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Exploring the Personal, Relational and Communal Role of Religion in Diepsloot

by

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PSYC7015A: Research Report

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08 June 2023

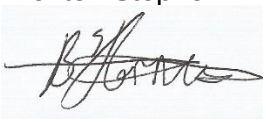
Plagiarism Declaration

Declaration

I, Brenton Stephen Thornton, declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Community-based Counselling at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Brenton Stephen Thornton



The 28th day of May 2023 in Linmeyer

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I would like to start by thanking Prof Tanya Graham for all the help she has given me over this time as my research supervisor. You let me hold true to my style, values, and interests in this field of research and knowledge production. Thank you for pushing me with appropriate deadlines and thank you for understanding my needs throughout this process. Without this help, I would have struggled immensely.

To my loving parents, thank you so much for emotionally and practically supporting me throughout this challenging yet rewarding journey I have pursued. You both allowed me to do what needed to be done with so much understanding, and for that I am so grateful. Specifically, I have the utmost appreciation to my darling mother, who has helped so much in keeping me sane throughout this journey. Thank you for being my rock.

To my family and friends that have been by my side over this journey, thank you for listening, caring, and understanding my challenges over this time. You helped to keep my life balanced, and I cannot thank you enough.

To my participants, I have you to thank for letting me in, and teaching me of your experiences; I never thought I could learn and grow this much, and I have you to thank for this. Being an outsider, I knew there was a risk of being pushed away, and you came with an open heart and an open mind. I hope that in some ways I have contributed towards making your voices louder.

Abstract

South Africa has a populace that perpetuates diversity in every demographic group. Although there are peaceful aspects to this diversity, there are also conflicts that have been shown historically and contemporaneously. Township communities in South Africa have experienced a particular development over time, due to aspects such as racial discrimination from Apartheid. Religion within this context was explored due to its diverse and consistent presence within South African township communities.

Diepsloot is a township with particularly high levels of psychosocial struggles. To understand if religion adversely affects or alleviates these issues, this study examined the role and function of religion in this community. Religious experiences, roles, and the meaning of religion as a meaning making system were explored using a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach in the marginalised township community of Diepsloot. The specific analysis employed was Interpretative Qualitative Analysis (IPA). Data were collected using qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. The core theoretical areas of this study that were discussed was attachment theory and social identity theory in the context of religion; while ecological systems theory was also applied but used as a contextual tool to understand and organise the themes for each structural, ecological level of the social environment of Diepsloot.

Qualitative findings suggested that there were four main themes of this study; The Personal Relationship with Religion and God, Internal and Interpersonal Religious Conflict, Discrimination Based on Different Beliefs, and Diepsloot Factors Contributing to the Disconnected Community. Within these results and discussion of this paper, religion was shown as a factor that significantly impacts the perceptions, feelings, and behaviours towards the self on a personal level, and others on an interpersonal and communal level. Religion therefore has a significant part to play in social settings, and it is recommended that more studies exploring the phenomenon of religion be explored qualitatively to contribute further to the subjective understanding of the psychology of research within such contexts.

Keywords: *Religion, Religious Experience, Psychology of Religion, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Qualitative, Attachment Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, Social Identity Theory*

List of Abbreviations

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

PoR – Psychology of Religion

RSA - Republic of South Africa

Yrs - Years

ZCC - Zionist Christian Church

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

This chapter provides an integration of the conceptualisation of the study and the reasoning as to why religious experience and the role of religion are important areas for research within marginalised communities, such as Diepsloot, Johannesburg. Township communities in South Africa are impacted by severe psychosocial issues (Ngwenya, 2015). Diepsloot has its own extremities of violence, murder, rape, and poverty (Mahajan, 2014; Milan, 2015). Alongside these difficulties, it also has a proliferation of churches that represent differing religions and denominations, which suggest that religion plays a significant role in community setting. Several studies have indicated its relevance in such a setting (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Paloutzian, 2017). This factor highlights a need for expanding the research in South African community townships such as Diepsloot, while exploring how religion functions within this community. This chapter elaborates on these aspects by firstly engaging in the focus of this study, followed by the reflexive preface, where I account for my positionality as a researcher undertaking this study. After this, the aims of the study are detailed to clarify the intentions of the study, followed by the rationale, which develops an argument for the importance of this study. The chapter then provides a section on the structure of the report where all the chapters are explained and outlined.

Focus of this Study

The area of focus in this study is directed towards religion, and how religion impacts the experiences of Diepsloot residents. Diepsloot is a location riddled with high rates of crime, violence, unemployment, inadequate education, municipal neglect, and marginalisation due to many systemic factors (Mahajan, 2014; Ngwenya, 2015). Religion is a complex aspect of everyday life; it affects our experiences in a unique way and can create peace but also create tensions amongst members of religious communities (Paloutzian & Park, 2014). The function it therefore plays within a community with adverse circumstances is therefore the focus of this study, and efforts are made to shed light on the functions that

religion provides to people within these communities. The purpose is not to argue that religion is good or bad; this dichotomy is unrealistic given the complexities found within communities and real-life contexts. Instead, the aim is to understand the subjective, qualitative ways in which the participants experience religion within this setting.

Reflexive Preface

My positionality in this research is acknowledged as an aspect that is characterised by complexity. If I felt it were not the case, then there would be a blind spot within such a study. I am a white South African male who occupies a privileged position within societies in general. In South Africa, where the effects of Apartheid are still evident in socially engineered communities based on race that have structurally oppressed black, Indian, and coloured South Africans while empowering white South Africans (Carolissen, 2006), I understandably hold pre-emptive power that may influence the way this study is actioned. Many white academics struggle with diversity, as they have had fewer expectations and experiences to enable them to understand the psychosocial issues that other races have had to deal with (Muhammad et al., 2015). It is white, male researchers that dominate most of the psychological literature, largely due to the higher levels of access white men have had towards higher levels of education (Dutta, 2018).

Specifically with regard to this research, Prilleltensky (2005) states that well-being includes having the necessities one needs to be fulfilled. Many individuals within Diepsloot and other underdeveloped, impoverished settings often do not have these necessities (Mahajan, 2014). Noting these aspects, I therefore needed to understand my positionality and interrogate it throughout this research, due to the automatic privilege that I hold. The way to go about this task was to avoid positional bias, by acknowledging and understanding where I hold power in the study (Daley, 2010); by interrogating my positionality through constant reflection, I was able to understand where there were blindspots that needed to be considered. In order to address the blindspots, the voice of the participant remain the focus; there was a need to limit my interpretation and allow for the participant to bring in insight, truly from their

subjective voices (Daley, 2010; Dutta, 2018). For these reasons, I conducted a qualitative study with the intent to experience the phenomenon of religion from the participants' perspectives; any interpretations from my stance were carefully shaped from what the participants mentioned. Due to my privilege, I am more decontextualised due to the increased freedom I have in navigating social spaces, as well as the neutral, objective academic upbringing I have had to remove myself from my personal context when involved in these settings (Boughey & Mckenna, 2016). Although being decontextualised is seen as a strength within academia and critical thinking (Bou Khalil et al., 2022; Boughey & Mckenna, 2016), the downside of this approach is that it allowed me to retain power over others that were more contextually bound and immersed within their unique context (Dutta, 2018). Many segregated and oppressed communities are embedded and contextualised within their race, culture, and tradition, and remain in that space due to the inability to access power in their positions (Dutta, 2018). Even being able and willing to travel to and from Diepsloot, a township far removed from where I stay, is privileged in and of itself. I therefore needed to acknowledge this privilege and ensure that the participants were viewed within their own, unique world that holds different values and meaning making systems. I acknowledge that these values are not lesser than mine, they are simply different, and my genuine interest to understand and give voice to these participants needed to be utilised in the right and ethical way.

My interest in the psychology of religion needs to be understood and acknowledged. I have always had a need to understand the meaning people derive from their belief systems; since I was a child, I always found the concept of "faith" interesting, especially when experiencing more empirical, objective people who do not have religious beliefs, as well as people who have faith in their religious beliefs. I am aware that wars and peace can be influenced through religion, and I have often grappled with this dichotomy over the years. I also had a need to remove myself from my personal context when studying populations. For this reason, I researched Diepsloot and found that there was a different Church (often Christian) with a different denomination on most street corners in the township (see *Figure 4)*. This finding really excited me, as I felt that religion as a stimulus for psychological wellbeing could be an intense

phenomenon in such an adverse setting as Diepsloot. Being privileged enough to be a white male in a middle-income context, I have had the ability to decontextualise my interests and knowledge to better understand external aspects (Dutta, 2018), such as different religions, ideologies, and value systems. Due to this, I have always been interested in understanding how religion can be used as a vessel to psychologically change behaviours in different contexts. I have therefore had the need to see and explore aspects outside of my immediate surroundings, which was a core factor motivating me to undertake this research topic.

Aims

This study aimed to explore the perceived role that religion plays within the Diepsloot community. Understandings related to the importance of religion and religious experience in the community are interpreted by attempting to uncover perceptions about the personal, relational, and communal role that religion serves for community members. It was anticipated that this approach would develop insight into how religion shapes the community, and what effect it may have on members who live within the same residential area. Using the experiences of participants who reside in a community that suffers from many adversities (Mahajan, 2014), it was envisaged that this study might contribute to the development of creative ways to create community strength, cohesion, and tolerance within communities living in similar adverse social conditions. It was further anticipated that this approach would allow for future qualitative and quantitative research to build on religious experiences within this community and others.

Rationale for the Study

The nature of religion, religious experience, or religiosity cannot be captured within a single thought or idea. In a webbed network of the numerous possibilities that religion represents, the dynamics this "complex cultural concept" (Taves, 2015, p. 25) provides is undoubtedly unique and challenging (Paloutzian, 2017). The role religion plays within personal, interpersonal, and collective

contexts is often shown to be paramount in matters of in-group and out-group peace and conflict (Hogg, 2016; Paloutzian & Park, 2014; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). On a personal level, theories such as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) have illustrated the personal component in one's relation to their belief. On a global level, historical and contemporary events that communities still experience are usually deeply affected by religion, regardless of the extent of secularisation that has occurred within a context (Vail et al., 2010). New wars, new alliances and religious extremism begin and end on a consistent basis solely based on the religious landscape of communities, countries, and continents (Vail et al., 2010; Wibisono et al., 2019). Third-world countries and neglected communities have specifically been shown to rely on religion to a greater extent, due to the loss of more tangible factors of economic and social control (Inglehart & Norris, 2004). This factor is especially relevant when considering the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2006; Bulbulia & Sosis, 2011) and the social identity model (Tajfel, 1970; Trepte & Loy, 2017) that highlight how phenomena such as religion can shape the psychological dispositions of individuals within a larger communal context (Botero et al., 2014).

Due to religion being such a diverse part of human life, whether one is religious or areligious (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003), the effect religion has can uplift or break down the social cohesion of a community (Paloutzian & Park, 2014). Based on this fact, as well as the three theoretical frameworks mentioned and expanded on below, my study sought to investigate the perceived experiences of diverse members of the Diepsloot community inductively and subjectively. This community is defined geographically by members who live within the community, as previous empirical studies have neglected to address this classification, due to groupings more often persisting in schools (Naidoo, 2015), race (Brittian et al., 2013; Sorsdahl et al., 2009; van der Merwe et al., 2010), and other non-geographical factors. This research contributes to filling the subjective gap that has been left in the global and South African context, as psychology of religion studies have been found to be overly quantitative in justifying their presence within the scientific community (Cresswell, 2014). Instead of justifying religion in objective science, I aimed to use religion in its true form; something that is subjectively experienced (James, 1985;

Vail et al., 2010). Therefore, I employed a hermeneutical, phenomenological approach to studying and understanding religion in Diepsloot (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Diepsloot has experienced many socio-economic issues (Mahajan, 2014). Crime, violence, female unemployment, inadequate education, municipal neglect, and marginalisation have occurred in Diepsloot due to many factors (Mahajan, 2014; Ngwenya, 2015), and my research therefore sought to define the various ways in which religion could be a possible factor in either strengthening or weakening the community. I realized that the answer would not be clear-cut; however, it allowed my research to give true agency to participants. It sheds light on the matter and gives guidance on whether there should be future studies and interventions in addressing matters such as religious discrimination. This research brings insight that may further our understanding of the complexities that religion brings to the Diepsloot community and sets a qualitative platform that can be used for future inquiry.

Structure of the Report

This research report consists of five chapters, namely the introduction, literature review, research method, results and discussion, and conclusion.

The first chapter (introduction) involves introducing the focus of the study on exploring religion in Diepsloot, explaining my positionality as a researcher in the reflexive preface, the aims behind actioning this research, as well as the rationale for this study which argues for its importance.

The second chapter (literature review) builds the foundation for the study through exploring previous literature, while providing a theoretical grounding and contextualisation for the study. This chapter includes a general discussion of the origins, development, and current state of religion in psychology, also known as the psychology of religion field. The paradigm, conceptual framework and theoretical framework are also explained to give light to the core theories (ecological systems theory, attachment theory and social identity theory) and definitions this study uses to investigate religion in Diepsloot. This chapter also

brings in the existing literature on a global level with these theories in mind. Thereafter, the South African context and research is presented, giving a specific view on religion in Diepsloot.

The third chapter (research method) explains the research questions, research design, sampling method, procedure, research analysis, ethics involved in the study, as well as the reflexivity section where I explain my experience throughout this research.

The fourth chapter (findings and discussion) discusses the themes gathered from the qualitative interviews I conducted with participants from Diepsloot. These themes are discussed in depth, and there is additionally a commentary discussion where the findings are interpreted and explained in relation to existing theory and literature to situate this study in relation to other studies and theories.

The fifth chapter (conclusion) concludes by synthesising the relevant aspects gathered from the results and discussion chapter and presents the general findings from this entire research process in a summative format, with strengths, limitations, recommendations and comments mentioned for future studies of a similar nature.

Conclusion

This chapter has integrated the initial conceptualisation, description, and argument for engaging in this field of study. More specifically, the chapter has argued for the importance of studying religion in Diepsloot as a necessary endeavour for the future of the psychology of religion field. Diepsloot, and all its adverse circumstances has residents that regularly interact with religious surroundings, and understanding how this interaction occurs qualitatively is likely to bring necessary understanding to the township community. These aspects were elaborated on by explaining the focus of this study, engaging with my positionality in the reflexive preface, presenting the aims of this study, the rationale (argument) for why this research area is of specific importance, as well as the explanation of the structure of the report where the organisation of the chapters is explained for the benefit of the reader.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

When considering the phenomenon of religion, it is fair to state that the idea of religion, religious experience, or religiosity cannot be captured within a single thought or idea. This complex aspect of everyday life, whether one is religious or areligious, affects our experiences in a unique way. Consequently, religion has always been a topic of debate on almost every level (Paloutzian & Park, 2014). To understand this phenomenon, this literature review starts by providing the origin, development, and contemporary context of the psychology of religion (hereafter as PoR) field. The contextual understanding of the PoR field allows further exploration into the conceptual and theoretical framework that is discussed and critically analysed afterwards, with special emphasis on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) being an umbrella for attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1970) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1970). Thereafter, the methodological framework and state of PoR research is addressed. With the South African context being of utmost importance, the context of religion in townships is then discussed, focussing specifically on Diepsloot. Finally, the gap within South African empirical research is discussed as well as the contribution of this research in attempting to address this lacuna.

The Origins of the Psychology of Religion

When understanding the origins and development of PoR, it would be appropriate to state that it has had a slow, turbulent development over the past 20th century (Main, 2021; Paloutzian, 2017). In fact, around 1900 this area of psychological research was almost non-existent (Paloutzian, 2017). This factor was mostly due to the dominant, theological Christian stance that was uncontested and unexplored within Western research before the 20th century (Main, 2021). Due to the industrial era, the increase of naturalist and scientific advancements, the beginning of secularisation (where scientific modernisation contested traditional religion) (Zukerman & Shook, 2017) as well as upcoming religious disciplines such as

comparative religion (Müller, 1881), traditional religion was increasingly located within a more critical, scientific stance (Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012).

The main research area of this literature review, PoR, was first introduced and implemented in 1902 by William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature* (1985). PoR scholars have often stated that James made the outsized contribution to the development of the field, with Hall, Starbuck, Pratt, and a few others impacting the field's initial growth as well (Main, 2021; Taves, 2018; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). In James' (1985) functionalist stance, he connected the dimensions of psychology and religion by implying that religion should be investigated experientially and subjectively, especially in terms of conversion and mystical experiences (Hill et al., 2000). This approach was adopted because religion was socially shown through an objective, impersonal experience of the divine (i.e., reading the bible), and first-hand subjective experiences (i.e., personal prayer) tended to be viewed as irrelevant (Cresswell, 2014; James, 1985; Taylor, 2007). By focusing on the first-hand, subjective religious experience, James (1985) demonstrated a need for the religious inquiry towards understanding the naturalistic (observing phenomena the way they are), non-reductionist (viewing religion as universal and not abnormal) truths of the psychological experience of religion (van Tongeren et al., 2021).

