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The impact of Christian Churches' separatist treatment of difference on the intersectional identities of LGBTIQA+ and d/Deaf communities in Johannesburg

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Abstract

This research explores the manner in which mainstream Christian institutions respond to the embodiment of difference, looking particularly at the difference of d/Deaf identity and LGBTIQA+ identity. It discusses how people who embody these differences respond to the institutional treatment of difference, and the impact that this treatment has on their religious (Christian) identity.

It tracks the history of the Church in South Africa, and how alternative churches emerged over time, given the instances of marginalization, oppression and discrimination which occurred in mainstream churches. This research also discusses the history of South Africa's d/Deaf Community and the importance of d/Deaf Culture and Deafhood in this community, as well as the ongoing struggles and consequent victories of the South African LGBTIQA+ community.

By using an ethnographic research method, doing deep hanging out in four research sites around Johannesburg, South Africa, and conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with nine participants, which included d/Deaf and LGBTIQA+ people from various demographics, it was found that people who embody difference tend to experience violence in various forms in church spaces. This included structural violence, physical violence and sexual violence. Lateral violence also occurred where members of a marginalised group reiterated the violence perpetuated by mainstream churches, on fellow marginalised group members.