, et al., 2010), regarding homophobic experiences, specifically reports from participants (Tanya, Kerry, Adele, and Chris). Whilst Tanya, Kerry and Chris all directly felt judged and victimised due to their sexuality, Adele and Bongi both perceived that they will be judged should they openly display their sexuality. It could be understood that these ideas of impending judgement and potential rejection must be based in their concepts of reality, a socially constructed reality. However, whilst South African popular opinion regarding LGBTQ acceptance and culture remains tenuous, the LGBTQ community is protected by the constitution. Specifically examining the manifestation of sexual fluidity within the South African context, participants reported feeling safe from prosecution but still felt scrutinised and judged in their daily, personal lives. Chris speaks clearly to feeling watched (Chris DZI 4: 493) and her image submissions (Figures 4.8 and 4.9) represent the sinister connotations she feels, reporting people staring with “disgusted looks” (Chris DZI 4: 494). Similarly, Kerry’s inner dialogue, depicted by the image of St. Anthony (Figure 4.2), outlines her inner conflicts between, as she puts it, “the narratives of hegemonies”. Taking a less direct approach, Adele and Bongi have both hidden their same-sex relationships from their families out of fear for judgement and misunderstanding.

Whilst microaggressions such as scrutiny, judgement, misunderstanding and even at times verbal abuse are not directly life threatening as such, it does impose a more reserved and cautious element to same-sex relationships than the average heterosexual relationship might (van Zyl, 2011). Chris feels that heterosexual couples have a gift of normality in so far as that they do not have to continuously *come out* about their sexuality or correct people's wrong assumptions regarding the gender of their romantic partner.

Bongi's experience of sexual fluidity in South Africa has reportedly been positive up until the time of this study. Bongi shared with the researcher that she was expecting to feel victimised when travelling with her Nigerian girlfriend, Sade, around South Africa but in fact she felt welcomed throughout the trip, recollecting that "people were lovely" (Bongi DZI 3:303), especially in comparison to the people from Sade's home country, Nigeria.

Interestingly Bongi feels accepted by South African society and socially reinforced by pioneering LGBTQ celebrities but, continued to fear judgement from her own family. Whilst Bongi notes feeling free in urban areas and tourist destinations, none of the participants were able to speak to personal experiences in rural South Africa, this makes up one of the major limitations of this study, and is mentioned as such within Chapter 6 (Section 6.2).

Considering social perceptions of sexual fluidity, within the South African context, the manifestation of such, although legally accepted, stands in stark conflict with commonly held social values (Sutherland, et al., 2016; van Zyl, 2011). This inverted approach, where social opinion did not drive change to policy, suggests that sexual fluidity is perceived as morally wrong by both society and individuals within that society but not at a policy level. Areas affecting social constructions of reality, such as upbringing, religion, spirituality and community values were mentioned as factors contributing to participants' constructions of their world. These and other external influences and experiences were reported to dynamically influence the manifestation of sexual fluidity and constructions of identity

amongst the study participants. The below section ventures into identifying areas influencing participants' understanding of their reality. The content captured within the following section are data informed, referring to the factors contributing to the manifestation of the participants' sexual fluidity within the South African context.

5.2 The Influence of Childhood/Upbringing

Four of the participants grew up in 'conservative, traditional, patriarchal households' and had limited non-heteronormative exposure during their childhood. In Kerry, Tanya and Adele's cases, deviance from cultural norms was discouraged in the form of distal stressors, an objective stressor, relating to their actual experiences of discrimination from within their circle of influence (family, community, religious or spiritual). This was evidenced in the symbolic messages imposed on Kerry and Tanya specifically the Barbie doll car (Kerry DZI 2: 655) and the dress and bobby socks (Tanya DZI 5: 202) as reported on in Chapter 4. Tanya was further impeded in her self-exploration following the direct, verbalized message from her mother, "if you ever come home and tell me you're gay I will disown you" (Tanya DZI 5:96).

Echoing the literature on social and environmental influences and the psychological stress associated with conforming to societal and specifically familial norms Adele and Bongi at the time of the study were still attempting to come to terms with how their families may react to disclosure of their queer relationships. Adele noted, "it's really difficult to step out, break the rules and upset your parents…, my father would never have accepted it [sexual fluidity]" (Adele DZI 1: 127). Tanya and Kerry attempted to assert their divergence during middle childhood but were not taken seriously and were even punished for rejecting imposed gender stereotyping. To add, whilst Chris' family were less restrictive than some of the other participants' families, the fact that Chris described joy in being perceived as "different" and

sought attention through “shocking” others, implies a generally negative attitude towards perceived deviant behaviour.