The Development of PoR over the 20th Century

After the initial contributions towards the PoR, the field had a few roadblocks in its development within the 20th century. Key theorists such as Freud (1987) theorised religion as an identification of neurosis (psychological distress and deficit in functioning) due to the need for people to psychologically control the external world around them, and unconsciously fulfil their instinctual wishes. On the other hand, the work of Carl Jung (1960) and Alfred Adler (1987) developed in more positivistic directions, maintaining that religion was instinctually an unconscious agent for allowing positive meaning making in individuals from all religions, as it provides goal-oriented meaning for persons achieving their individuation and potential for positive change. In the humanist lens, Abraham Maslow (1970) also gave credit to Jung and Allport, based

on the incorporation of self-actualisation and finding meaning in life through aspects such as religion. Self-determination theory, ecological theories, developmental theories and other contributory perspectives and theories of religion also shaped the field in its growth (Paloutzian & Park, 2014; Robak, 2015).

Although the above works of Freud, Jung, Allport and other "grand theorists" (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 379) contributed towards the psychological understanding of religion, PoR did not develop consistently (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Apart from speculations as to why PoR was not consistent (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003), one of the definitive reasons for this inconsistency can be attributed to what was socially valued and appreciated at the time (Taves, 2015). As shown, religion has never been a "construct", but more of a "complex cultural concept" (Taves, 2015, p. 25) that alters according to the context and theoretical perspective (Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012; Taves, 2015). The future historical context after the birth of PoR, such as the growth of the empirical, behaviourist perspective in the early 20th century (1920-1950s) and the move to cognitive psychology (from the 1950s) lowered the interest and view of religion and religious experience in psychology (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). This development can be attributed to the objective, empirical aspects of psychology becoming more valued over subjective experiences (Belzen, 2019).

The overarching paradigm that existed after the 1950s was called the "measurement paradigm" (Gorsuch, 1984, as cited in Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990, p. 443). This era dominantly focused on formulating key variables that were scientifically measurable (Hill & Pargament, 2017; Park & Paloutzian, 2013). Although this paradigm created effective and rationalised quantitative forms of psychology, religion for most of the 20th century was rather seen as "taboo" due to its philosophical and theological nature (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Gorsuch, 1984). Therefore, the developments in the first half of the 20th century were sparse and turbulent for PoR.

Despite the 1900s mid-century slump, the rise of PoR started to slowly expand, due to the shift from dominant Protestantism towards more equal cross-cultural religious acceptance (Wulff, 1996). This shift was due to many factors, such as the newer, secular affiliation of spirituality becoming more prominent

in contrast to traditional religious affiliations in the 80s and 90s (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Taves, 2015; Wulff, 1991, 1996). Thereafter, PoR started being used more in a critical, political, social, and empirical manner (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). The 3rd wave of humanism in the 60s-80s, which was critiqued by religious fundamentalists as "secular humanism" (Aanstoos et al., 2000, p. 22), also impacted this shift (Resnik et al., 2001). Evidence of this shift is shown in how the creation of the humanism Division 32 of the American Psychological Association in 1971 implied a need to value human experience and the therapeutic relationship, regardless of one's belief system (Aanstoos et al., 2000; Resnik et al., 2001). In fact, the association in 1976 soon after established Division 36, named the Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (Belzen, 2020). The International Association for the Psychology of Religion was thereafter established in the 90s and has also highly influenced the field of PoR (Belzen, 2020).

The Contemporary Development of PoR

Along with other historical factors and the slow increase of PoR, there was still a contestation regarding the acceptance of religion within psychological research in the beginning of this century (Belzen, 2020). It was the catastrophic 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 that skyrocketed PoR and is argued as being a core reason for why PoR is used as much as it is today (Paloutzian, 2017). Evidence of the increase in the significance of PoR since 9/11 is found in how journal articles with "religion" and "spirituality" in their titles increased six-fold from 2005-2014 (Paloutzian, 2017). This increase is because the event occurred in the West, but due to the extreme act involving religious belief and behaviour (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Thereafter, the psychological community mostly took PoR seriously (Paloutzian, 2017). Presently, because of all these mentioned events as well as other pertinent ones, it is safe to say that PoR is at least regarded as an established field (Paloutzian, 2017). However, there are still recurring debates amongst academics regarding which paradigm, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual frameworks are suitable for studying PoR.

A Paradigm for PoR

In contemporary times, there is greater focus on multidisciplinary paradigms, such as the *multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm,* which focuses on accommodating quantitative and qualitative PoR research as well as other disciplines (i.e., sociology) while using a stable definition (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Paloutzian, 2017; Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012). Due to PoR's past of mostly focusing on quantitative methodologies, this move is certainly in the appropriate direction (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Paloutzian, 2017). There are further debates as to whether there should be even more of a focus on interpretivist, qualitative analyses using a stronger hermeneutic paradigm to act as an umbrella for PoR (Belzen & Hood, 2006). However, this approach will likely not be well received, and diversity of research should be encouraged within this field, even when considering how quantitatively dominant it is. Therefore, considering that this study is qualitative and located within the interpretative-hermeneutic paradigm, this research would generally fall under the multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm as proposed by Belzen and Hood, (2006) and Paloutzian (2017), as it has a general contribution to the PoR field. In order to further understand this paradigm in the context of PoR, this review next discusses what conceptual and theoretical frameworks best suit PoR in the context of this study.

Conceptual Framework

When considering which conceptual framework to use for religion, religiosity, or religiousness, a myriad of meanings emerges, which is mostly due to the confusion around these constructs or variables (Hill et al., 2000; Robak, 2015). Evidence of this allusivity is how a highly renowned content analysis showed 31 definitions and 9 separate categories of religiosity, with no major category being used statistically more often than the others (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Psychological matters are often more subjectively debated due to the impossibility of empirically seeing psychological phenomena, which has caused key foundations of psychology to be blurred and debated (Uher, 2021). However, when regarding the concept of religion, excessive debates have existed within PoR ever since its beginnings and have

caused major authors of the field to even consider PoR as needing to start over again (Belzen & Hood, 2006). The most confusing aspect around PoR is how religions are viewed differently cross-culturally (Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012; Taves, 2015). The research dominance in Western locations has also caused an imbalance in definitions of religion in the global sense, as other global conceptualisations are often not accounted for (Dueck et al., 2017).

For PoR research to be more successful, there must be a stable, broad conceptual framework that is consistently used and applied (Paloutzian, 2017; Paloutzian & Park, 2014). The meaning systems framework and other broader types would allow cross-cultural sensitivity to exist, and would allow PoR findings, regardless of methodology, to be compared appropriately (Taves, 2015).

Substantive Approach

What often happens when conceptualising religion in PoR is that the psychological component is either lost in its definition due to the generality of it (Paloutzian & Park, 2013), or it is too specifically narrow (Hill et al., 2000). The substantive approach is used in the general sense, as it uses religion as a "broad-band construct" (Zinnbauer et al., 1999, pp. 897) that focuses on all multidisciplinary aspects related to a search for a higher power or divine being (Bruce, 2008; Zinnbauer et al., 1999). However, due to the complex nature of defining religiosity and religious experience, there are many inconsistencies in its use and broad overlaps with constructs of mysticism, spirituality, anomalies and *the sacred*, in particular (Bruce, 2008; Paloutzian, 2017).

The substantive stance therefore clouds specificity behind the psychological meaning of religion and replaces it solely within the components of subjective perception and psychological experience (Bruce, 2008). Evidence of this would be how *the sacred* concept of religion derived from Durkheim and used by scholars in the substantive stance (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009) can be used for anything, even a beer can (Kripal, 2014). This is because it relies on the personal judgment of individuals and what they personally deem as religious (Kripal et al., 2014). This substantive stance aims to unscientifically combine

spirituality and religion and accept the construct as a broad, complex concept (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). This approach is only arguably correct because loose terms such as these can literally mean anything, which therefore makes religion lose its distinction from other constructs such as "spirituality" (Taves, 2018).

Functional Approach

When considering another more specific concept, there are many well-known authors in the field (Hood, 1970; Paloutzian, 2017; Paloutzian & Park, 2014) who follow the functional approach to PoR. This approach looks at the reason or function that religion psychologically serves in the life of individuals, and their surrounding environment (Lewis Hall & Hill, 2019; Park, 2005; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). I argue that the specific *meaning making systems model*, originally created by Park (1991) and used by numerous scholars of the field (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Paloutzian, 2017; Park, 2005; Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012) can be appropriately applied to the concept of religion. This is because it integrates empiricism, worldviews, beliefs, and expectations together as people have an innate, automatic, and evolutionary need to make meaning in order to alleviate suffering (Lewis Hall & Hill, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2013; Paloutzian & Mukai, 2017; Taves et al., 2019). This need is not necessarily a consciously experienced need, but more of an automated creation that shapes our conscious awareness of meaning as an after-effect towards a stimulus, and therefore changes our global beliefs into something more specific (Lewis Hall & Hill, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2013; Park, 2010).

Numerous studies have revealed the innate ability of humans and animals to create a psychological meaning system (Kirkpatrick, 2013; Park, 2010). At these levels, the meaning systems framework model is broad, and exists within the way we perceive, behave, and view ourselves and our interpersonal environments (Kirkpatrick, 2013; Park, 2010). Proof of this framework is how every phenomenon of human memory has been shown to be based on meaning making, as the memory retrieved gets reconstructed and changed into a new, subjectively created form (Debiec et al., 2002).

This may be a highly cognitive and neuroscientific explanation, but that does not make this only suitable for quantitative, empirical research (Paloutzian, 2017). This meaning making systems model can certainly be applied to all research, unless it is within a model that relies on dissecting and reconstructing the very definition of religion (Park, 2005; Taves, 2018). From previous research, there have often been tensions within the definitions of the mystical, religiousness, religiosity, and religion (Hall et al., 2017; Park, 1991; Taves, 2015, 2018). Using the meaning making systems model definition undercuts tensions of other definitions by accommodating the generality of religion, while also being sensitive of the specifics in terms of how the self and society interact and make subjective, specific, and functional meanings to one's religion (Park, 2005). In fact, the application of this conceptual model has favoured more ecological, cross-cultural theories and research (Taves, 2015). By having a stable definition for religion as a meaning making system, all research under PoR, as well as this study, may be able to move forward and be acknowledged in a subjective, experiential manner (Paloutzian & Park, 2014; Taves, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

With regards to the concept of religion in PoR, there is a lot of controversy, due to the complexity of religion as a construct (Robak, 2015; Taves, 2015). However, using the meaning systems framework in conceptualising religion (Park, 2010, 2005; Taves et al., 2019) clarifies the overarching theory that is used. The more environmental and social psychology theories that are considered in this research are the ecological systems theory that provides a contextual backdrop to location-based studies, and social identity theory (hereafter SIT) that provides theory on group behaviour. In addition to these theories, a more personal and appropriate theory that has involved PoR on a personal level is attachment theory (Cherniak et al., 2021; Spilka et al., 2003), which is also used.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

As shown above in using the functional meaning systems framework for a conceptual framework, the personal and social theories are also functionalist in nature, as they serve to theoretically describe what

religion does (the function it serves) and how it operates in a psychological or social system to affect people and groups (Kunin, 2003; Schilbrack, 2022). These functionalist theories differ from substantive theories that aim to describe religion philosophically and universally from the inside (Kunin, 2003; Sharpe, 2005; Schilbrack, 2003).

Park and Paloutzian (2005) also explain that theories such as ecological systems theory, social identity theory and attachment theory are "midlevel theories about a particular range of human behaviors" (p. 553). Midlevel psychological theories mostly explain human behaviour by incorporating deductive grand theories (overarching, deductive theories that are often not empirically proven or provable) with inductive, empirical observation (Kislov et al., 2019). The below-mentioned theories come from branches of grand theories (i.e., systems theory, psychoanalytic theory, and intergroup relations), but have been used with empirical observation to allow for specific, midlevel theories to exist (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Based on the importance of exploring specific social phenomena in this research, it seemed useful to use midlevel theories that can address specific personal and social aspects but use overarching grand theories in its approach as well. With these aspects in mind, the social and environmental levels of ecological systems theory and social identity theory, as well as the personal level of attachment theory are discussed in the context of religion.

Ecological Systems Theory

The reason why the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1992) particularly suits the construct of religion is due to the focus on interpreting how the environment affects the self, as well as the collective, interpersonal relations involved within the surrounding environment (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013; Bulbulia & Sosis, 2011).Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) revised the naming of this theory to the "bioecological model" over time; however, for the purpose of clarity this report uses the original term, "ecological systems theory".

The ecological systems theory was created to explain how the differing parts of a developing child's social environment play a role in their upbringing (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This theory shows similarities to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Jaramillo, 1996) and Bandura's social learning theory (1971), due to the emphasis on how the environment ecologically impacts the development of a child. Although this developmental psychology theory starts at the beginning of life, this ecological systems theory explains how the environment can impact people in any of the different stages of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). An example may be how elderly populations have been studied with ecological systems theory to understand their developmental change in relation to the rapid growth of technology (Backonja et al., 2014). For this reason, this theory has been used in studies to understand all sorts of populations and ages in response to certain stimuli (Crawford, 2020; Podgorski et al., 2021).

These ecological levels of society exist globally in human coping and identity formation (Spencer, 2007) and respect the contextual diversity of location-based differences, such as religious practices (Bulbulia & Sosis, 2011). Recent empirical research has also shown that moralising Gods within negative environments can promote cooperation amongst the communities within an environment and its diverse systems (Botero et al., 2014). This example shows how the ecological approach may help to understand and intervene in religious phenomena presented within communities (Kelly, 1966). This less assumptive, open-ended model certainly can be used globally, as cultural values and differences are of importance (Botero et al., 2014; Spencer, 2007; Bulbulia & Sosis, 2011). This open-ended model is not used to illustrate existing research in the discussion but serves as a contextual backdrop to add an ecological understanding to the interpersonal aspects of social identity theory, and personal aspects of attachment theory.

Ecological Systems Theory Levels and Position within this Theoretical Framework:

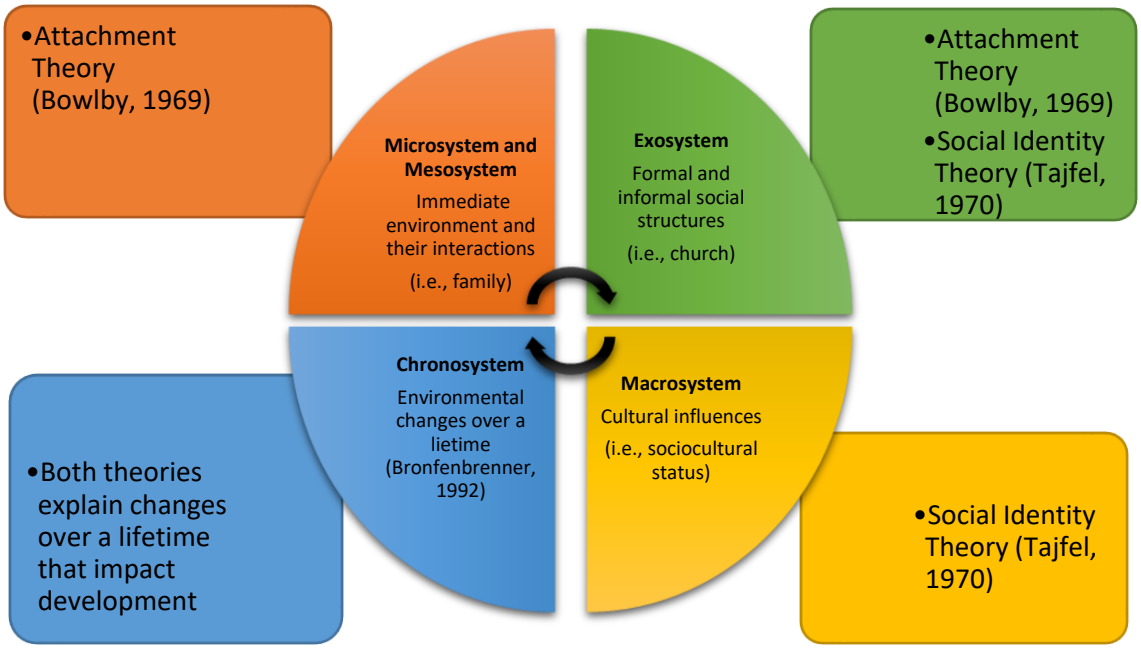
Having a systems model that differentiates all parts of society (*Figure 1*) has allowed cultural-based phenomena, such as religion, to be understood in these interpersonal parts of societies (Botero et

al., 2014). The way this theory explains human behaviour and development is through differentiating different social structural levels of ecological influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, 1974). These levels begin with the *microsystem*, which is the direct, personal surroundings that individuals experience in their immediate environment; this involves a bi-directional relationship that can involve influencing others while being influenced directly, and includes family members, teachers, and other immediate figures in one's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Botero et al., 2014; Probine, 2022). The second level is the *mesosystem*, which is the interaction amongst these immediate figures from the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). An example would be how parents interact with teachers or siblings, and how that impacts on the person's ecological development. The third level is the *exosystem*, which branches out into more social aspects of one's surroundings that may indirectly influence one's ecological development. Examples of this exosystem would be churches, neighbourhoods, mass media and anything else that can be an informal or formal social structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The fourth level is the *macrosystem*, featuring the cultural aspects of one's development on a social, communal scale. The individual is immersed amongst many in these aspects, and they could feature socio-economic class, location, ethnicity, and many other collective features (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The fifth level is the *chronosystem*, which more broadly encapsulates all of the environmental changes over one's life. This system features across all levels and is the largest system of the theoretical model (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Probine, 2022).

With these systems in mind, it has been demonstrated that this theory has great utility towards understanding the social surroundings and structures available (Botero et al., 2014). Considering this aspect, it would then be suitable to suggest that this theory can provide a contextual, overarching component that can hold other theories within it. Based on this report's theoretical framework and research needs, it would therefore be suitable for attachment theory to feature within this model, as well as social identity theory. Figure one below illustrates this applicability:

Figure 1

The Structure and Position of the Theoretical Framework



As shown in Figure 1, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) serves to feature within the microsystem, mesosystem and slightly on the exosystem level of Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory due to the more personal based levels of influence. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1970) features rather on the exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) due to its applicability to intergroup behaviour. The chronosystem includes all the levels and is applicable throughout. For this reason, this literature review and report does not refer to existing literature on ecological systems theory; it rather serves as an overarching contextual tool that can allow existing literature from attachment theory and social identity theory to be discussed and contextually placed in this research report.

Attachment Theory

The more personal level of psychology that is considered is attachment theory. The argument often put forward is that this theory is highly suitable to address the PoR due to the extent of literature on

the topic (Cherniak et al., 2021; Granqvist, 2021; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008), as well as the functional approach it has towards religion (Kunin, 2003; Schilbrack, 2022). It would also be considered an essential component that can be applied within the more immediate, direct overarching structural levels of the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem from ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), as shown above.

Originally, attachment theory was conceptualised within the behaviourist paradigm by Dollard and Miller (1950), and incorporated the condition that attachment was formed through the way an infant was fed and who fed the infant (the primary attachment figure). However, the evolutionary theory of attachment came later, and focused more on the response and care by the caregiver as the catalyst for attachment and attachment styles (Bowlby, 1969; Granqvist, 2021). The evolutionary theory perspective was mostly pioneered by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1970).

This evolutionary perspective of attachment theory sees infants as having a pre-determined biological response to form attachments with others adaptively to survive and seek proximity with them (Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Granqvist, 2021). In this sense, the nature of evolutionary adaptation is incorporated alongside the nurturing environment the attachment figure can provide. More emotionally supportive caregivers are preferred, and many caregiver-infant experiments have shown a strong correlation that supportive caregivers will securely impact the internal representation, also known as the "internal working models", of oneself and others into adulthood (Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby & Robertson, 1958; Cherniak et al., 2021; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). If a secure attachment is lacking, it has been shown that this may lead to insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious attachment) that negatively affect interpersonal security in adulthood as a result (Campbell & Marshall, 2011; Haydon et al., 2014). When experimental results are inconsistent, it is usually attributed to environmental changes in caregiving environments (Booth LaForce et al., 2014).

When considering attachment theory and religion, what must be considered is that although attachment theory predominantly focused on caregiver-infant attachments, subsequent literature also

expanded our understanding of the further elements of one's attachment to religion and God (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Cherniak et al., 2021). As Ainsworth (1993) states, the proximity to a perceived caregiver provides a *safe haven* to lower distress, as well as a *secure base* in which infants can explore life and thrive as they grow all the way into adulthood. In religion, this attachment is similar, as a God through religion fulfils an attachment figure in order to lower psychological distress and feel safe in one's life (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2012). Acts such as prayer and worship have been shown to embody outward requests for a *safe haven*, and in turn having a secure attachment with God protects followers from perceived threats (also known as t*hreat prime*), such as failure, as there is an increase in positive emotions due to the access towards God (also known as *God prime*) (Granqvist et al., 2012; Kupor et al., 2015). Attachment theory in this context is theorised as the "religion-as-attachment model" (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p.49), and incorporates main religions and God as a safe and secure tool that is perpetuated through doctrines (beliefs taught by powerful structures like the church) and experiences (Cherniak et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that the process of incorporating God as a non-physical, anthropomorphic, secure attachment figure and having an internal, dialogical exchange with such a figure is involved in the cognitive maturation process, as there is a lessening of reliance on the caregiver and a furthering of selfhood internally (Kirkpatrick & Granqvist et al., 2008; Schjoedt et al., 2009). Studies have also shown that self-referential aspects of being attached to God helps those who may have had negative internal working models (insecure attachment), as God may be a source of unconditional love or an entity that can be loving with certain acts one may perform (Granqvist et al., 2021). However, one may also experience negative settings in experiencing their religion and God, which may impact insecure attachment in such a bond, which has been shown to worsen general attachment styles due to a negative imagery of God (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Negative spiritual or religious experiences therefore may also cause God to be seen as distant, controlling, or judgmental, and one's psychological distress and negative self-esteem tends to increase based on this insecure attachment (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Counted, 2018). As for

caregivers, God/s can therefore also impact one's attachment style significantly. It should also be noted that there are gendered differences that have been shown in the way women often have their God concepts impacting their self-reference (if God is loving, one can love one's self), while men are more likely to show that their image of God is impacted by their parent-reference (if the caregiver is distant, God is distant), mostly from their attachment towards their mother (Reinert & Edwards, 2014). However, this finding has been suspected to be more culturally impacted due to the use of Western samples, as women in these samples tend to seek more intimate relationships while men in these samples may seek acceptance in the larger, Western social societal sphere (Baumeister & Somme, 1997; Cross & Madson, 1997). Attachment theory therefore serves as a suitable basis to understand the interpersonal attachment of one person towards an intimate entity such as God (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Cherniak et al., 2021).

Many argue that theories under the theoretical framework of social and cultural psychology are more relevant when considering the construct of religion (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). These theories would include ecological systems theory and SIT but would exclude the more personal-oriented theories that describe personal relationships in psychology, such as attachment theory (Kirkpatrick, 2012). The explanation for this assertion is that the nature of religion is clearly something that is cross-culturally defined, flexible and controversial (Taves, 2018; van Tongeren et al., 2021), as the cultural perception of religion can affect "human cognition, emotions, identity, morality, and behaviour" (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011, p. 1311). This reasoning would therefore bring up the argument that more personal theories not specifically under social and cultural psychological frameworks (i.e., attachment theory) would be problematic to use in religion. However, the personal theory of attachment theory does explain the personal experience one generally has with one's belief system and God/s when appropriately used, and there is extensive literature on its application (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Weingarten & Chisholm, 2009). The most prominent criticism of attachment theory is that it only focuses on a monotheistic God (Calvert, 2010). However, given the sample of Diepsloot participants, their religions have been shown to mostly include monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam (Religion in Diepsloot, Gauteng, n.d.). Although attachment theory would not be

appropriate in contexts where there is more than one God, such as Japan (Rothbaum et al., 2000), it would be appropriately used within Diepsloot. Therefore, attachment theory is also used where relevant in this research to understand more personal aspects of one's relationship with one's religion.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (hereafter as SIT) is a theory that explains intergroup behaviour, and how social groups affect the perception of the self and others (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel and Turner, 2001; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). This theory explains behaviour (descriptive) and articulates one's inner behaviour and thoughts (prescriptive) which lead to one's self-image (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002). This self-image and sense of self-preservation lead to the perceived separation of the individual's associated group (*in-group*) and the contrasted outside group (*out-group*); individuals are theorised to favour their in-group and generalise or negatively perceive the contrasted out-group in order to maintain a consistent self-image (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1970; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). These groups may be defined through social roles, social categories, interests, and other relatable aspects amongst groups (Lopez et al., 2011), such as religion (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). The actual process of SIT theorises that social identity is formed through 1) *social categorisation* (categorising people to better understand the social environment as well as the norms in one's group), 2) *social identification* (adapting the identity of the group as a member to form a psychological bond that impacts emotions and self-esteem based on group image); and 3) *social comparison* (comparing one's in-group with other out-groups to maintain self-image and satisfy one's self-esteem as a member of the group) (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2003).

The reason for why (SIT) is applicable within the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) is because this theory can be oriented towards the manner in which religious in-groups and out-groups shape an individual's identity, cognition, and emotionality in different ways (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1970; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). These commonalities (heritage, values, and identities) amongst groups

and how they emerge can be conceptualised using the ecological systems theory model shown above to contextually locate where they emerge (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). This membership may include the interaction of group membership within religious institutions, as found within the microsystem (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). It has also been shown that this theory relates to group cooperation and group conflict (McKeown et al., 2016), as the perception of religious membership has indicated a sense of positive in-group comparison, and a sense of in-group superiority because of this (Ysseldyk et al., 2010, p.61). There are therefore positive mental dispositions but more distinctiveness in religious memberships, as the collective identity thus creates power of ideology, and competes with other religious identities in a more psychological (not physical) form (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). It would therefore be necessary and possible to understand how much influence certain intergroup behaviours have, which is another reason for its use with ecological systems theory.

In the communal (ecological systems theory), interpersonal (SIT), and personal (attachment theory) sense, I have suggested the need for a combination of these three theories in order to understand how identities can cause these interpersonal problems, and where to ecologically locate these problems on the different systems with an overarching tool from ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The Existing Global Research on PoR

Considering the trends of empirical research within the field of the PoR, it is essential to understand the differing components of the quantitative and qualitative empirical research within this field. This section includes an in-depth, critical discussion of what research has been conducted in the field of psychology with religion. This aim is achieved by using the more highly cited articles in these areas due to their contribution to knowledge production, while understanding how psychology and religion have been used and applied with the theoretical frameworks discussed in depth above (ecological systems theory, attachment theory and social identity theory). As explained, this section does not discuss existing literature on the ecological systems theory model (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), as this theory is used as an overarching

contextual tool to rather map and apply existing literature from attachment theory and social identity theory in the fourth chapter (findings and discussions).

Existing Quantitative Research on Religion

The trend that links these most cited articles in PoR together is the full focus on the quantitative style of analysing psychological research. There are many different religious phenomena that has been explored in PoR, but it has often been done with quantitative or mixed methods research. When considering research from the general global context of PoR, investigation of the area leads one to becoming familiarised with frequently cited authors in this field. The link between all of these most cited authors is their empirical focus and orientation towards understanding (1) religious constructs (i.e., religious experience, spiritual experience, mysticism, conversion), (2) how to quantitatively study religious constructs and (3) how to use quantitative measures to study religious constructs cross-culturally with appropriate scales (Belzen, 2010; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Exline & Rose, 2005; Hill & Edwards, 2013; Hood, 1970; James, 1985; Park & Paloutzian, 2013; Piedmont, 1999; Taves et al., 2019).

The unbalanced methodologies of quantitative-heavy research in PoR poses an issue (Coyle, 2008). Even two renowned, quantitative-based authors, Belzen and Hood (2006), state that when conducting correlational religion research, studies “gain a privileged status” (p.20) due to the way the behaviourist-empirical tradition has neglected more phenomenological qualitative inquiries into the field of PoR (Belzen & Hood, 2006). This occurrence happens in many fields of psychology, and many of the authors involved within the quantitative methodological framework acknowledge that the field is primarily quantitative (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Spilka et al., 2003). Evidence of this methodological imbalance is revealed in the fact that only 15% presentations at the 2013 International Association for the Psychology of Religion congress in Lausanne used qualitative methodologies (Anczyk et al., 2019).

These quantitative authors often attempt to address the issues that quantitative studies bring to the PoR; an example is how a team developed the Inventory of Nonordinary Experiences (INOE) scale to cross-culturally understand the differences of religion in correlational research (Taves et al., 2019). However, the critique that will always exist in this matter is the fact that religion is fixed as an extremely personal and subjective experience that means different things for different people (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Cresswell, 2014). In fact, theories such as terror management theory has shown religion to mean different things amongst people even within the same religious affiliation, as their unique human awareness differs from each other (Vail et al., 2010). Examples are how historical conflicts within the same religions have created separate denominations and sects (Hoffmann, 2015).

This literature review therefore argues that reducing this phenomenon into quantitative data may potentially remove agency and additional meaning from the participants, as well as the true meaning of religion in all its subjective intricacies. Due to the diverse religious aspects that need to be accounted for at a social and personal level, there should be a greater presence of phenomenological, qualitative approaches in the field of the psychology of religion (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Coyle, 2008). For this reason, the use of using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (hereafter as IPA) approach (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) in this study is implemented and explained in chapter three.

Considering the general field of PoR research and the notable lack and gap of qualitative studies, the discussion takes a deep dive next into the general studies, as well as the specific studies involving SIT and attachment theory that do involve qualitative methods in the PoR field. Thereafter, the specific gaps found in this literature are described.

Existing Qualitative Research on Religion

Based on the above finding that there needs to be more qualitative-based literature, efforts were made to consider the more qualitative-based literature that exists on religion. When reviewing the more highly cited qualitative-based literature on the personal, interpersonal, and communal experiences around

religion in various populations, there are some general qualitative studies that have been carried out, despite its general neglect in the PoR field (Anczyk et al., 2019). These general qualitative studies have often addressed notably specific populations that arise from occupations (Cunha et al., 2020; Lun, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2015), traumatic events (Drinnan & Lavendar, 2006; Torbjørnsen et al., 2021), age (especially older populations) (Shaw et al., 2016) and sexuality (Iman et al., 2014; Mattis, 2002; Safavifar et al., 2016; Valera & Taylor, 2011). These studies arose out of specific experiential concerns in relation to specific needs of these populations. Examples would be literature addressing the complex relationship of homosexuality and black members of certain churches (Valera & Taylor, 2011), using religion to cope with Hodkins disease (Torbjørnsen et al., 2021) or Brazillian nurses' concepts of religion and God (Cunha et al., 2020).

Themes that emerged across most of the literature included the following: the thematic link of one's upbringing and familial structure with one's religious belief and relationship with God (Cunha et al. 2020; Drinnan & Lavendar, 2006; Iman et al., 2014; Safavifar et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2016; Torbjørnsen et al., 2021; Valera & Taylor, 2011; Lun, 2015), the influential power of the church in directing behaviour and negatively impacting self-identity (Drinnan & Lavendar, 2006; Safavifar et al., 2015; Valera & Taylor, 2011), the impact of hardship in strengthening one's relationship with God and one's personal identity (Cunha et al., 2020; Drinnan & Lavendar, 2006; Henriksen et al., 2015; Iman et al., 2014; Mattis, 2002; Safavifar et al., 2015; Shaw et al., 2016; Torbjørnsen et al., 2021), and God as giving meaning to one's life (Cunha et al., 2020; Mattis, 2002; Shaw et al., 2016).

Qualitative Studies Using SIT and Attachment Theory:

It should be noted again that ecological systems theory is not included in this analysis of existing literature with similar qualitative methodologies. The reason for this exclusion is because existing studies were already briefly mentioned in the general description; additionally, the purpose of using ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) is to provide a tool that may rather compliment and add an

ecological, contextualised understanding (Crawford, 2020) to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and SIT (Tajfel, 1970).

When using boolean terms such as “qualitative”, “study”, “social identity theory”, “attachment theory”, “religion” and “religious experiences”, there was less of a research presence for SIT than expected. There was interestingly more of a research presence for attachment theory than expected, however, this presence is only in relation to other PoR areas of research, as it is still generally under researched (Belzen & Hood, 2006). Starting with the more highly cited SIT literature on religion and religious experience, there were fewer literature sources cited on actual SIT studies that were conducted first hand (primary research); instead, there was more secondary research discussing other primary research. The common foci were mostly directed towards the way in which different group identities played a role in a person’s religious identity and identification. Examples were studies that focused on minority groups such as LGBTQ individuals (Minwalla et al., 2005), Muslim individuals (Cinnirella et al., 2010; Pamungkas, 2018; Peek, 2005), Jewish individuals (Coyle & Rafalin, 2001; Sinclair & Milner, 2005) and how these individuals’ identities differ from other more socially accepted groups. Interestingly, the literature on Muslims and their religious identity increased after 9/11 in 2001, which corresponds with how PoR studies increased since that event (Paloutzian, 2017); this factor was mentioned in the contemporary aspects of PoR above. In addition to these studies, there were other cited ones based on age (Lopez et al., 2011), acute events (Haslam et al., 2005) and different religious practices (Andries, 2018; Chusniyah & Pitaloka, 2016), such as the research from Andries (2018) on the “Pukul Ritual” in Indonesia.