Deviance with regard to sexual orientation or romantic attraction was not something any of the participants was able to consider until adulthood despite same-sex flirtations and experimental same-sex behaviour (heteroflexibility). Whilst intellectually participants acknowledged that they now believed that there is nothing wrong with women loving women, this may not always have been the case. Shame was expressed verbally by both Adele and Tanya, represented with a photograph by Tanya and implied by other participants (Chris, Bongi and Kerry) in their initial reluctance to assimilate same-sex experiences into their sexual identities or come out to social groups. This concurs with Rosenberg’s (2018) findings, which link shame, psychological distress and repression of sexual expression. Adele articulates feelings of shame. “Uhm, …you’re definitely faced with feelings of shame, because you’re raised in a certain way and you’re raised that certain ways are shameful and that there’s something wrong with you” (Adele DZI 1: 333).

Whilst shame is a paralysing determinant of sexual orientation disclosure to family (D’Augelli, et al., 2006), so too is the potential withdrawal of social (Everett, 2015) and financial support (Mrubula-Ngwenya, et al., 2020), that families often provide. Fear of loss of affection or exposing your loved ones to social stigma, attached to a family member’s disclosure, also called *courtesy stigma* (Angermeyer, Schulze, & Dietrich, 2003), produce strong arguments for concealment of sexual orientation. Relationships do not take place in a void and the social implications of having a sexually fluid or non-heteronormative family member can bring the whole family under scrutiny and discomfort. Conservative social environments with rigid heteronormative and religious underpinnings can make divergent life choices difficult, as was explicitly seen in the narrative of this study’s participants. Following on from the discussion on family and upbringing, the following section focuses in on religion

and spirituality, as four of the five participants made direct reference to the strong influence of religion in their upbringing.

5.2.1 Religion, Spirituality and Patriarchy

Within the narratives contained in Chapter 4, already it can be deduced that participants held strong, conflicted, and mostly negative views on religion. Interestingly two of the participants, Kerry and Chris, completed religious studies at tertiary education level. According to Yip (2005), the intrinsically traditional, dominant, and binary heterosexual messages taught in religious texts problematises and censures homosexuality. It is from these and similar comments reported by Yip (2005) in Chapter 2 already, that we seek to understand both Kerry and Chris' desire to engage deeply with religious texts in an effort to buttress and understand the arguments supporting and opposing non-heteronormative behaviour. Yip (2005, p. 49) purports that "it is not surprising that non-heterosexual Christians and Muslims engage with religious texts to construct space not only to contest for acceptance, but also to generate theological capital for their own spiritual nourishment". The preceding statement was confirmed when Chris attributed her interest in studying religion to the fact that she desired to "have a rebuttal if somebody comes at me" (Chris DZI 4: 620). Kerry's interest in the study of religious texts is investigated from her connection to the image of the torment of St. Anthony (Figure 4.2). Kerry advised that the image of St. Anthony had always held a special place for her, having experienced opposition to her self-expressionism as a child and denial of her needs and wants in favour of her mother's needs and wants. The messages Kerry internalized from her upbringing questioned her morals, bringing her feelings into conflict with her introjected values, taken from others. In our participants' cases, socially held common beliefs and values would have become normalised during their early developmental years. Interjected social values and beliefs are only later re-

evaluated as individuals begin to critically evaluate their beliefs as they further develop and define their self-structure and identities. Understanding religion as a construct of knowledge (Guest & Arweck, 2016), participants' continued investigation and study (particularly Chris and Kerry) in adulthood, allowed for reassessment of value systems and beliefs. Exposure to LGBTQ individuals and communities (Sutherland, et al., 2016), gay affirming social media and popular culture (Burgess, et al., 2016), can be reasonably regarded as facilitating tolerance and acceptance of divergent sexual orientations and identities.

Adele's narrative in Chapter 4, Section 4.1, reflects feelings of being burdened by the religious values imposed upon her. Especially with regard to understanding her emotions as sinful and demonic. Instead of feeling burdeoned, as Adele did, Chris shared feelings of anger, by saying "I've got a lot of anger towards the Christian community. I'm not gonna lie" (Chris DZI 3: 586). Both Adele and Chris speak to a conflict between religion and the embodiment of their sexual fluidity. They both make mention of the oppressive rhetoric regarding the need to be *normal* and insinuating that perceptions of non-heteronormative romantic relationships are deemed sinful, demonic, or abnormal. Chris further stated, "if you look around the world, religion and sexual fluidity, it just doesn't go together. And yes, I have a lot of anger about that" (Chris DZI 4: 625).

Other examples of conflict with religion can be demonstrated by Tanya's brother and sister-in-law disowning her due to their religious and moral beliefs. Kerry suffered a similar fate and states that disclosure of her orientation, "led me [to be] disallowed to continue [in the priesthood]. And also, then losing my entire network of friends that I had through that experience" (Kerry DZI 2: 317). Bongi always felt that Christianity was an oppressive institution and stated that she never "bought into" the Christian values system, which she feels are judgmental and political. The Eastern influence that has tinted Bongi's spiritual growth resonates with her desire to be part of a more open, accepting world.