It was clear that almost all the aforementioned literature was based on minority groups and how their identities change not just on a religious level, but in terms of an ethnic and cultural identity level as well (Andries, 2018; Cinnirella et al., 2010; Chusniyah & Pitaloka, 2016; Pamangkas, 2018). These more socially discriminated minority groups were not only defined by culture and ethnicity, but also sexual orientation and socio-economic standing. They were shown to have identity-based hardships, and they commonly showed an increase of religious identification to strengthen and support their membership within

an in-group such as a religious affiliation (Coyle & Rafalin, 2001; Lopez et al., 2011; Minwalla et al., 2005; Peek, 2005). This finding demonstrates that people located in lower social standings (i.e., minorities) can change their social identities to increase religious identity and participation if individuals perceive that they need to preserve a more positive sense of self (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002; Lopez et al., 2011; Minwalla et al., 2005; Pamungkas, 2018). This assessment is consistent with Tajfel and Turner's (2001) theorisation that minorities often emphasise other social identities to preserve a positive sense of self.

Literature on attachment theory revealed similar results to general PoR and SIT studies; however, there was more of a presence of this research field with more frequently cited articles, and the studies were more recent than the SIT ones, as it seems SIT has faded more in PoR from the later part of the 2000's. As shown above in the patterns of SIT studies, there was more focus on specific groups that allowed the theory to be explained in relation to that group (i.e., minority groups). The difference for attachment theory studies is that these groups were often differentiated by religious groups, trauma/grief survivors (Davis et al., 2019; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2012), and gender (Joung, 2006), children (Aydar & Tokur, 2019; Culver & Denton, 2017; Kiesling, 2011; Kimball et al., 2013; Muthert & Schaap-Jonker, 2023; Tau, 2023). These religious groups often included samples from the more socially dominant groups, such as Christians (especially Evangelical Christians) (Cicirelli, 2004; Currier et al., 2021; Kiesling, 2011; Miner et al., 2017; Okozi, 2010; Ross, 2007; Sandage, 2014). Some studies included ones like Latter Day Saints (Skidmore et al., 2022) or Muslims (Miner et al., 2017), but these ones were few and far between.

These attachment theory studies were often focused on arguing the importance of mixed methods when incorporating qualitative methods (Cicirelli, 2004; Currier et al., 2021; Kimball et al., 2013; Miner et al., 2017). As shown above, with most of the existing quantitative PoR literature, SIT literature and attachment theory literature, there is generally a lack of a full qualitative methodologies for investigating religion for SIT and attachment theory. In attachment theory literature, qualitative studies often included "qualitative interviews" or explained that there was a "qualitative difference" in the findings after discussing the results, but this also does not engage deeply enough with the qualitative components of the phenomenon of

religion. In addition, many of these studies attempted to utilise quantitative scales, such as the Authoritarian and Benevolent God Scales used by Currier et al. (2021), in order to test the correspondence and compensation model of religious attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1992). This model theorises attachment towards God in two pathways; the correspondence pathway shows that a child with a secure attachment style is more likely to develop a stronger secure attachment with God, and the compensation pathway shows that a child with an insecure attachment style may develop a secure attachment towards God as a surrogate parental figure into adulthood (Kirkpatrick, 1992; Granqvist et al., 2010; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Gaps in General, Attachment Theory and SIT Global PoR Research

In terms of the more frequently cited general qualitative studies on religion listed above, they do address experiential qualities involved in religion effectively, especially when considering the importance of subjective meaning making in religion (Cresswell, 2014; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Vail et al., 2010). However, there were two types of gaps found in the aspects of sampling and methodology.

Gaps Related to Specific Sampling:

The first type of gap found in the research was based on how specific the samples were in addressing religious experiences; an example would be focusing on one religious group or age group. Except for some qualitative studies that focused on diverse multicultural and multireligious samples (Chusniyah & Pitaloka, 2016), the general, SIT and attachment studies mentioned above commonly focused on specific religions, ages, events, genders, and occupations in their approach. Of course, smaller samples and greater specificity is a common occurrence within more qualitative, in-depth research (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Saunders et al., 2018). In this way it is argued that qualitative data may reach data saturation more quickly, as there are less participants in the total population being researched (Saunders et al., 2018). It therefore makes sense to use more specific samples in order to reach saturation.

The issue noticed in this specific sampling orientation is that there was minimal sampling for religious studies in locations where there are diverse religions and different participants. When

"geographical homogeneity" (Robinson, 2014, p.28) is focused on, it can provide valuable data on the context of general life in such a location (Robinson, 2014; Roy et al., 2015). Dire and diverse circumstances may occur across these population groups based on locations, and not necessarily on other demographics (i.e., age), which gives rise to a need that must be addressed and a gap that must be filled. In these locations, there may be a myriad of differing social and personal experiences that may shed light on the subjective experiences of how religion and the relationship with religion forms, conforms and manoeuvres differing spaces (Robinson, 2014). Ignoring the value that a qualitative study may bring to a location-based sample may invariably result in neglect of the holistic impact religion may have on a general, location-based community setting. As Morse (2015) states, data saturation is achieved in all qualitative data if it involves a sense of replication; if the role of the theory and research is to generalise findings that can show patterns and future replication, then saturation may be shown as achieved in contrast to what others would claim (Saunders et al., 2018). Therefore, a gap that needs addressing within these studies is sampling based on geographic homogeneity.

Gap related to Methodological Preference:

The second gap found within the most frequently cited general, SIT and attachment theory qualitative research is within the methodologies used in the studies. When considering these studies, they aligned with the general field of PoR based on its quantitative-rich presence in the field (Belzen, 2010; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Exline & Rose, 2005; Hill & Edwards, 2013; Hood, 1970; James, 1985; Park & Paloutzian, 2013; Piedmont, 1999; Taves et al., 2019). Even when searching for qualitative-based studies with appropriate boolean phrases, quantitative studies still emerged. The general, SIT and attachment theory studies often utilised inventory scales to assess religious experiences along with qualitative data in mixed methods studies to justify a qualitative presence. This approach was mostly prevalent in attachment theory studies that often focused on gathering insights into the correspondence and compensation model of attachment towards God (Currier et al., 2021; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Kimball et

al., 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Skidmore et al., 2022). As explained above in the mixed methods research, there was a general justification for using qualitative measures with “qualitative interviews” or explaining that there was a “qualitative difference” in the quantitative findings after discussing the results (Culver & Denton, 2017; Lopez et al., 2011). The issue is that most of these qualitative aspects were not discussed sufficiently when mixed methods were used, as the inventory scales often over-shadowed most of the general narrative of the findings, and it was therefore difficult to gain truly subjective experiences and narratives of the participants. There was also a common explanation that the quantitative data may set the platform for further qualitative research. Although this assumption is true in the social sciences, this does not address the gap of there being a significant lack of qualitative-based research (Park & Paloutzian, 2013). When qualitative-only research was incorporated, it yielded rich data that truly showcased the voices of the participants, especially when IPA, narrative, and grounded theory methods were utilised (Andries, 2018; Aydar & Tokur, 2019; Coyle & Rafalin, 2001; Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002; Peek, 2005; Sinclair & Milner, 2005). Although this approach limits replication, it enhances richness and depth (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Spilka et al., 2003).

The aspects discussed regarding general and more specific literature in qualitative and quantitative reports highlight gaps in the research as discussed, and this qualitative gap was considered worth addressing through this research report. However, another consideration is the South African context, which is discussed in the following sections.

Religion in the South African Context

A large proportion of the South African population believes in a religion and dedicates a large part of their lives to it (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011). When considering the 2001 statistics of for religious affiliation (Statistics South Africa, 2001), it broadly shows a trend towards Christianity having the most affiliates (79.8%), non-religious/non-stated being second on the list (16.5%), and non-Christian religions being third

(3.7%). More recently, data have estimated that South African Christians have decreased to 61.52%, and other religions have started to increase (The Association of Religion Data Archives, 2021).

When considering the data, it would seem that religion in South Africa has had a different and diverse past and development, which can be attributed to South Africa's apartheid and colonial histories, as well as the more contemporary view of religious acceptance and decolonisation (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011). The fact that most religious affiliations are Christian, may also be a cause of psychological concern, as the power of such a religion may be a reason for conflict stemming from silencing or minoritising other ones (Clobert, 2021; Giliomee, 2003). As shown by theorists such as Karl Marx, social conflict theory provides support for the case that religion has been used to justify leadership or actions in creating social imbalances (Coser, 1957). For example, evidence exists regarding the way in which the apartheid system was supported and "justified" through Christian denominations such as the Dutch Reformed Church (Gilomee, 2003).

Religion can thus be clearly shown in many factors involving conflict within society, which poses a psychological problem for social development and communal wellbeing across South Africa. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, research has also shown a greater need for religious reliance by using it as a coping mechanism. For instance, there is evidence from a survey study in Italy indicating higher religiosity rates of attendance of church services and prayer due to COVID-19 (Molteni et al., 2020). This finding clearly underlines a heightened need for an increase in PoR research in psychology and particularly South African psychology.

South African Research on PoR

When considering religion in the context of South Africa, it can be stated that religious diversity runs deep within its roots (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011). As stated above, PoR has generally been underestimated by psychological research (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Paloutzian, 2017). South Africa is certainly no exception in this trend (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011). Evidence to support this viewpoint stems from the most recent quantitative census data of religion in South Africa in 2011, when religion was lower on the

priority list of the census data (Statistics Africa, 2011). There is irony within this statement, as there is a huge amount of power vested in religion, as “South African cultures are still seeped in religion” (van der Merwe, 2010, p. 5) and psychology (van der Merwe, 2010).

In terms of the diverse religious context of South Africa (van der Merwe, 2010), it is important for research to account for the different meaning systems (Paloutzian, 2017) that exist within such a context (van der Merwe, 2010). For more traditional African meaning systems, self-identity is not nearly as important as the collectivist identity that South Africa exists in ecologically (Ivey & Myers, 2008; Makhubela, 2016). Unlike Western meaning systems, African beliefs often entail a holistic approach towards the mind, body as well as non-tangible material that exists within existential aspects of religiosity and spirituality (Nwoye, 2015). African beliefs have also been shown to not correspond with quantitative, observable, and coincidental aspects of the self in psychology either (Nwoye, 2015). In fact, many South Africans who adhere to African traditional belief systems, believe in “mystical causality” (Nwoye, 2015, p.212) which is non-tangible and non-applicable to Western beliefs (Kaminer et al., 2018). In the same breath, South Africa’s past has allowed for a clash of Western Christian and African traditional beliefs that cannot be separated for many. For this reason, many South Africans are dualistic in using both in combination (Kaminer et al., 2018).

The uniqueness of cultural diversity gives South Africa an immense difference from many other contexts. There is a need for a shared identity and deviation from Western normalcy in African communities and township communities (Ruane, 2010). These deviations need to be respected and treated differently within research (Nwoye, 2015). Therefore, more qualitative methodologies, such as the IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) explained in chapter four must be incorporated in order to not assume ones meaning making system, but to rather allow members of diverse South African religions to use their agency in explaining the phenomenon and how it plays a role collectively within their communities (Nwoye, 2015).

Although the secularisation theory (which rejects more traditional religious beliefs) has become more of a normality within the European context (Gill, 2002; Taylor, 2007), many places including South Africa, the US and many other countries have not shown this situation to be the case (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011; Paloutzian, 2017). Along with the backlash of secularisation, where there is a plausible counter that indicates that spirituality is rather taking over religion (Hill et al., 2000), the piloted reworkings of secularisation by authors such as Inglehart and Norris (2004) place a more plausible, empirical counter to both arguments, as they demonstrate how religion continues to thrive in the third world due to the context where social and economic control is lost. The result is an individual and collective need for civilisation to rely on religion to regain that lost control (Berger, 1999; Inglehart & Norris, 2004). With regards to the loss of economic and social control causing "existential insecurity" (Inglehart & Norris, 2014, pp. 3389) and a need for religion, future research can be used to further understand the effect religion has within communities that have lost a sense of personal and collective control (Inglehart & Norris, 2014).

The Research Gap in South African Studies

In terms of the field of PoR, there are many important facets that have not been sufficiently researched within the South African context, especially regarding religion and its role within township communities, such as Diepsloot. Regarding the current trend of global psychology, the newer subjective wave of psychology has given rise to and strengthened cross-cultural psychology (Clobert, 2021), due to the way it can play an integral role in highlighting cultural diversities (Clobert, 2021; Vail et al., 2010). When considering religion, this aspect is highly relevant due to the way culture and religion have often been linked as overall factors in human behaviour (Clobert, 2021; Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). This link not only shows the importance of religion in cross-cultural studies, but also the integral aspect of qualitatively exploring a commonly unexplored link to primary psychological research (Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012; Tarakeshwar et al., 2003).

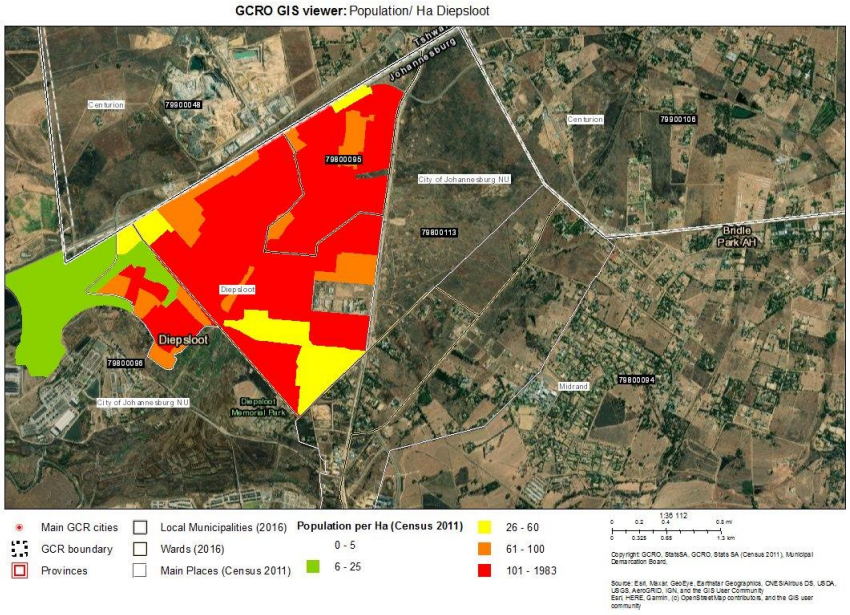
Another factor of religion is its diversity presented amongst people even under the same religions (Hoffmann, 2017; Vail et al., 2010). The construct of religion has often been argued as being a highly subjective aspect, as statistical analyses cannot always capture its intricacies due to the way it often categorises people under one religion (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Hence, my study entails a more qualitative, subjective aspect, as I aim to be more explorative, interpretive, and inductive in allowing the specific agency of others to guide my data. I do not plan on deducing aspects that inherently cannot yet have deductions and hypotheses.

Religion in the Context of Diepsloot

Many South African townships, such as Diepsloot, have been riddled with increasing rates of crime, violence, unemployment, inadequate education, municipal neglect, and marginalisation (Mahajan, 2014; Ngwenya, 2015). Research evidence has shown how 56% of Diepsloot residents admitted to either beating or raping a woman over the previous year (Nair & Govender, 2016). There has especially been an influx of economic migrants and refugees from the rest of Africa that have also resided in Diepsloot (Mahajan, 2014). Due to the failed municipal housing policy, there has been an overpopulation of residents (Mahajan, 2014). All these factors have resulted in discrimination and xenophobic violence (Misago, 2019). As shown in *Figure 2* below, there is an intense spatial issue within the township.

Figure *2*

Population/Ha Diepsloot

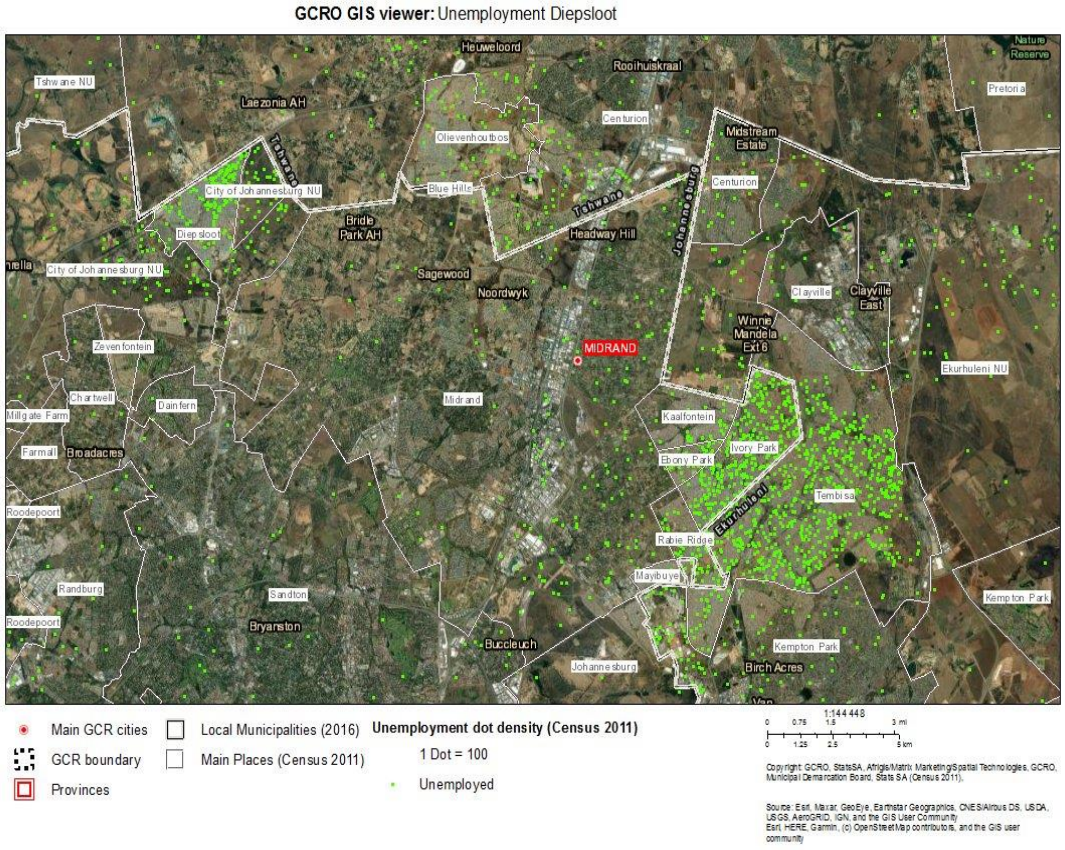


(Gauteng City Region Observatory, 2021)

This context clearly shows a lost sense of economic and social control, and there is statistical evidence of group conflict as well, due to this loss of control (Mahajan, 2014). The issues of unskilled labour and poverty in Diepsloot date back to Apartheid, due to spatial discrimination and historical placements of minority groups (Mahajan, 2014). Despite this struggle, these community members often cannot leave Diepsloot due to financial constraints (Mahajan, 2014). Evidence can be shown in *Figure 3* below depicting unemployment rates in Diepsloot.