The findings of this study, with regard to a conflict between religion and sexual fluidity concurs with the literature recited within the literature review, where Yip (2005) states that religious, non-heterosexual individuals continue to grapple with censure of their sexuality. Yip (2005) further documents that non-heterosexual individuals may go to lengths to conceal their sexuality, suppress their proclivities, or may discard religion altogether in order to relieve psychological distress caused by their internal conflicts. As none of the participants directly spoke to distress or psychological distress, the following section is informed by the participants' shared narratives in conjunction with the tenets of dynamic systems theory. The heading *identity deconstruction and reconstruction* is utilized as a broad, encompassing term to report participants' self-reported links between sexual fluidity, sexual identity crises, conformity, traditions, and psychological distress.

5.3 Identity Deconstruction and Reconstruction

Throughout this study consistent reference is made to sexual identity changes and the influence thereof on South African women's propensity for psychological distress.

"Psychological distress is a state of emotional suffering associated with stressors and demands that are difficult to cope with in daily life" (Arvidsdotter, Marklund, Kylén, Taft & Ekman, 2016, p. 687). The below section focusses first on identity development with an emphasis on sexual identity crises due to changes in sexual orientation. After this a discussion on psychological distress follows as, four of the five participants, not only experienced psychological distress due to their sexual orientation in adulthood, but also during their childhoods.

5.3.1 Sexual Identity Development and Crises due to Changes in Sexual Orientation

According to Katz-Wise (2012, p. 1), "previous theory on sexual orientation understood it to develop early in life and remain stable over time". Formerly, identity development as theorised by Erikson (1959), believed adolescents achieved identity milestones after undergoing crises and integration (Katz-Wise, 2012). Studies supporting the need for the affirmation of sexual orientation and identity in the teenage years, suggest that social support in these areas benefitted individuals in providing a more positive sense of well-being in adulthood (Doty, et al., 2010; Ryan, et al., 2010; Snapp, et al., 2015). More recently (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2005; Diamond, 2008a; Diamond, 2008b; Katz-Wise, 2012) have highlighted sexual orientation and identity as fluid rather than fixed. This indicates that sexual identity is continuously undergoing reassessment in response to sociocultural influences (Katz-Wise, 2012).

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2), the Cass identity model (1979), outlines six stages of coming to terms with, and openly declaring one's identity or sexual orientation, these being: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Kerry, Chris, and Tanya's narratives suggest successful navigation through the stages, whereas Adele is perched with "curiosity" at the precipice of learning more about herself and Bongi, taking a practical but noncommittal approach for the foreseeable future. Rosenberg (2018) argues that the notion of navigating fluidity is far more complex, influenced and impacted by each new sexual experience. Thereby reinforcing that identity and fluidity are dynamic, rather than finite. Hence understanding one's sexual identity and being resolved in it are not necessarily achievable objectives, resulting in complex emotions and psychological stress. The following section further investigates psychological distress as it relates to this study.

5.4 Psychological Stress and Sexual Fluidity

On investigating the notion of fragile senses of self, participants acknowledged feeling less psychologically distressed directly regarding their sexual fluidity as opposed to acceptance of such by society. Kerry articulates that distress was rather due to the secondary effects thereof. In Kerry's case these were specifically concerns regarding the loss of career, loss of friends, and loss of mentors. In Tanya's case, discomfort was acknowledged in the fear of disclosure and the subsequent abandonment she experienced. Chris expressed feeling resentful, of time wasted engaging in toxic relationships with men, Adele and Bongi were still caught up in the dance of disclosure, awaiting motivation to do so and articulated worries about the reactions of their respective families.

Most of the participants did not directly link sexual fluidity as impacting on psychological distress but rather the reactions of others to the disclosure of same-sex or sexual minority orientation. This corresponds with the literature, whereby negative reactions from family and peers increased anxiety and potential exposure to discrimination and rejection (Everett, 2015). Adele's narrative touched on feelings of suppressing her desires, and her internal dialogue spoke to feeling torn between trying to do the right thing and the thoughts inside her head (Adele DZI 1: 379). Kerry's narrative and image of St. Anthony highlights feeling pressured to fulfil others' expectations to her own detriment. Chris blanketed her fluidity in flamboyant behaviour and Tanya buried herself in sport and academics. Bongi, having had no proclivity towards sexual fluidity prior to her first experience in adulthood, did not relay childhood sexual identity discord.

For Tanya, Kerry and Chris, the delay in assimilating conflicting messages both distal and proximal arguably delayed development and cognitive symbiosis. Tanya also advised that she lacked a sense of belonging (Figure 4.14, alone in shame), Chris was unable to find the nurturance she desired in unfulfilling relationships and Kerry fought to not be pulled in all

directions by ‘demons’, artfully accentuating this angst with the submission of the image of St. Anthony (see Figure 4.2).

Psychological distress in the form of microaggressions were reported by participants in feeling scrutinized, judged, at odds with societal expectations and the need to continually “come out” to strangers. Concurrent with the findings of Rosenberg (2018), sexual minority individuals may find themselves in a constant battle to live authentically within an oppressive heteronormative society. Whilst it may be accurate to state that psychological distress may be lessened by self-acceptance, acknowledgement of the pressure to continuously self-categorization, disclosure of sexual orientation and the ability to deal with social discrimination, is arguably burdening (Rosenberg, 2018).

5.5 Conclusion

Contrary to the psychological distress reported regarding primary and secondary effects of expressions of sexual fluidity, all participants in this study felt positive about their actual awakening. Kerry speaks to gay pride and true love, Chris to feeling overjoyed and that she had experienced a sexual revelation. Adele expressed “fireworks” (Figure 4.1), Tanya “pride with a bang” (Figure 4.12) and Bongi “a whole new world”. From this we can deduce that the participants’ experience regarding the manifestation of sexual fluidity was one of excitement, joy and wonder. The psychological distress felt can therefore be attributed to conflict between cognitions and emotions as it pertains to hegemonic discourses, learned through social conditioning, directly conflicting with feelings of attraction. The following chapter concludes this research study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study explored the sexual fluidity of five South African women between the ages of 30-50.

The introduction presented the backdrop of the study by drawing on the literature; the rationale of the study; context, research questions and concludes with a synopsis of each chapter.

Chapter 2 reviewed the extant literature and deductively presented constructions of sexuality, beginning with understanding perspectives on sexual orientation across cultures and homosexuality within the South African context. Chapter 2 also included an overview of the literature on sexual fluidity, the influence of power and religion, perspectives on sexual diversity in the South African context, and the subsequent burden of stress on minority groups followed. Finally, the theoretical framework, namely dynamic systems theory and queer theory were presented and discussed.

Chapter 3 provided a comprehensive discussion of the methodology used for the current study. The Chapter presented the research questions, research design, data collection method, sample and sampling method, data analysis, as well as the relevant ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study. In line with a narrative analysis style, participant narratives were constructed and presented using a narrative tone. The photographs, submitted by participants with the aim of representing and complementing their individual experiences regarding their sexual fluidity within the South Africa context, were presented within the narratives.

Chapter 5 discussed the findings of this study utilising the research questions and objectives to explore participants' sexual fluidity manifestations, the influence of upbringing, religion and patriarchy, sexual identity development, and the psychological stress associated

with being sexually fluid. Links were made between existent literature, the theoretical frameworks (namely dynamic systems and queer theory) and the findings. The findings were supported by literature.

Chapter 6 sums up the main findings, specifically the impact of upbringing, culture and lack of exposure to diverse environments influence identity and sexual identity development. This Chapter also presents recommendations for future research.

6.1 Synthesis of Findings

Specifically, the data reveals that upbringing, parental approval, and lack of access to LGBTQ affirming information or support was fundamental in suppressing participants' coming out, sexual identity development, and overall identity development. Becoming aware of, and acknowledging, one's sexual identity or orientation is a process, usually beginning with self-acceptance and coming-out to oneself (Katz-Wise, 2012). An individual's sexual identity development may be related to holding particular attitudes about sexuality. Previous research has suggested that many individuals hold negative attitudes toward bisexuality (Israel & Mohr, 2004). It is interesting to observe the impact of social constructions such as the ones explored in this study (religion, community, tradition, limiting binary constructions of sexuality) impact the degrees to which each of the participants embraced acknowledgment and integration of sexual fluidity into their identities. The narratives and images submitted by participants in this research speak to several articulated and implied messages, imposed by society and their environments, that have impacted their sense of self exploration, identity development and belonging. Queer theory, as applied to this research, sought to challenge these constructions of reality which place limits on an individual's potential desires (Valocchi, 2005). The findings of this study were consistent with the literature in that conservative viewpoints and small communities were found to create less opportunity for

diversity and sexual identity exploration. Diamond's (2008b) assertion that sexual fluidity is situation-dependent suggests the importance of considering the impact of social context on sexual fluidity experiences. Thereby implying that an individual may never question their sexual orientation until they are exposed to the notion of sexual fluidity or experience an attraction for an individual that falls outside their preferred gender attraction, where it be same-sex or other-sex. For all participants in this study, whilst social constructions (religion, up-bringing, community, tradition) influenced their sexual-fluidity manifestation, living in South Africa was not considered constraining. All participants acknowledged microaggressions towards same-sex couples at some level, yet none reported feeling that living in South African was detrimental or factored as a deterrent to their sexual fluidity. Rather, most felt liberated that they were protected by the law. Participants did acknowledge that this was not true in more conservative, traditional environments and that women in some communities were at risk of GBV.

Whilst each participants' photo-narrative is unique, there were intersections in the data surrounding: identity adjustment, the impact of religion and spirituality, the influence of upbringing (community and nuclear family) through to a national level (South Africa). To elaborate, the picture that emerged is one of identities being reshaped and revised as individuals continually negotiate and challenge their introjected value systems and structure of self in conjunction with widely accepted socially constructed norms. This concurs with the literature, specifically those highlighted in Chapter 2, namely dynamic systems theory (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2005; Diamond, 2008a; Diamond, 2008b and Katz-Wise, 2012) and queer theory (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1990 and Sedgwick, 1990). These adjustments would only be possible within dynamic systems (continuously changing) or queer (challenging and deconstructing) frameworks.