Figure 3

Unemployment in Diepsloot



(Gauteng City Region Observatory, 2021)

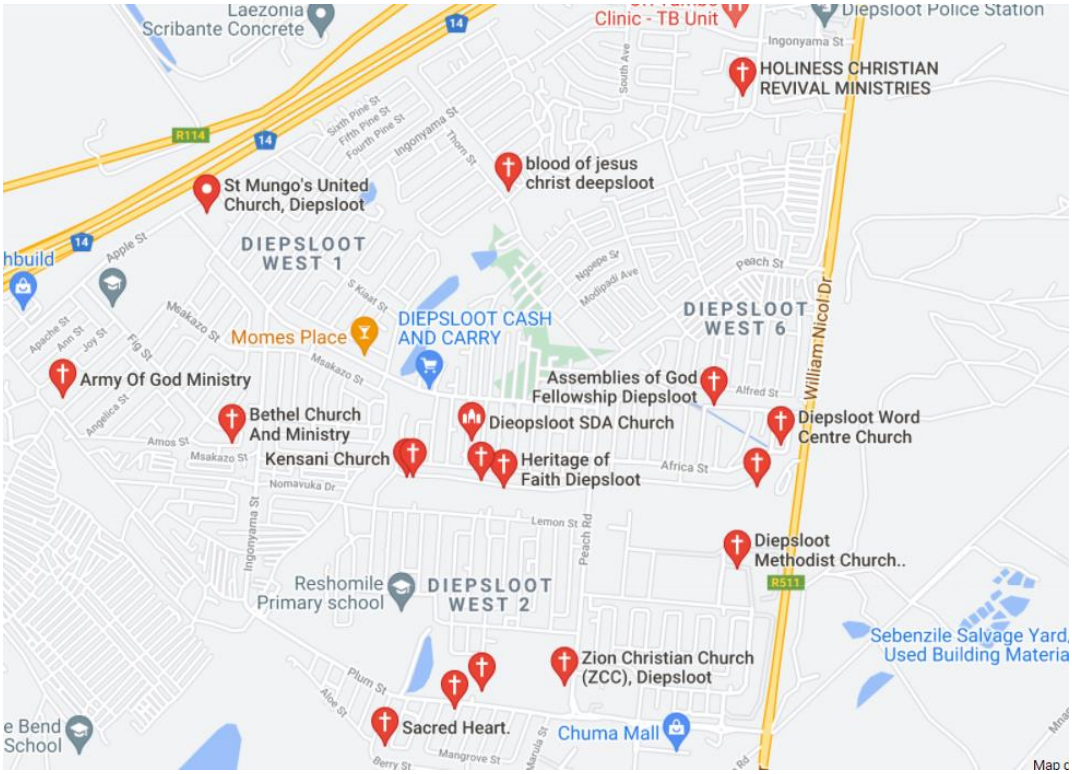
The reason why this community particularly is being focused on is due to the excessive violence and underdeveloped living circumstances that have caused stagnation within the community's empowerment and social control. This community needs to be more focused on in research using the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and SIT (Tajfel, 1970) in order to plan community interventions.

Although religion seems to not receive sufficient attention when utilising location finding platforms (Gauteng City Region Observatory, 2021; Google Maps, 2023), one finds that there are all sorts of churches around these areas, ranging from non-Christian churches to Zionist churches (ZCC) and Catholic

churches. It also seems that there is a higher frequency of churches involving certain Christian denominations (i.e., Christian churches such as ZCC and Apostolic), and a lower frequency of churches or religious buildings involving less popularised religions in South Africa, as shown by the lack of Mosques. Research has shown that ZCC is popular amongst the black South African community due to the dualistic use of African and Christian beliefs (Mashabela, 2017).

Figure 4

Google Map of Diepsloot Churches



(Google, 2023)

Surely, amongst the adversities these residents face, religion has been used in a way that either creates more out-group discrimination or enhances peace. Research focusing on non-Western locations have shown the idea of social cohesion and the idea that collaboration of differing religions is needed for communal progress (Karbo, 2013). This research aimed to explore this aspect further, as South African

studies and ecological studies in general are far from understanding the true dynamics of this phenomenon (Bulbulia & Sosis, 2011).

Specific Diepsloot Research and the Gap

Although the above aspects are of major concern, there is a specific gap that I found within psychological studies on South African communities and townships. The secondary research on religion has received far more theoretical attention on differing worldviews in South Africa (Ivey & Myers, 2008), but there have not been sufficient primary studies carried out on the present, contemporary view of religion and how it plays a current role within communities based on a common neglected area of geographic homogeneity (Robinson, 2014).

Using boolean phrases such as “religion” combined with “Diepsloot” or “Townships”, hardly any direct inferences regarding religious experiences were found within numerous databases. There have been studies on perceptions of religion in marginalised communities and townships (Brittian et al., 2013), but these studies have also been outside of the scope of psychology, and more within the sociological, philosophical, or paediatric view of religion. The psychological studies have often defined communities not based on location or proximity, but rather on groupings of single religions, schools, races, and other classifications (Brittian et al., 2013; Sorsdahl et al., 2009; van der Merwe et al., 2010). This finding is also consistent with previously mentioned studies spoken on general PoR research. This situation causes issues when viewing communities that may have been systematically marginalised based on geographic location, as it would help to see the differences between these people, instead of grouping them via a common trait (i.e., being Christian).

These noted studies from South Africa have contributed significantly towards the knowledge economy, but the gap I noticed was the lack of present, explorative ways of understanding the dynamics of religion in township communities. I therefore anticipated that my study might have the ability to not only incorporate an internalised view on the perception of religion but might also set the groundwork for differing

hypotheses to be tested following this study. It was further envisaged that this qualitative inquiry might set the groundwork for quantitative and modified qualitative aspects to be investigated after this study, as this research might uncover integral themes about the effect religion has on a proximity-based population groups that suffer from marginalisation, crime, violence, and discrimination. Using the Diepsloot community as the population from which I drew the participants in this study, I hoped to be able to contribute to the knowledge economy by understanding the role religious experience has on the community from a psychological perspective.

Conclusion

The development of PoR has certainly increased since 1900, and many new debates have been engaged in and insights developed regarding ways of addressing this sub-field of psychological research (Belzen & Hood, 2006). As shown, this research is necessary, due to the role and effect religion has on people's lives. This literature review firstly demonstrated how religion, specifically religious experience as a sub-field, has developed over the 20th century and how it looks today. The PoR paradigm was also discussed and explained as the umbrella that this research forms part of, due to the need to contribute to this field. Thereafter, the conceptual and theoretical framework were discussed. Due to the complexity of religion, the meaning making systems conceptual framework was considered to suit this construct appropriately. Considering the theoretical framework, with cultural implications in mind, the ecological systems theory appeared to serve well as an overarching contextual tool for discussing and using literature from attachment theory and social identity theory to understand the personal and communal issues of religion. In addressing these frameworks, this review then investigated the methodological framework and commented on the state of global quantitative and qualitative research involving PoR. This literature review then discussed attachment theory and SIT literature and identified two significant gaps based on sampling and methodology imbalances in PoR. This review then contextualised South Africa with regards to its present and historical religious context, as well as the research on PoR from South Africa. Following this

aspect, the township community of Diepsloot was focused on. There is a significant gap in the research for South Africa but especially studies in Diepsloot, which highlights the qualitative, experiential gap that needs to be filled within religion and South African township communities that suffer from major adversities. Understanding how religion plays a part can set the groundwork for future quantitative studies to address this gap, and for future qualitative research to enrich our understanding of this field of inquiry.

Chapter Three: Research Method

Introduction

In this chapter, the different methodological aspects that were involved in planning, conducting, and analysing the research data are presented. The qualitative research questions are the first aspect mentioned. To answer the research questions, the research design, sampling of participants along with the data collection tool, the procedures of data collection, and data analysis explain the methodological aspects involved in actioning this study. Apart from these aspects, the section on establishing quality and ethics involved ensuring that quality assurance and ethical compliance were adhered to in executing the study. The reflexivity section is the last section, where I explain my reflexive process that occurred throughout the process of interviewing of participants.

Research Questions

This study explored the experiences around religion in Diepsloot, with particular attention paid to personal, interpersonal, and communal aspects. The research questions for this study therefore were:

1. How do members of the community personally experience religion?
2. How do members of the community interpersonally experience religion?
3. What role does religion and religious experiences bring to the community?

Research Design

Due to the intricacies that need to be accounted for under a social and personal level of religion, there should be a greater presence of phenomenological, hermeneutical approaches in the field of PoR (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The phenomenological approach, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (hereafter referred to as IPA) approach, is increasingly being used in qualitative research on religion (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2015). This research

design was utilised in this study due to the need to move away from the older measurement paradigm, as well as the need to place religion in its true, subjective form (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Coyle, 2008;).

The phenomenological, hermeneutical IPA approach as a qualitative research design is specifically worthy of consideration within the experiential side of religion. This is because the agency given to personal accounts of experience is an important part of IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). With this design in mind, the quantitative issues of cross-cultural sensitivity, over-generalisations, and assumptions in understanding the experienced, psychological phenomena of religion (Clobert, 2021) were therefore addressed in this study. Religious meanings and communal factors of group construction when considering meaning making are highly valued in this IPA approach (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This approach was applicable to communal members of South African communities, due to the diversities that existed within Diepsloot. The IPA approach allowed for a subjective understanding of the inductive implications of how religion shaped the participants' lives. Therefore, considering the above, the IPA approach was selected as the research design that was used in this study to adopt a hermeneutic, phenomenological style and thereby gain insight into the experience of the phenomenon of religion.

Sampling of Participants

The study included a dataset of 12 adult community members (18+ years old) residing in Diepsloot. This number has been shown to be an adequate sample size for the IPA approach (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The sampling parameters were defined by membership of a residential community. This sample type is also defined by "geographic homogeneity" (Robinson, 2014, p.28) as it involved the cross-sectional exploration of the role of religion of different community members within a particular location (Diepsloot). This participant group tied in with the aims of the study in chapter one, as it was the community members of the specific township that were interviewed.

Sampling Method

The collaborators were collected through a mixed method, sequential sampling technique. Stage one of this technique involved snowball sampling while stage two employed criterion sampling. This method has been shown to work well in qualitative studies (Green & Aaron, 2011), and involves the convergence of participator (also known as collaborator) recruitment through snowballing, while still developing the correct representation in the group once enough people were contacted due to the criteria required (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling is the method of collecting participants through other participants and links from participants in a chain effect, while criterion sampling is the process of selecting members based on characteristics that meet the requirement of the group (Palinkas et al., 2015; Suri, 2011). I therefore used snowballing to accumulate more than 12 collaborators and used criterion sampling to appropriately select collaborators based on the criterion of diverse religious affiliations. This approach ensured a diverse representation of different religious experiences/affiliations with participants that were most interested in participating in the study.

Data Collection Tool

Data collection was achieved by using the centralised gatekeeper of the Diepsloot SADAG container, as I placed an advertisement in this facility and utilised the facility as the place of interviewing the participants. Originating from SADAG (Diepsloot extension 2), I found that the advertisement did attract one participant; however, what helped even more was collaborating with the moderator of a Facebook group online that had Diepsloot members who shared entertainment, advertising, and news content as a community. This strategy gave me wide access to the community, as I could speak to the participants that reached out and set up interviews through emailing when my research advertisement received responses. Although the initial plan was to use snowballing from participant to participant, the advertisement on the Facebook group allowed the community to easily reach out to me. Once I had gathered 12 participants in the study, I had enough content for data saturation due to the way they happened to have different

religions, backgrounds, and contexts. If advertising the research at the SADAG container or Facebook did not yield enough participants, I was planning to contact other possible gatekeepers, such as the Green Door Women's Shelter (Diepsloot West, Extension 2). This study therefore included a geographically homogenous group of adults who resided in Diepsloot, and involved many diverse genders, cultures, ages and religious affiliations as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Sample Description and Additional Information (at the time of the interview)

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Religious Affiliation (Assigned at birth)	Place of Birth	Age and Years in Diepsloot (if mentioned)	Church/Mosque Attendance (current)
1	Male	Christian, Apostolic	"Limpopo" (RSA)	40 yrs old, in Diep. for 20 yrs	Doesn't attend
2	Female	Christian, Apostolic	"Eastern Cape" (RSA)	37 yrs old, in Diep. for 22 yrs	Doesn't attend
3	Male	Christian	"Zimbabwe" (ZW)	39 yrs old, in Diep. over 20 yrs	Doesn't Attend
4	Female	Christian, Evangelical	"Lesothu" (RSA)	30 yrs old, in Diep. over 10 years	Regularly attends
5	Male	Christian, ZCC	"Zimbabwe" (ZW)	43 yrs old, in Diep. for 22 yrs	Doesn't attend
6	Female	Christian, ZCC	"Limpopo" (RSA)	53 yrs old	Regularly attends
7	Male	Christian	"Malawi" (MALW)	37, in Diep. for 13 yrs	Attends different churches/mosques
8	Male	Christian, ZCC	"Limpopo" (RSA)	50, yrs old in Diep. for 20 yrs	Regularly attends
9	Female	Christian, ZCC and African traditional healing/beliefs	"Diepsloot" (RSA)	32 yrs old, in Diep. most of her life	Regularly attends
10	Male	Christian, Non-denominational	"Zimbabwe" (ZW)	29 yrs old	Regularly Attends
11	Male	Muslim	"Katlehong" (RSA)	19, in Diep. for 4 yrs	Regularly Attends
12	Female	Christian, ZCC	"Limpopo" (RSA)	40, in Diep. for 14 yrs	Regularly Attends

As shown in table 1 there are seven males and five females in this study. There are two Christians that did not disclose a denomination presently, but six participants were from the Zionist Christian Church (hereafter ZCC), two Apostolic, one Evangelical, one African traditional healer, one Muslim and one non-denominational Christian. However, these participants have varying degrees of following and commitment towards their religions and religious denominations.

Procedures of Data Collection

The first procedure this research undertook was the facilitation of rapport between me and the main gatekeeper, SADAG. Thereafter, snowball and criterion sampling were used to recruit 12 members. In this way I facilitated a safe, accessible space within the SADAG Diepsloot container where appropriate interviews took place. Before the interview took place, the participant consent form was signed, with the participant information sheet being read by the participants to ensure that they understood the subsequent process.

The interview schedule construction process was based on the following of IPA guidelines and semi-structured interview styles (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2007, 2017). The interview was constructed in a way that ensured flexibility, interest, and exploration in the content of the interview, and allowed for openness and unexpected occurrences to be managed appropriately (Brocki & Wearden, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The structure of experiential factors needed to be emphasised in this interview (Brocki & Wearden, 2017). For this reason, there were open-ended questions, as well as no time allocations for each question in the semi-structured interview. Instead of time-rigid adherence, the participant could then share in-depth experiences outside of the questions that may have contributed to the richness of the study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2007). In order to enter the psychological world of the respondent, the questions in particular (i.e., “can you tell me what religion means to you?”) were based on broader questions that could have led us to various places in the discussion.

While this approach may have disadvantaged the control in the study, it was necessary to ensure rich in-depth data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

With regard to the number of questions, there were four main components alongside the introduction and conclusion. These four were in the areas of 1) one's personal relation to religion, 2) one's elaboration on reasons for this stance, 3) interpersonal factors/experiences with religion and 4) one's choices or autonomy surrounding religion. Demographic questions (age, suburb, culture, place of birth, religion, and language) were derived from the introductory section. The questions listed under these parts were guided questions; however, the questions really needed to follow the direction of the participant, and not keep the participant confined to those questions. This approach allowed minimal prompting from the interviewer (Smith & Osborn, 2007); however, the questions kept the interviewer aligned towards some form of consistency and therefore allowed for directionality if needed. If they decided to focus on one aspect more than others or come back to a section, then that was perfectly fine. These components were sufficiently covered in approximately one hour, with space for the collaborator to fill in gaps between these parts.

The procedure of the study involved individual interviews with the participants. In this way the person was not affected by group dynamics, and their personal experience was valued when they talked about the sensitive topic of religion and religious experience (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009). "Participants" in this study were also rather treated as "informed collaborators" within this collaborative inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, I conducted an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), which is the process of subjectively making meaning of a person's personal and social subjective accounts of a specified phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). More specifically, this inquiry provides additional interpretive insight into the qualitative data that have been collected (Smith & Osborn,

2015). I adopted an insider perspective within this process but did not remove agency from the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This perspective was achieved by differentiating and bracketing my interpretive, subjective accounts from the actual accounts of the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). By bracketing my interpretation of the data on religion and composing a description of the essence of experiencing religion (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), I was able to value the interviewee's agency while also interpreting the data in a meaningful and respectful way. This approach was not a transcendental, but rather a double hermeneutic interpretive version of analysis that was developed by Anthony Giddens (1982). The double hermeneutic approach of the IPA method distinctly uses a social science approach to enable the participant and the researcher to interpret the spoken phenomena (Giddens, 1982; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

In terms of the exact steps of this process, I gathered the interview transcripts, immersed myself within the spoken phenomenon of religion, attempted to understand the collaborator's perspective as much as possible and equally engaged in emic (from collaborators) and etic (from researcher) actions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Specifically, this approach involved the process of making multiple notes, transforming the notes into emergent themes using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) style of thematic analysis, but also seeking the relationships in between these themes and clustering them via labels (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This content was then reported, discussed, analysed, and concluded.

Establishing Quality

When considering the maintenance of quality in qualitative, social science research, one must look towards Lincoln and Guba's (1985) refined criteria for quality in research. The criteria used to ensure rigor in research are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The aspect of trustworthiness is rather a general strengthening tool towards the overall research (Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility in research is a measure of internal validity in a study and involves the assurance that the truth of the findings is accurate (Morse, 2015). Appropriate measures were put in place to ensure this internal validity existed within the research as well as my own actions within the research. To name but a few methods adopted to enhance credibility, member checking was applied to ensure that the participants' responses were correctly written down and understood, peer debriefing was carried out within my research to gain any insight from colleagues on how to improve this study before and after data collection, and persistent observation was used to understand the participants' contextual experience around religion and focus on their narrative in detail and depth to ensure that they were not merely answering a question from the interview schedule (Amankwaa, 2016; Morse, 2015).

Transferability in research refers to the ability for research to be replicated in other contexts and other settings and is a form of external validity as it involves matters outside the specific research (Amankwaa, 2016). This study conscientiously ensured transferability was a factor within this research, due to the need for furthering of research in PoR. An example of a way to ensure transferability is thick description, which is achieved by explaining a phenomenon in the utmost detail in order to allow for the conclusion to be explained enough for further research to grapple with and incorporate into other settings and general contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). When looking at the phenomenon of religion, it differs per context; however, based on the sampling of geographic homogeneity, I can allow for other research to also incorporate more diverse populations and how religion interacts with them. I found a gap in there not being enough location-based studies, as it is not specific populations that should necessarily be the focus at all times, but religion in and of itself as well within PoR.

Dependability is a measure of reliability, and often overlaps with credibility with overlapping methods (Morse, 2015). This research did involve itself in methods to test for replication and duplication; evidence is how I did a completely new thematic analysis using IPA on the same transcript months after the first IPA analysis; to ensure that the themes being obtained were dependable and based on the

participants' experience, not my experience or changes in my context. A unique method of dependability is the method I just explained, called "stepwise replication" (Morse, 2015, p. 1213).

Finally, the last of the criteria, confirmability, ensures that the findings of this research are as objective as they can be (Morse, 2015). While this subjective, qualitative enquiry which does make this process more difficult, I navigated this by employing triangulation (using multiple existing datasets, methods, and theories to ensure that my research question was relevant and appropriate for objectivity) as well as reflexivity (section below) (Amankwaa, 2016) to ensure that my positionality did not interfere in taking away much of the participants' narratives around the phenomenon of religion within Diepsloot. With these criteria for rigor and trustworthiness in my research being addressed and accounted for, I ensured that there was an appreciation and commitment to the quality of this research, for internal and external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

When considering the nature of ethical adherence in qualitative social science research, there are many ethical issues that may arise when dealing with populations drawn from lower socio-economic social strata (Ponterotto, 2010). Much of the ethical adherence in this research sits with the researcher integrity and the need for furthering self-awareness (i.e., being reflexive about one's positionality) and having multicultural competence in understanding and working with different people of different contexts (Ponterotto, 2010). This approach ensures that there is an ethical bridge between the researcher and the participants (Ponterotto, 2010).

With these aspects in mind, this study needed to adhere to ethical principles in qualitative social science research, including the right to withdraw at any point without consequences, informed consent (consenting to the interviewing process and being clear regarding research intent), non-deception (disallowing any misdirection or unmentioned intentions and being transparent), debriefing (participant

feedback from the study when it is finished as well as managing any issues arising post interview) as well as confidentiality (the identities of participants are kept confidential) (Willig, 2013).

Ethical Clearance

The ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Witwatersrand University Human and Community Development Ethics Committee (non-medical) under protocol number MACC/21/12 and was signed for a minimal risk population and approved unconditionally.

Participant Selection and Conflict of Interest

The participant selection was conducted in an ethical manner, as I did not exclude anyone who wanted to volunteer in this process. There were no questions asked about one's demographic details before the interview, which ensured that there was fair access for the participants to volunteer if they wished. At times if the participant changed their mind or asked about being compensated for the interview, I had to inform them ethically that it is perfectly fine to change their minds and that there was absolutely no monetary compensation given for this process. Based on conflict of interest, there was none to report on, due to the fair and ethical manner this research was conducted and the way I did not know of any participants before organising an interview with them through Facebook or from the SADAG container.

Informed Consent and Non-Deception

In terms of my integrity as a researcher, I had to be fully cognisant of the ethical principles I needed to adhere to throughout this research process. Reflexivity was an efficient tool, especially when engaging in reflexive journalling, to gain insight into any instances where my positionality may have skewed the data away from participants (Reed et al., 2012). In terms of informed consent, the participants of this study were required to sign after reading and understanding the participant information sheet to confirm their voluntary participation in this study. If they did not manage to understand, the interview would have not begun until it was confirmed as being understood. This process ensured that they had enough control in the interview

(Smith & Osborn, 2007). The collaborators were not deceived in any way within this process; they decided what to say and how they wanted to respond without much input from me (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). To ensure that the participants had agency, I was open to the participant explaining things beyond the interview schedule; I was therefore conscious of the nature of semi-structured interviews and how it helped them to be heard more openly (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Confidentiality and Safety

When considering confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were not required to give any revealing information other than the demographic related information (i.e., age). I also locked these interviews and transcripts in a file-locking system stored and protected on my device. To ensure privacy in the in-person interviews, they were conducted within the SADAG container where one may not be heard. The identity of each participant was also protected and not shared with any other participant. Even if and when external researchers use the data, they will not be able to identify participant names or revealing information other than demographic data, as the names have been removed.

Right to Withdraw

Based on the nature of religion in Diepsloot as well as the violence that may occur (Mahajan, 2014), I allowed participants to disclose what they wished and allowed them to let me know later if they felt they would not want their transcript analysed.

Debriefing and Managing Issues Arising Post-Interview

In terms of participant feedback, I ensured that they were free to contact me via email and inquire about the progress of the research; I also allowed them to let me know if they would want to view the research later and informed them that they would be asked this question again after the research was completed. Based on their response I would act accordingly in either sending the research to them or not sending it to them.

Noting that the participants were not a vulnerable group, the possible outcomes that may have risen from this process could have involved negative psychological effects afterwards, as the topic of religion may have been hard to express for some interviewees. This negative effect may have existed regardless of being allowed to leave the interview if they ever felt the need to do so. I therefore also made each participant aware of toll-free telephonic counselling services (SADAG, Lifeline and Adcock Ingram Depression and Anxiety Helpline) in the information sheet, and I also made them aware of the SADAG Diepsloot container and what this service offers (i.e., counselling). In addition, I offered my email address and the ethics non-medical committee's numbers if they had additional queries or concerns regarding the management of this research data. As shown in the ethical principles by Willig (2013), these have been adequately adhered to and followed through before, within and after the data collection took place.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is involved in knowledge production, due to the weight the researcher's body carries in power discourses (Daley, 2010); this weight has automatic power that the researcher needs to be aware of (Del Busso, 2007). South Africa is in a post-Apartheid era, where there are existing inequalities, especially within township communities such as Diepsloot, where participants are contextualised in respect to their immediate psychosocial issues embedded within their environments (Mahajan, 2014). This situation has allowed me to receive more power in the social discourses that exist; I am more decontextualised than others based on my opportunities to critically think outside of my immediate space and exist in other spaces (Boughey & Mckenna, 2016), and I therefore could impact the way the participants' voices are heard in this research if I am not conscientious of my positionality. This positionality does not only exist through ethnicity, but gender, age, education as well as the ideologies that differ in one's position in contrast to a participants' position (Daley, 2010; Muhammad et al., 2015). Being conscious of one's power in these aspects is therefore imperative in the reflexive process; it allows for research to be carried over ethically without "positional bias" (Savolainen et al., 2023, p. 6); that is the act of ignoring and neglecting

cultural phenomena through the participants (Savolainen et al., 2023). Through incorporating values from participatory research (Muhammad et al., 2015), I needed to allow the participants to work with me in this narrative building and not let the participants work for this study.

Considering the above, my positionality as an outsider researcher, coming from a background with differing decontextualised ideologies and having a different ethnicity and socio-economic position in relation to the Diepsloot residents did play a part within this study. I had moments where I was truly challenged; a few of the participants asked for money at the end of the interview, and based on my ethical principles I could not provide them with this resource. This aspect, as well as a few other challenges derived from me being an outsider to Diepsloot's context, was intensely demanding for me to deal with. Through using a reflective journal, a tool used for questioning one's positionality (Reed et al., 2012), I constantly questioned my positionality over this period each day of interviewing. This practice allowed me to better understand the participants, to not be upset if they were late, or if they did not manage to show up, but to be understanding of the demands they had to deal with. It also allowed me to treat them with humane intentions; I did not need to illustrate my power through treating the participants with pity and non-genuine empathy. Instead, I learnt towards the beginning of this process that my best work came from me being the genuine version of myself, acknowledging that I exist as an outsider in this space, and that treating the participant as a participant and genuinely being interested in what they had to say (which was automatic based on my interests) was the way I could find their truth, without my own positionality over-injecting itself within their narratives of the phenomenon of religion.

My interest in religion and psychology could have caused interpretative bias, but the semi-structured way of interviewing the participants allowed me to give them their voices. Early on after the first interview, I realised that sticking to the general interview schedule was of importance; however, when the participant would share a topic not related to the question, it would be best to let them free run with it. This approach allowed for a great deal of transparency and genuineness from the participants as well; if they were passionate about a topic on religion it came through. I also realised that my Christian background

could have caused some bias in my interview questions in relation to the Muslim and African traditional healer participants. They often went beyond my questions and felt ideologically different about those questions. When I allowed them to have the freedom to do so through semi-structured interviewing, their voices were subjectively heard and recorded not for interpretation only, but for representing their interpretations on what religion means for them in Diepsloot.

Interestingly, being an outsider for this research allowed for disadvantages but advantages as well. As explained above, I had to be careful in terms of understanding the participants' perspectives that may be contextually different, while not endorsing my power in the discourse that existed between interviewer and interviewee. Of course, being a white male from a middle-income context, and younger than several of the participants, came with a privileged sense of power, as the participants did at times did not divulge further in a matter that they seemed to think I would not understand. However, when I showed a genuine interest in learning about these matters, such as "twasa", they were often surprised, and explained more and opened up to me. Not being an insider of their culture allowed them to have opinions towards religion in Diepsloot, which in fact was communicated at times to give them comfort in confiding with me, a researcher who would keep their identity confidential and who did not have any tethering to their churches or surrounding cultures. Therefore, this outsider status did offer an advantage even when considering the disadvantage of being an outsider.

Conclusion

With all these methodological, ethical, and reflexive sections in mind, they adequately encapsulated the instrumental aspects of this research in answering the research questions in the first section of this chapter. To answer the research questions, the research design, sampling of participants, along with the method, data collection tool, the procedures of data collection, and data analysis explained the methodological aspects involved in actioning this study. Moreover, the sections on establishing quality and ethics involved ensuring that quality assurance and ethical compliance was adhered to. The reflexivity

section was the last section, where I explained my reflexive process that occurred throughout the interviewing process with the participants.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings and discussion section of this paper involves a dual process, where the findings from the analysis (IPA) will be detailed with themes and quotes from the participants' qualitative, subjective accounts, and the discussion will utilise existing literature to give insight towards these findings. Four themes are discussed, described, and contextualised in this chapter along with numerous subthemes under them. These themes are summarised in *table 2*:

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes of the Results and Discussion Section

Main Theme	Area of Focus	Subthemes
1. The Personal Relationship with Religion and God	The personal and intimate relationship one has with their religion and God.	- The Relationship and View of God and Religion - God and Religion as an Instrument for Hope and Dread - Behaviours Towards Practicing One's Faith - Similarity Towards Satanism
2. Internal and Interpersonal Religious Conflict	Personal conflicts one may have towards their belief and relationship with God on a personal and interpersonal level.	- The Power of the Pastor and the Prophet - Pastors and Prophets for Profit - The Cultural Clash between African Beliefs and Christian Beliefs - Contention of Traditional Christianity and going to Church - Traditional Familial Influence and Conflict
3. Discrimination Based on Different Beliefs	The interpersonal conflict and tensions involved with social identities when pertaining towards religion in their context.	- Friends and Discrimination - Discriminating One's Personal Characteristics Instead of Religion - Religion being Used to Justify Xenophobia - Consequences of Leaving are being Lost and Mistrusted
4. Diepsloot Factors Contributing to the Disconnected Community	The environmental and interpersonal aspects of experiencing religions and other religions within Diepsloot	- Disconnected Community due to Religious and Denominational Difference - Money and Power's Influence for Violence in Religious Differences

These themes encapsulate the essence of the phenomenon of religion as a meaning making system and how the personal, interpersonal, and environmental experiences play a role in their lives. It must be noted that these themes are structured in a bottom-up approach; they start from a more personal experience of religion, and gradually move up towards the more interpersonal, social-behavioural, and environmental levels of religion and religious experience. This embodies the directionality that social influence moves in, as it starts with one person's beliefs and actions, which then ripple and influence larger parts of society around them (Botero et al., 2014).

The conceptual framework of religion as a meaning making system, as well as the theoretical framework of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1970) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) are applied to help further the understanding of these themes and subthemes derived from the participants' accounts. Each theme is introduced and incorporates results from participant quotes with a theoretical discussion and discussion of existing studies, where relevant.

Theme 1: The Personal Relationship with Religion and God

The first theme, called *The Personal Relationship with Religion and God*, encapsulated the closest, barest understanding of one's personal connection towards their existence, religion, God/s, and the Church. This theme is located within the microsystem of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1992). The microsystem is the crux of what shapes a person's behaviour in one's immediate surroundings and how one is affected by their perception of immediate figures (i.e., God on a parental level), as well as how one may bi-directionally impact their immediate relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Probine, 2022). The microsystem is the focus of the section; however, some interpersonal levels (interactions with people) from the mesosystem and exosystem, and environmental levels (culture and socio-economic status) from the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) do at times feature in the broader context.

Interestingly, participants of the same religion or belief system often showed many subjective differences in connection to their God. There were also similarities shared among participants with different belief systems. This suggests that there are more unique differences in one's belief at the personal level; this is in contrast with the other themes that hold more similarities in one's belief at the collective, interpersonal level. The personal experiences one encounters in finding their own belief system is unique and specific; this is a critical element of this theme. This is due to the different relationships people form with themselves and others around them, which shapes their relationships with their God (Lun, 2015). This is why attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1970) is mostly utilised to describe the more personal aspects towards one's God, as the theory acknowledges personal differences in perception and belief even within the same religions (Counted, 2018).