What is also evident from the findings of this study is that attitudes to non-heterosexuality in the South African context, whilst still not considered the norm, have come a long way from the hidden shadows of yesteryear. This is positive from a queer theory perspective, as noted in Chapter 2, which constantly challenges our constructions of what is deemed normal. Similarly, changing or dynamic constructions of society may see an evolution from currently perceived norms into a totally new version of normal. One participant speaks to a desire to move between the grey spaces, the non-permanence of the dominant binary and highlights education and experience playing a role (both in the past and future). Lack of non-heteronormative and gender diverse education in schools was also noted as promoting homophobia, explicitly verbalized in Chris' narrative. The normalising of heterosexualism through the current curriculum and limiting inclusion of gay and gender affirming literature is believed to passively play a part in maintaining limiting beliefs around what society considers normal (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Queery theory, as stated in Chapter 2, directly seeks to challenge these limiting constructions, that passively seek to control society and define 'normal'. A search on Google Scholar on "education and LGBT in South Africa" since 2020, produced 4350 results, highlighting the need for reconsidering sexual and gender policies and programs within South African schools and universities. In contrast to this, one participant, Bongi, mentioned a shift in contemporary South African culture, where sexuality on a continuum is starting to replace binary systems thereby revising fluidity as fashionable and trendy.

In conclusion, all five participants continue to challenge commonly held belief systems, endeavouring to live authentically and consciously; discarding unassimilated, internalized sex-gender-sex identity matches and externally determined cultural expectations of their behaviour and roles, sexually and otherwise. thereby reinforcing positing this study within dynamic systems and queer theory theoretical frameworks.

6.2 Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations together with recommendations for future research are outlined in attempt to encourage and inspire more literature on the topic of sexual fluidity, specifically within non-Western contexts and communities.

Due to the small sample size, synonymous with qualitative research methods; and lack of access to rural women willing to identify as sexually-fluid; this study was limited to educated, professional, sexually fluid adult women. Access to sexually-fluid women from rural areas within South Africa may have revealed similar or differing data. According to the literature, rural women's experiences, might differ immensely to that of urban women (Lynch, et al., 2013).

Regretfully only one Black South African woman participated in the research and her experiences of LGBTQ community differed exponentially to the White South African women participants. The White South African participants felt a severe lack of LGBTQ community, whereas the Black South African participant felt an inclusive, burgeoning sense of LGBTQ community. Other Black South African women could provide valuable insight into this discrepancy.

Considerations for further study would include the following. Including a demographically diverse sample of participants (in terms of race, ethnicity, area of residence, education, etcetera). In addition, an area requiring attention and further study would be researching access to LGBTQ support and communities, especially with an emphasis on developmental years, for example the schooling system and broader community. What is strikingly evident in the data, is the negative impact of homophobic upbringings, religious institutions, and community or neighbourhood; and the lack of positive factors such as affirmative developmental environments (schools, religious institutions, role models) and access to an LGBT community. Study participants unanimously felt that there was a lack of

exposure, interaction and access to LGBT communities and support systems. Four of the participants felt that their small-town, traditional upbringings had confined them and felt that earlier exposure to LGBT communities would have been beneficial to their sexual awakening. All five participants mentioned that social triggers and exposure to divergent communities was fundamental to their authenticity and sexual diversity. Participants generally felt that there was a lack of access to LGBTQ communities in South Africa, with three of the five participants speaking directly to the difficulty in even finding like-minded LGBTQ friends. As previously mentioned only one participant felt that there was a large and growing, queer community in South Africa. Delving into the difference in participants' experiences regarding LGBTQ communities in South Africa is beyond the scope of this study but may be a consideration for future studies.

In addition, recommendation for future research into the following fields can be made: discrimination experienced in the work context or job market as a sexually-fluid or lesbian woman; school systems (parents, teachers) and their readiness for LGBTQ life orientation curricular; school systems and discrimination experienced by LGBTQ staff, students, parents; access, availability and effectiveness of support services across the age-groups readily available to LGBTQ individuals, their families (including education, legal, medical, etc.); openness of schools to gay affirming, age appropriate literature such as children stories not projecting stereotypical nuclear families and incorporating for example Jane and John's two dads etc.; ways to assist the reporting of hate crimes in order to (1) negate further victimisation of sexual minority groups (2) enhance recourse for the conviction of perpetrators of hate crimes.

6.3 Conclusion

This study explored the manifestation and complexities regarding the sexual fluidity of five South African women between the ages of 30-50. A narrative analysis interview approach was utilised, complemented by participant sourced photographs depicting images relevant to participants' life experiences regarding sexual-fluidity manifestation in the South African context. Utilising dynamic systems theory and queer theory frameworks, the study revealed that there is a significant correlation between sexual-fluidity manifestation in the South African context and social constructions and factors such as upbringing, religion and patriarchy, sexual identity development, and psychological stress associated with non-heteronormative sexual orientation. The findings were supported by literature and links were made between existent literature, the theoretical frameworks (namely dynamic systems and queer theory) and the findings. Finally limitations of the study and recommendations for future research were presented.