The Relationship and View of God and Religion

Considering the relationship and view of religion and God, there were some concurrent patterns that were found in the participants' accounts. When asked what importance religion and God plays in one's life, He was most often identified as essential towards life, and guiding towards one's future endeavours. The evidence of God being seen in a traditional light varied based on demographic differences, religious affiliation, and participants' personal descriptions. God was often defined as a personification of a masculine deity with a 'He' pronoun among Christian participants:

> *"Religion to me, for me is to mean to live with a respect of the human being and also respect everything we have in this world; you must have the religion from the Big Man, because if you don't have the belief in the Big Man you can't do nothing." (Participant 1)*
>
> *"You must talk to them, God is like a person when you talk to him He will hear you, you know." (Participant 12)*
>
> *"So, I believe in God He is working so but eish I don't know about Church." (Participant 3)*

Generally, the conceptualisation of one's religion for the participants often involved the acceptance of a monotheistic view of God in a traditional sense; God was often identified as a masculine symbol that

protects and listens. This is noted as traditional, due to how God has been seen throughout centuries in monotheistic beliefs as a masculine, male-dominating figure or “Big Man” (Participant 1) that served as a patriarchal tool to perpetuate female submission in societies (Hoover et al., 2015; Moder, 2019). It must be noted that this is a recurrent phenomenon that does not just exist within this research, but within societies in general (Hoover et al., 2015; Moder, 2019). Understandably, by using the term “God” and not “Goddess”, it is deriving a masculine version of a deity; however, this is not the only indication towards a masculine deity.

Interestingly, as exemplified in the above quotes, the use of identifying this personal view of God mostly derived from Christian participants with differing denominations, and Participant 1, 12 and 3 cited above did not regularly attend church. This speaks towards secularisation theory, and how the personal relationship with “God” is enhanced away from the Church instead of the following of a “religion” through Church (Chipkin & Leatt, 2013; Paloutzian, 2017). God was further described by many participants as a personified male but with God-like, paternal, omnipotent (all-powerful) abilities. This would be sensical given how Christianity particularly uses the dominant patriarchal image of God to often justify patriarchal norms (Moder, 2019, p. 86), especially within poorer societies such as Diepsloot that involve heinous, violent acts from men towards vulnerable groups, such as women and children (Akibu, 2018; Mahajan, 2014). When considering a developmental perspective, this would be understandable given how God in Christianity is taught to children and perpetuated through patriarchal doctrines (Moder, 2019). Evidence from existing literature shows that God has been empirically shown to feature as an object of “protection or paternalism” (Tau, 2023, p.438) in literature involving the analyses of children’s drawings (Muthert & Schaap-Jonker, 2023; Tau, 2023).

Sometimes, God did not feature as a “person”, but “religion” itself and its use and purpose to society was sometimes identified when speaking of one’s belief:

> *“Religion for us is the way of life, the way we are supposed to live, religion has taught us a lot of things like, a lot of things that we need to know, it gave us purpose and information of what*

is going on around us and what we must do, what we mustn't do, and what is coming and the history and things like that." (Participant 11)

"To me it is a connection, connecting us to the things that we don't know. Learning more and more of the things that we don't know." (Participant 9)

"Religion to me is a sense of belonging…Something that you believe in, something that gives you culture." (Participant 2)

Interestingly, Participant 11 believed strictly in the Muslim faith, Participant 9 was an African traditional healer, and Participant 2 was originally Apostolic, but had a more Agnostic take on religion. These participants, as well as few others that were not within one Christian denomination, often framed religion in a general way that represents an all-encapsulating way of life. Participant 11 framed religion as a guide to knowledge; Participant 9 interestingly framed religion as a "connection" that rather teaches one about the unknowable, and Participant 2 framed religion as a tethering to one's cultural or communal belonging. This differs from the more specific definitions shared by Christians with specific denominations, as religion here is shown as a sexless object encapsulating a sense of *knowledge* or *truth* about one's existence.

When using attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), the question would be if the personal, paternal, and therefore parental attachment to "God" is more or less secured than seeing "religion" as an attachment to a way of life. In the former sense, "God" is a personal, paternal attachment figure that is seen as protective (Participant 1, 12 and 3). In the latter sense of God, religion is rather non-parentally being seen as an essential vessel towards guiding one's ways (Participant 11, 9 and 2). The one difference noted is that the former, personal God attachments are from participants 1, 12 and 3, who do not regularly attend church, and the latter, non-personal religion attachments are from Participants 11 and 9, who do regularly attend church (see *Table 1*).

When using attachment theory, not having a personal relationship with God as a surrogate attachment figure has quantitatively been shown to lessen the dependency one has on a God (Krause &

Ironson, 2019). This is hypothesised towards one developing more control over their actions in an active sense, instead of putting all of one's faith on God (Kirkpatrick et al., 1990, 1992). Although this may suggest security in one's attachment to God, there is some contrasting evidence that points in other directions. Based on the correspondence and compensation model for attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1992), attachment theory stipulates that religious members may rather view God as the ultimate attachment figure and have a more secure attachment by viewing him on a personal, parental level. This may happen either through having an insecure attachment from caregivers and using God as a surrogate parent (compensation) or having a secure caregiver attachment and following that onwards with God later in life (correspondence) (Currier et al., 2021). Therefore, regardless of one's family context (which this study did not necessarily focus on), a healthy, secure attachment towards God does seem to derive not from seeing "religion" as a vessel, but rather from seeing "God" as a parental figure (Currier et al., 2021).

Interestingly, the view of God as essential and parental came from participants that did not attend church regularly in this study. This does indicate that church attendance may therefore not necessarily impact whether one has a healthy, secure attachment to God or not. However, this is not to state that church attenders definitively do not have a secured attachment towards God either or to say that non-church attenders do have a secure attachment to God. For instance, Participant 2 did not attend church, but viewed "religion" as a vessel, and did not view "God" as an attachment figure, while Participant 8 attended church regularly but does have a personal relationship with God:

> *"I always say no thanks God I am working I don't want to be rich. Whatever I got I always thank God for that because some people are not even getting what I am getting. "(Participant 8)*

However, despite this, the crux of this finding is that attending church may not necessarily suggest an insecure attachment towards one's God.

God and Religion as an Instrument for Hope and Dread

The Essential and Guiding View of God

Keeping the above conceptual differences towards one's relationship with God in mind, the evidence of religion or God ultimately being seen as essential and/ guiding can be similarly shown in all participants, despite their demographic differences. This idea of the essential and guiding features of God can be shown in many accounts:

> *"I believe God because I am still alive and my kids are still alive, my wife is alive so I see even that is from God." (Participant 3)*

> *"…but sometimes I say God you know the time that you are going to give me things […] at the end of the day thanks God that you are still alive." (Participant 12)*

> *"It is important, very very important because even yourself if you do something wrong, your God will tell you this thing is wrong." (Participant 1)*

> *"I don't see a place where religion is not important in everything I do I can find answers through religion." (Participant 11)*

> *"…in Christianity they tell you don't be angry for how many hours like that and don't be angry and kill people. So that is why I did not want to do something that I know is wrong. That is why I quickly ran and said no let me get people that can help me." (Participant 8)*

These descriptors of God or religion differed for Participant 3 and 12 as compared to Participant 1, 11 and 8. Participant 3 and 12 viewed God as a life-sustaining source that is essential, while Participant 1, 11 and 8 viewed God as a guide correcting one's behaviour. Participant 3 and 12 specifically struggled immensely with financial difficulties, which may impact the desperation in seeing God as essential, instead of guiding. As shown by Ainsworth's (1970) conceptualisation of a secure attachment figure, it seems that participants that found God to be essential viewed him as a "safe haven" (feeling the love, support, and care that one receives from an attachment figure to fulfil one's attachment needs) and participants that

viewed Him as guiding see him more as a “secure base” (using that attachment figure as a security, which allows one to explore life and surrounding environments).

These essential and guiding descriptions demonstrate how the participants’ perspectives on God and religion can fulfil different attachment needs or serve different attachment functions for them. This is how “safe haven” and “secure base” have generally been coded for in quantitative studies and mixed methods studies to allow for separation (Currier et al., 2021; Kimball et al., 2013; Miner et al., 2017). However, as shown in these studies, there is no definitive line that shows God either as essential or guiding; in this qualitative study, the participants that viewed God as guiding also at times viewed Him as loving and essential. It must be noted that unlike the ways these quantitative studies function to code specific themes, these two attributes of a secure attachment figure (safe haven and secure base) are shown in this study to work on a spectrum, where each individual subjectively understands and corresponds at different levels with using God as the two aspects. Evidence is shown in the way Participant 11’s quote can be interpreted as being “essential” (safe haven) and “guiding” (secure base) in the view of God, as one may essentially gather “everything” (Participant 11) from God in an essential view, while also gaining guidance from always having an answer from God. These qualitative findings illustrate more complexity in this, as shown in the personalised views of God. This finding suggests that the participants’ views of God as being a safe haven and secure base as the requirement for a secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1970) belongs on a spectrum, and is not as dichotomous as other studies suggest.

Hope and Dread

Considering the phenomenological experience of religion, it comes to no surprise that faith and hope serve as a large part of one’s personal connection towards their religion or God. Oftentimes, being given hope and purpose from a connection to God serves as one of the “benevolent representations” (Currier et al., 2022, p. 760), along with being cared for and finding meaning through suffering (Currier et al., 2022). In fact, the component of faith and hope is what makes religiosity a controversial topic; the lack

of scientific evidence in one's religion creates an interesting gap that faith can only bridge between a person and their meaning making system. It must also be reminded that all these participants expressed that they do not want to optionally live in Diepsloot; all of them financially and systemically struggle to the extent that faith and hope is a tool for them to stay motivated and eager for eventual change. Considering the thematic patterns accumulated in this subtheme, hope served as a stimulus for faith:

> *"…I don't have anything so I need that things if I pray I am going to ask God that things. So, God, can I have this, have this, have this… so God is going to answer me one day. He is going to give me… I believe God because I am still alive and my kids are still alive, my wife is alive so I see even see this is from God. So, I believe in God he is working so but eish I don't know about Church." (Participant 3)*

> *"Yeh the car, it hit me in my head, supposed to die that time. But… I was in Diepsloot no. 6, but for Jesus, he's helped me every time." (Participant 6)*

> *"You are going to have a belief that this things is working, but if you don't pray God will never give you something that you don't pray, that you don't want it. You must talk to him then, God is like a person when you talk to him he will hear you, you know…" (Participant 12)*

> *"You must have the religion from the Big Man, because if you don't have the belief in the Big Man you can't do nothing." (Participant 1)*

As shown in the above quotes, faith generally allowed the participants to retain not only hope for the future, but gratitude towards their present lives as well. As shown by Participant 12 and 1, the future and believing in God was a way to hope for things to get better; Participant 3 and 6 were grateful for presently surviving or others presently surviving up until now. Therefore, the religious hope and faith in the participants seemed to primarily serve as gratitude towards being alive in the present, but also being able to possibly receive good outcomes for the future. It seemed to provide meaning towards their existence that allows for a positive outlook to occur. As Kelley and Chan (2012) found in their study with mediators in the grief experience, God provided participants with a sense of coherence, which allowed them "to imagine a hopeful, purposeful future, even in the midst of grief" (p. 218). Hope was also shown as a stimulus for

faith in God in other studies involving adverse circumstances for the participants (Currier et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2019; Joung, 2006). As expected, this indicates that hope served as a tool for making sense of suffering. In a less religious and more spiritual-focused study, positive spiritual and personal relationships have also shown hope as a tool to expect and be patient towards change (Dansby et al., 2017). Therefore, there are many positive attributions that hope through religion and spirituality can provide for the future, as shown by the participants in this study and other studies.

There was a difference between hope in the participants, but also dread, as it was also found that some participants felt that their prayers had not been answered. These participants showed a diminished sense of faith and hope towards their beliefs, which indicated a lessened loyalty and confidence towards their specific religion:

> *"Yes, it is testing my faith, last year December on the 26th around 10:00, the thugs came out of my way. I was working with the father of my baby in extension 13. The thugs came and killed that person with a knife. In that time, I was praying so hard, going out and calling out the community, but there was no one that came to help me. I just wonder why God put me through that test, and even today, I am still in depression because of that thing. I am unable to find a job, I am unable to do anything, but I am still praying." (Participant 4)*

> *"…I don't have anything so I need that things. If I pray, I am going to ask God that things. So, God can I have this, have this, have this… so God is going to answer me one day. He is going to give me." (Participant 3)*

These quotes exemplify what certain participants said towards why they had a lack of faith or why their faith was tested. Participant 4 explained that she gets tested regularly in her faith and her following towards the Evangelical church. The same could be said about Participant 3, who expressed a continuous struggle that has made him feel that he "don't have anything", and yet he does have hope that God will provide one day. However, these participants were shown to still pray and read the bible despite their faith being tested. The following quotes illustrated a clearer doubt or lack of faith and hope:

> *"I was introduced to a new concept. God helps those who help themselves and I was like okay so this is how it is – God helps those who help themselves which is not fair because if that is faith how can God help those who help themselves?" (Participant 2)*

> *"So, I used to question a lot about God, does he hear us and are we on speaking terms? You know… Why is there holes up there, out there. Even religious person but we are suffering here… In Diepsloot, for example, you do have more religious persons… but if you see what happens, it's like we are living in a world where there is no God." (Participant 7)*

Interestingly, other participants, such as Participant 2 and Participant 7, explained clearly that they deductively lack faith. What was particularly interesting was Participant 2 and 7's articulation and thoughtfulness when describing this; they both had traumatic experiences that had led to this point. They had both been in different Christian denominations, and they were now in a place where they could not justify fully having unconditional faith and hope towards a deity that they felt did not respond to their needs. Controversially, studies have been done to differentiate between non-believers and believers of religion, and many have concluded that atheists and agnostics have a higher cognitive ability, or at least a higher analytical ability than religious believers (Pennycook et al., 2014, 2016). However, the meta-analysis done by Zuckerman et al. (2013) found a negative association between intelligence and religiosity. Instead, it was hypothesised that it is more likely that more intelligent individuals are commonly less religious as they 1) did not tend to conform to groups, 2) they were commonly more analytical which undermines non-empirical aspects such as not seeing or proving "faith", and 3) they relied on more than religion to provide for themselves, such as a physical secure attachments or self-regulation (Zuckerman et al., 2013).

While Participants 4 and 3 had their faith diminished and tested, this did not necessarily cause them to turn to agnosticism or atheism; this rather left them hopeless. In the case of Participant 2 and 7, they were found to be more agnostic and unassigned to a religion, objective and analytical in their knowledge of different religions and more decontextualised than the other participants. Participant 2 and 7 also had negative experiences with their religions and decided to justify not fully committing themselves to a religion, but to rather understand religion objectively. Although being decontextualised and

knowledgeable about different religions suggests higher intelligence, that is a social issue based on the way society views decontextualised people to contextualised people (Dutta, 2018). In the three hypotheses mentioned above from the study by Zuckermann et al. (2013), there were reasons outside of intelligence that explained why less-religious individuals "seemed" more intelligent (i.e., more analytical). From these hypotheses, Participant 4 and 3 may simply have preferred being in groups, may have been less analytical or may have not been taught methods outside of religion to regulate themselves. Participant 2 and 7 may have had different contexts to allow for more independence, analytical, and self-regulatory methods to learn and utilise outside of religion.

Notably, with regards to the adverse circumstances of the Diepsloot participants, many of the participants with less faith seemed to rely on themselves more as a vessel to provide for their families and themselves:

> *"No, I will tell you the truth when lets say it is Sunday today and especially on my side I have got a small bakkie… I usually move people somewhere I charge that little bit money, so when it is Sunday somebody comes to me and says lets go to Church and somebody comes to me and says I want you to move me and take my stuff […] I would rather prefer to work than attend Church…" (Participant 5)*

> *"Because even is too much … Going to prayer early in morning, sleep prayer so you see my sister believes God because sometimes my sister is coming to me "my brother can I have this…" and I say I don't have it she says don't worry pray God is going to give it to you." (Participant 3)*

> *"No, the situation [to stay in Diepsloot] I don't like it. The situation has forced me to stay there, the situation is that I can come to the part time job like this [on a Sunday]… Just wasting time for nothing, me I am not a church attendant but I believe in the Big Man." (Participant 1)*

> *"Every Friday, when I get a chance, when I am not too busy at work I go sometimes" (Participant 11)*

This suggests a sense of self-preservation in one's time of need; instead of only using faith and hope, these participants felt they would have to skip on consistent religious worship through time-based

commitments and would use that time to tangibly work towards achieving rewards through their own hard work. This is the active stance over the passive stance, and this ironically occurs for participants with differing levels of loyalty and confidence in their faith. Participant 5, 3, and 1 were not attending church, and Participant 11 dutifully attended the Mosque whenever he could. The only commonality shown was that these were males of different ages trying to provide for themselves and their families. This is significant to note, as they may have felt it was up to them to prioritise work over worship, even when they were loyal towards their faith. This highlights the severe and dire need of the Diepsloot residents in their quest to gain financial resources to survive. While waiting for God to provide, it seemed they would work until God provided enough. Zuckerman et al.'s (2013) third hypothesis for why less-religious people seemed more intelligent was that people may find other self-regulating tools that allow for them to feel better outside of religion. In Participant 5, 3 and 1's case, that certainly seemed to be true, as they had sought for work to fulfil their needs, while rather not pursuing religion or pursuing religion less.