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Appendix A: Turn it In Report

Lisa Nicholas dissertation

ORIGINALITY REPORT

5%	5%	2%	2%
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Appendix B - Research Approval Dated June 2019

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

05 June 2019

Ms Lisa Nicholas (205507174)
School of Applied Human Sciences
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Nicholas,

Protocol reference number : HSS/0282/019M
Project title: Challenging the binary : A photo-narrative exploring sexual fluidity and the sexuality sex gender continuum in adult women in South Africa

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

With regards to your response received on 28 May 2019 to our letter of 20 May 2019, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 1 year from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]
.....
Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr Nicholas Munro
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Ruth Teer-Tomaselli
cc School Administrator: Ms Priya Konan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Appendix C - Research Approval Dated August 2020

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

20 August 2020

Ms Lisa Nicholas (205507174)
School of Applied Human Sciences
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Nicholas,

Protocol reference number : HSS/0282/019M
Project title: Challenging the binary : A photo-narrative exploring sexual fluidity and the sexuality sex gender continuum in adult women in South Africa

Approval Notification – Recertification Application

Your request for Recertification dated 13 August 2020 was received.

This letter confirms that you have been granted Recertification Approval for a period of one year from the date of this letter. This approval is based strictly on the research protocol submitted and approved in 2019.

Any alteration s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

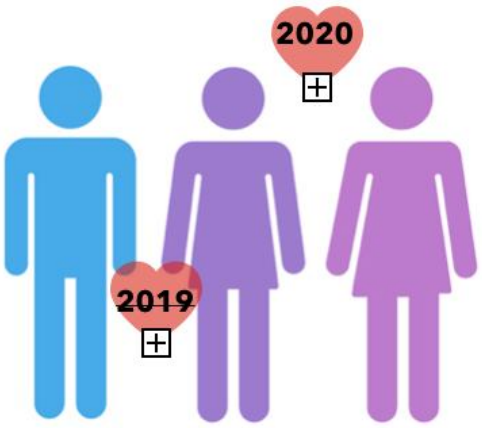
/dd

cc Supervisor: Dr Nicholas Munro
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Ruth Teer-Tomaselli
cc School Administrator: Ms Priya Konan

Appendix D - Flyer for distribution to possible research participant

SEXUAL FLUIDITY

FALLEN IN LOVE WITH BOTH MEN AND WOMEN?
CANNOT QUITE PIN DOWN YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?
DO NOT QUITE IDENTIFY AS BISEXUAL?



Benefits:

- **You may learn more about yourself and develop new insights about your experiences.**
- **Your participation may benefit sexually fluid women in the future.**

Participate in a research study seeking to understand your experience of becoming, and living, as a sexually fluid woman in South Africa.

I am a Psychology Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My research is on **sexual fluidity** and changes in attraction from males to females (or vice versa) over time (e.g. dated exclusively women until I met Robert last year or vice versa). I want to better understand experiences in becoming and living as a sexually fluid individual in South Africa.

In this study, I am interviewing **sexually fluid women,** who have had at least one sexual or love relationship with someone from a gender group that they would not previously have been attracted to in a romantic/physical way.

To Participate: You must identify as a sexually fluid woman and be between 30 to 50 years of age. To find out more about the study please contact the researcher, Lisa Nicholas, before the end of **April 2020**.
Tel/WhatsApp: 0724 555 905 or email: lnicholas@gmail.com

The study has been approved by the University of Kwazulu-Natal Ethics Committee (#HSS/0282/019M).

SEXUALLY FLUID WOMEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 30-50, HAVE YOUR SAY.

Appendix E: Gatekeeper's permission (GLN)

GAY & LESBIAN NETWORK
equality ukulingana | respect inhlonipho | acceptance ukwamukeleka
NPO NO. 026-854 PBO NO. 930006636

24 February 2019

Lisa Nicholas

Cc: Nicholas Munro
Lecturer: Discipline of Psychology
School of Applied Human Sciences

University of KZN

Dear Lisa

Permission to leave flyers at GLN office

This letter confirms permission for you to leave flyers on your research proposal for your master's degree on sexual fluidity among mature women at GLN office.

You may speak to Phili Phungula our Office Administrator to make the arrangements to leave the flyers at our office. She can be contacted at 033-3426165 or info@gaylesbian.org.za

If you do require women at a later stage for your research you may contact Tracey Sibisi, Programme Coordinator at GLN who may assist you. You may contact her at 033-3426165 or advocacy@gaylesbian.org.za

We could also add a brief on the research on our website and social media and if you also want to use those please send me a brief advert that we could place on those mediums.

I hope you able to acknowledge GLN in your research and also to share the research with us once completed for our record purposes as we would be interested.

I wish you all the best on the research.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

ANTHONY WALDHAUSEN
DIRECTOR

P.O. Box 2721, Pietermaritzburg, 3200
19 Connaught Road, Scottsville Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 3201
Tel: +27 33 342 6165, Fax: +27 86 508 2203
www.gaylesbian.org.za – E-mail: info@gaylesbian.org.za

Appendix F: Participant Information sheet

Date:

Hello and welcome.

My name is Lisa Nicholas from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. I am conducting a research study on sexual fluidity among South African women between the age of 30-50 inclusive. The research study forms part of my master's degree in counselling psychology.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study regarding the process of sexual identity development and your experiences of sexually fluidity. Being sexually fluid means that you are, or have been, attracted to both men and women at different stages throughout your life. Your preference for a specific gender is not limited to either males OR females and you may feel drawn towards a certain person regardless of gender. For example, you may feel that you identify as lesbian but at one period of your life you were attracted to a man.

The aim and purpose of this research is to try to visualise and understand your journey through your life experiences: the trials, the triumphs, the confusion, the clarity and so on. It is hoped that the information obtained from this study will be of benefit to the sexually diverse community. This may be in the form of a contribution to the newly released 'Practice Guidelines for Psychology Professions Working with Sexually and Gender-Diverse People' published recently by the Psychological Society of South Africa. The study is expected to engage 5-10 participants in total between the Pietermaritzburg and Durban sites. It is expected to take approximately 12 months and will involve the following procedures:

1. an initial introduction and orientation, telephonically, which will include a photo-narrative orientation and induction session (30 minutes).

2. taking some photographs or finding relevant images to represent your experiences with sexual fluidity and answer the research questions, over a three/four-week period. Images to be sent electronically to lnicholas@gmail or via WhatsApp on 0724555905.
3. an interview via the Zoom videoconferencing platform to discuss the photographs you have chosen and the reason for doing so (60-90 minutes)
4. a third interview, if necessary, to clarify any information and confirm the accuracy of the interpretation of your experiences also via the Zoom platform (60-90 minutes).

The study is funded by the researcher, and participation is voluntary. You can decide to leave the study at any time without facing negative consequences, penalty or loss. Please simply notify the researcher of your desire to leave the study. Your participation may be terminated if the researcher feels the study is negatively affecting you, the study or other participants. The researcher will discuss this with you first.

There are no costs that you will incur because of your participation in the study, and there are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study.

The researcher takes confidentiality very seriously and any personal information shared as part of the research process will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your name will not be recorded in any of the data collection activities (audio or written), and pseudonyms will be used when the findings of the study are presented.

Transcripts of audio recordings and electronic data collected during the research will be kept in a securely locked storage facility (i.e., a filing cabinet in the researcher's supervisor's university office) for five years following the study. Electronic data will be password protected and saved on the researcher's external hard drive which will be stored in the same facility as the written data. Five years after the study has been completed, electronic

data on the researcher's external hard drive will be deleted, and all hard copies of data will be incinerated.

The study will not involve any physical risks for you, but may involve some minor psychological discomfort. As an example, the study may invite you to share some of the negative experiences you have faced due to your sexual fluidity. Some of these may be a recollection of experiencing prejudice, homophobia, discrimination or rejection. Sharing these experiences may be uncomfortable or upsetting, alternatively it might be cathartic and beneficial in assisting you to better understand yourself. In the event that feelings of discomfort require you to seek counselling, as a result of your participation in the study, the following facility will be able to counsel you:

Gay and Lesbian Network

9 Connaught Rd, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

T: 033 342 6165

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSS/0282/019M).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher (Lisa Nicholas) on telephone: 072 455 5905 email: 205507174@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lnicholas@gmail.com, the researcher's supervisor Dr. Nicholas Munro telephone: 033 260 5371 email: munron@ukzn.ac.za 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

Appendix G: Informed Consent

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled 'Challenging the binary: a photo-narrative exploring sexual fluidity and the sexuality-sex-gender continuum in adult women in South Africa' by Lisa Nicholas.

1. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.
2. I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.
3. 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.
4. I consent to being interviewed and recorded on the Zoom video conferencing platform and advise that I will digitally sign and return this consent form prior to participation.
5. 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 via telephone, SMS or WhatsApp: 072 455 5905 or email: lnicholas@gmail.com.

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:

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

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview	YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES / NO
Being interviewed via the Zoom platform	YES / NO

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Witness Date

(Where applicable)

_____ _____

Signature of Translator Date

(Where applicable)

Appendix H: Photo-narrative orientation and prompt

Dear research participant

Re: Photo-narrative orientation

FAQ 1: What is photo-narrative?

Photo-narrative is a research technique where researchers and research participants:

- Source images from the internet or magazines or take photographs in response to a prompt/suggestion
- The photographs should be a representation of a message or story in response to the prompts and suggestions laid out by the researcher.
- Use the photographs to assist the verbal interview in an attempt to impact and convey an accurate message or story.

In this research project, you will be using photo-narrative to impact and emotionally guide your story to provide a fuller, richer account of your experiences regarding sexual fluidity.

FAQ 2: What privacy and ethical issues are there in taking photographs within a photo-narrative project?

There are distinct differences between taking photographs as part of a photo-narrative project and taking photographs for social purposes. This is especially true when taking a photograph of someone else. If you choose to take a photograph of another person as part of your photo-narrative project, keep in mind the following privacy and ethical guidelines:

1. A person's **consent** is required in order for you to take or use their photograph as part of a photo-narrative project. Using an image of someone else is unethical and an invasion of their privacy, even if the person is in a public space. Consent should always be obtained from a potential subject of a photograph (or the subject's parent or guardian if they are a minor) to take their photograph (see "acknowledgement and release" form). If a person does not consent to having their photograph taken then their wishes should be respected and you should NOT take the photograph. Consent is not required when taking a photograph of a crowd of people, where any individual identities are unidentifiable. In the case where a person is inadvertently photographed while you are taking a photograph of an object, such as a tree or building, you may not be required to obtain that person's consent to take a photograph of them.
2. It is unethical to portray someone in an **embarrassing** or **false** light in a photo-narrative project. By discussing the "acknowledgement and release" form with the subject of your photograph, the subject should become aware that the photograph may be publically displayed or reproduced for research purposes. The subject of the photograph should consent to the photograph being used in this way.
3. Photographs taken or sourced as part of a photo-narrative project cannot be used for **commercial gain**, by either the photographer or the researcher, this would be unethical. By participating in this photo-narrative project, you agree NOT to use the photographs you take for commercial gain.
4. **Ownership of photographs** rests with you. You will be invited to sign a photograph release form after you have taken the photographs and presented these for discussion. This consent is entirely at your discretion and will allow me to use your photographs for research purposes.

FAQ 3: How will you take the photographs?

You will take the photographs with your cellphone camera. If your cellphone does not have a camera, then please source images from the internet or public domain.

FAQ 4: Sourcing images from the internet

Copyright and the legal use of another person's property, in this case images or photographs is a serious issue and for good reason. Artists, for example photographers, make a living from their images and using them for personal gain or without their permission is tantamount to depriving them of their income, i.e. stealing. There are exceptions and limitations to the use of images in research, these are outlined below.

- The Copyright Act 98 of 1978 (Government of South Africa, 2018) states that whilst it must be understood that the creator of the image holds the copyright to the image, 'fair use', i.e. the legal right to use images for education, research, or personal use, as long as the image benefits the public good in some way, is excepted.
- Images that are cited as 'copyright free' or 'free images' may be used.
- Images purchased from a stock photography library.
- Images which may be construed as embarrassing or sensitive in nature may be subject to pixilation or other means of retaining the confidentiality and privacy of the subject of the image if used in reports or published.

FAQ 5: What images will you source or what will you take photographs of?

It is up to you to decide what images to present during your interview. What you download and what/who to take photographs of, however, should be able to speak to your experiences regarding sexual fluidity. The prompts below may guide you:

1. How does sexual fluidity among adult women manifest itself in the South African context?

   Image which best illustrates the first time you started to question or were attracted to a person of the same gender.

2. What self-reported links do sexually fluid, adult women make between sexual identity crises, conformity, traditions and cultural heteronormative perspectives, and psychological distress?

   Image which best illustrates any obstacles/barriers/personal conflicts faced or felt during questioning/transitioning/experimenting.

   Image which best illustrates any achievements/realizations/triumphs overcome, faced or felt during questioning/transitioning/experimentation.

3. How do adult, sexual minority women, who have experienced sexual fluidity, interpret and understand their sexual identity development?

   Image which best illustrates how you understand and interpret any sexual identity change or application of labels during your lifetime.

FAQ 6: What should you do with the photographs once you have found/taken them?

Once you have sourced or taken the photographs, you should make them digitally available to me via email lnicholas@gmail.com or via the WhatsApp platform.

FAQ 7: How will the photographs be used?

The photographs will be displayed on my laptop and screen share, during the interview. They will then be used to assist you to tell your story (photo-narrative), assist with reflection and provide depth to your account of your lived experiences.

Sincerely,

Lisa Nicholas

Email: 205507174@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lnicholas@gmail.com

Cell: 072 455 5905

Appendix I: Narrative inquiry photo-narrative interview schedule

Phase 1: Welcome and follow up on photographic process

Thank you for coming today, how did you find the exercise of taking photographs and / or sourcing images?

Phase 2: Constructing the photo-narrative

Thank you for providing me with a copy of your images. I have saved them in a folder on my computer, shall we take a look through them? Which image should we start with? May I put them in sequence, i.e. is there an order you would like to follow?

Tell me about the photograph?

What is the photograph about?

What story does the photograph tell?

Who/what is in the photograph?

Who/what is not in the photograph, i.e. what is missing or purposely omitted?

How does the photograph represent who you are/were sexually then/now?

What is the overall message you are trying to convey with this image?

Phase 3: Image Saturation

Once the narrative about the first photograph is saturated:

Is there another photograph you would like to select and talk about?

Repeat line of questions as per Phase 2 above.

Phase 4: Close and thank participant