When considering general attachment theory in religion, the evidence against a secure attachment with God pointed to these participants struggling to connect with God as a nurturing, essential and guiding component to put one's faith in, which is the view of a secure attachment towards God (Cherniak et al., 2021). It seemed that this lack of attachment was due to the extensive, adverse circumstances the residents had been faced with, which had seemingly lowered their sense of trust and faith in their religion or God.

When considering the impoverished, dire circumstances of these participants in Diepsloot and how that impacts one's secure attachment with others, it is understandable as to why their faith and hope was lowered. As shown by Schmidt et al.'s (2012) study, socio-economic issues may in fact harm post-traumatic growth for Cancer survivors that experience adversities beyond what is expected. Religion, positive reframing and active coping had also been shown in the same study to correlate with post-traumatic growth. However, there were suspected impediments that caused perceived social support to

not correlate with a secure attachment, such as mental health and financial burdens (Schmidt et al., 2012). Therefore, the financial burdens that the Diepsloot residents faced were possible impediments towards their growth. The fact that religion, positive reframing, and active coping are options towards post-traumatic growth indicates that one can grow through these traumatic experiences with different tools, and not just religion (Schmidt et al., 2012). Hope and faith are shown as important components towards an attachment towards God. However, as shown by these participants, there were other ways in which one could develop and grow through adverse circumstances in Diepsloot.

Behaviours Towards Practicing One's Faith

In terms of how the participants practiced their beliefs, it did vary even amongst participants with the same religion or religious denominations:

> *"Yes, so what is happening is now I just pray on my own and read the Bible on my own." (Participant 8)*
>
> *"I also pray I also read the Bible I can even preach so what is the difference between me and them the fact that I also consult with my ancestors." (Participant 9)*
>
> *"You have to be open, we are doing public confessions so that if you don't want to do public confessions you must not sin or, if it happens it is a mistake you have to confess public so that Satan cannot follow you." (Participant 10)*
>
> *"Day and night everything I do I pray God help me and give me the power to do what I want to do and survive." (Participant 1)*

Participant 8 prayed and read the Bible. Participant 9 read the Bible while also speaking to her ancestors as she was an African traditional healer. Participant 10 engaged in his Church's public confessions. Participant 1 stated that he prayed to God alone. These accounts of worship and praise to God are different and differ based on their church attendance. The diversity of worshipping in one's religion has been shown to feature in existing literature in a myriad of ways, as all are a tool for religious coping (Torbjørnsen et al., 2021). In applying attachment theory to religion, many prayers and actions in times of

need indicate the need for a safe haven (Sandage, 2014). Interestingly, despite global studies showcasing participants with a more diverse range of religious worshiping behaviours, this study's participants seemed to generally limit themselves towards either (1) attending church, (2) reading the Bible, or (3) praying. Based on the traditional Christian presence and the adverse circumstances of Dieploot (Misago, 2019; Nair & Govender, 2016), this may have been the only methods introduced in worshipping one's God; this is because these circumstances limit the exploration residents may be able to take in knowing their personal way of worshipping their God. Based on the power of Christianity and other traditional Churches in the area (see *Figure 4*), the religious notions of praying and reading the Bible were likely to be the most common and expected practices for Diepsloot residents. Interestingly, ZCC has been shown to incorporate dancing and singing in worshipping one's God (Mashabela, 2017), but none of the ZCC participants mentioned this. Based on Covid-19 and social distancing issues from 2020-2021 in the context of Diepsloot, these acts may have been missing or limited in the current Church services.

Similarity Towards Satanism

Unsurprisingly, the only commonality amongst all participants was that they equally shared a hatred towards Satanic practices. This is plausible, due to the way Satanism is shown to impact and oppose peace within societies, communities, and people's personal lives (Reichert & Richardson, 2012). The fear of Satanism is attributed towards practices that often go against someone else's free will (Reichert & Richardson, 2012). These quotes illustrate an opposition towards Satanism:

> *"…Satanism and that thing that I am not feeling well and but I haven't seen any experience about it." (Participant 5)*

> *"They wouldn't want to, they would think that joining something [non-denominational] would maybe be satanic or whatever. So they think that maybe denomination is the right thing so …" (Participant 10)*

> *"For me, mina I don't want to lie there is nothing wrong. The only thing that involve the devil inside for me is totally out." (Participant 9)*

> *"They are going to call you different names because now you are not anymore a Christian [due to not attending Church anymore] you are a "eteng" that means it is a person who believes in Satan…Someone who believing in Big Man but for now they left and run away and starting to do wrong things this is Satan." (Participant 1)*

These quotes illustrate a consensus towards the disapproval and hatred towards what are deemed as satanic beliefs or practices in Diepsloot. Most participants expressed being affected in some way by Satanism, which does highlight an issue within the community. There are reports of increased satanism on a global scale, but in Diepsloot the participants did share some existent Satanic practices that happened within the township. Interestingly, the words "satanic" or "satanism" has also been linked towards behaviours in the community that the participants deem as non-religious or morally wrong. An example is how Participant 1 said others would call you Satanic if you stopped going to Church, or how Participant 10 said others might call one Satanic for joining the non-denominational Church that he is a part of. As shown, the judgment of being Satanic is clearly shown to be associated with behaviours that are deemed as immoral or evil. From an interpretivist stance, although the participants used the word "satanic" or "satanism", this may be an emotive description of how they feel judged by others or how they feel towards the behaviours of others. These behaviours are not necessarily Satanic; it seems that there is rather an emotive feeling and judgment towards associating behaviours that the community would disapprove of as satanic or evil. This showed there are some tensions amongst the community in terms of othering people with differing religious behaviours or beliefs, which is covered in the next main themes.

As news reports state, there are brutal murders that take place and many state that "Satan" exists within Diepsloot due to the presence of Satanic churches (Milan, 2015). It is also said that Satanism originates from richer sects abusing and invading the poorer populations (Masuku, 2015). With Diepsloot being a more lawless township with vulnerable, poorer populations (Tshililo et al., 2022), this would therefore be a place of danger that may be associated with Satanic practices. When considering the above, harsh descriptions of certain behaviours being seen as satanic or evil, it seems that there is a personal, emotive fear in being judged for not adequately worshipping or practicing one's religion

appropriately based on social norms that the community defines as abiding to their religions. The fear of being judged socially or not being accepted seems to thereby threaten the participants' sense of safety and security in their beliefs. Considering attachment theory, if the attachment to God is threatened, the feeling of having God as a safe haven (a source of protection) and a secure base (a guiding source to allow for exploration) is in question (Ainsworth, 1970; Sandage, 2014). Social learning is a key determinant of one's attachment to God, and if judgment causes one's internal working model to harbour negative detachments from God, this causes distance and perceived support (secure attachment) from their God (Cherniak et al., 2021). These social judgments may therefore threaten the feeling of attachment one has towards their belief and God, and based on the intense, adverse context of Diepsloot, the need for protection may be even more desperately sought for.

Theme 2: Internal and Interpersonal Religious Conflict

This theme thus embodies the internal, personal conflicts in relation to one's environment, as well as the interpersonal level at which one may experience tensions in believing or following certain customs in religion. Considering Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, this section covers differing structural levels starting at the microsystemic level (i.e., family influence on one's faith). Beyond this, these ecological levels also incorporate the mesosystem (where different immediate surrounding environmental aspects interact between one another), the exosystem (formal and informal social structures, such as a relation to a church) and some of the macrosystem (cultural elements affecting one's development, such as socio-economic class or cultural aspects of the geographical area) (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1992).

Interestingly, the participants stated that they experienced several power struggles, within themselves and their surroundings. These struggles included the difficulties inherent in accepting or opposing the power of the Church doctrine, the tensions between Western versus African belief systems, as well as the monetary tensions involved in the church. The reason why this was perceived as conflictual was due to the many diverse religious practices and belief systems that co-exist in Diepsloot. These were

seen to perpetually cause inner and interpersonal conflict. When considering social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1970), the importance of group behaviour became prevalent and appropriate within this theme. The self-image and self-preservation behind the participants' collective religious groups was imperative, and the fact that there were tensions was due to different forms of social categorisation and social identification. More importantly, it was a way of measuring what was "right" or "wrong" through social comparison (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1970; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). This suggests the role of consensus, social approval, and social affiliation in morality.

The Power of the Pastor and the Prophet

The presence of church leaders has always been a prominent feature of societies, especially within religious contexts; it is the person that mediates between church members, organises outreach programmes towards selflessly helping others, and challenges and projects expected norms that benefit the church community (Boyer et al., 2022). Through applying the norms of the church, prophets and pastors therefore expect certain behaviours to be adhered to and speaks to the members through the church's ideology and chosen belief system (Levitt & Ware, 2006). In this, there is an enormous sense of power within these leaders; this is no exception towards Diepsloot, where pastors and prophets have a lot of power based on the number of churches that exist, with certain Christian denominations holding more power over other ones (i.e., ZCC) (Mashabela, 2017). With that power, there is a sense of superiority towards their actions and behaviours, and that responsibility can be used righteously or selfishly. Many participants asserted the power of these religious leaders, whether pastor or prophet:

> *"Ah, like now since I have moved out of denomination…we are praying someone since we are following … they think that maybe we are serving that prophet, and you know that prophet is just a Servant of God, he is just like me but he is sent, me I am not sent." (Participant 10)*

> *"Like every day I have to dream this same dream and I decided to go to the other Prophet like down there, I know him he is a very famous Prophet in Diepsloot when I went there he told*

me my ancestors were calling for me they want me to be to practice African culture and I have to be a Sangoma" (Participant 4)

"I remember that my Pastor said, the Zion Pastor, said no you cannot go to both Churches." (Participant 9)

"They want to be there the people must respect him that kind of Pastor… I still respect, it is my Pastor I cant...." (Participant 12)

"I have my own belief, they are trying press this thing on me again and I have always struggled with the definition, who is he? How do people say I hear voices and God was talking to me, there was even one video clip of a Pastor on a phone, "hello is that God". I got so sore, sore here…" (Participant 7)

All these quotes described the immense power of the pastor or prophet in the participant's current or previous church. Participant 10 stated that the prophet speaks through his God, which holds immense power. He later explained that "if the prophet dies then we have to wait for another prophet, we are not supposed to do anything" (Participant 10). Participant 4 also spoke of the prophet's fame and consequential power due to such fame. She also stated that she did not fully believe in African traditional healing, yet still went based on what others said of his power and because she was said to be experiencing "twasa", which is the ancestral calling signs to become a sangoma through one's dreams (Nwoye, 2015). In terms of the pastors mentioned, they all held power whether participants agreed with it or not; Participant 9 spoke of her ZCC pastor's orders for her to stop African traditional healing while attending. Participant 12 spoke obediently of the Pastor as a person that must be respected, and believed if he was accused of corruption and was not guilty, he could still be taken out of the position. Participant 7 spoke of his distaste towards the power the pastor had towards his people with the viral clip of a Zimbabwean pastor speaking to God on the phone (Parker, 2017).

When considering the power dynamics of the religious leaders, the participants' quotes revealed that they held an immense amount of power to them, whether they were happy with this or not. Religious leaders have been shown to be able to project and refine the norms that a religious collective should live

by. A study by Boyer et al. (2022) explored how religious leaders in Uganda perpetuate traditional norms that still oppress certain groups such as women, and they found that educating religious leaders on more progressive norms could allow for change to ripple amongst the church followers. Other literature has also showed the tensions between religious leaders feeling obligated to save marriages while also protecting victims in the church, as saving marriages may perpetuate the cycle of intimate partner violence (Levitt & Ware, 2006).

When applying SIT, there are not enough existing studies focusing on religious leaders in depth. However, when applying SIT to leadership, it has been shown that leaders of collectives are described as implementing the first stage of SIT, which is social categorisation, while equally engaging in "prototype-based depersonalisation" (Hogg, 2001, p. 184). These two processes are prevalent, as the group in the social categorisation phase will understand the norms, and prototypically choose the member that embellishes those norms enough to have the most amount of group influence that can elevate each member's self-esteem (Hogg, 2001). This leads to conforming to the norms of the religious leader; this is why they are also known as "norm entrepreneurs" (Boyer et al., 2022, p. 2). Through this process, there is often an experience of depersonalisation in the leader's followers, as one will adhere to these norms; depersonalisation in this context happens through changing one's personal identity to a more stable and safe group identity, thus ensuring safety in numbers (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002). Based on this, a pastor and prophet hold immense power, and may use such power within their collective group to define what is acceptable or not within such a church group, thus heightening or diminishing a person's sense of safety in their identity. Therefore, the literature and theory on the power of the pastor and the prophet confirm the views expressed in the participants' accounts. The next subtheme addresses how this power may become a specific issue within Diepsloot.

Pastors and Prophets for Profit

Within the phenomenon of religion and religious experience in Diepsloot, there were numerous accounts that pointed towards the relationship between money and the church. Some participants felt that financial contributions to the church were necessary and a part of one's membership towards serving their church, either currently or before they left the church:

> *"I can say it is a funeral plan. So, every month we have to contribute to pay that funeral plan so that when you get an accident or you die, your funeral must be like other peoples who has got monies and whatever. I can have a dignified funeral." (Participant 8)*

> *I was working and it was a good job and it was paying me well and I ended up having to take money out of my kids and my own mouth so that I cover for Church. It was not like I would get compensated for it […] I would say again I am not going to lie I didn't have the faith then that I have now because then I would say God would provide." (Participant 2)*

> *"They can't push you away but they will never bury you if you didn't participate… They won't, there is certain money that you have to pay […] Whether it is cultural or pure Christian there is a money that you have to pay in order for them to come to your burial." (Participant 4)*

These quotes described the use of payment towards consequential outcomes, such as paying towards membership (Participant 2) or having a dignified burial (Participant 8 and 4). These participants, as well as other participants felt it was the way in which one gained different benefits from that church and community. As Participant 2 stated, the belief that God would provide is the faith that came with serving the Church. This was understandable, given the ways in which churches must make money to survive in the economic context; Diepsloot is therefore not a different case in that matter. Considering the benefits and necessity of providing financial payment to a church, it must be stated that many participants felt that paying for belonging to the church caused a myriad of issues, especially when there had been cases of corruption or financial exploitation of church members by pastors:

> *"I think people are just doing things they are not called to be traditional healers there are people that are not called to be Pastors, and now it's like I don't know money when you get*

money every day you buy with it. So people that are just using religious to get money those kind of things…" (Participant 9)

"So, in the Church it is his [the Pastor's] business, let me start by saying that it is business, he runs a business but again it is Church. So we would buy T-Shirts from the Church, we would buy whatever we need from the Church... Sometimes he has people working for him, he underpays the people that work for him. Like I mean it is how pastors and elders live… they will be driving a fancy car and at the end of the day who is paying for that fancy car?" (Participant 2)

"There is no answer, like last year that thing happened this year [2021] on the 6th there is a society something like a club we are paying money for those things and on Monday we are supposed to share the money […] Another test came upon us they money just disappeared…" (Participant 4)

"They [religions and churches] are after money because people are just doing things on their own, knowing that at the end of time they will have money." (Participant 8)

"So people that are just using religious to get money those kind of things… They have corrupted this word religion actually because what they do now, now we find Pastors praying for people and for consultation you pay R1000.00." (Participant 9)

"They use religion for different purposes it's not about God, it's about money, power and things like that […] when we go to Church we have to pay some money and stuff like that." (Participant 11)

"That one wants to leave the Church because of money and propheting because of power that one wants to do my money because this one has power that propheting" (Participant 12)

"There is a food parcel from the Government, the same members of different Churches, they benefit from those parcels but those people who are supposed to get those parcels – they are suffering… It is a problem because some other they use religion as a business." (Participant 1)

"…there was one Prophet would had Church members and one other guy decided of opening his own Church, but these old Prophets look for another guys to attack them while praying[…] they were beaten it was just bad." (Participant 7)

These participants were within a lower socio-economic bracket and felt exploited at times. Retaining their faith under these circumstances has clearly been a challenge. As shown above, there were many diverse accounts of corruption in the church, on the part of church leadership. Participants provided accounts that involved the exploitation of monetary resources by leaders for their own gain. This has caused a sense of despondency amongst most of them, and a sense of hesitancy towards trusting such entities. It has caused some participants to lose their faith and rather not attend church, while leaving other participants feeling hopeless and in despair about whether God would help them.

When considering qualitative studies on this specific area, there were not many population groups that expressed being negatively affected by the social structure of the church. Instead, the SIT qualitative literature rather focused on specific minority groups (i.e., LGBTQ) (Minwalla et al., 2005). This is disappointing, as socio-economic components shape an individual's identity significantly, especially as it is a cultural-based phenomenon that occurs in the macrosystem (cultural factors) and can affect a wide group of individuals if a social structure from the exosystem (social structures such as the church) impact members of a lower socio-economic bracket (Spencer, 2007).

When considering general theoretical components of SIT and corruption with the church, it has been found that organisational corruption often happens through a three-step process of spiralling (Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). This firstly involves the spiralling of divergent norms, which is where corruption grows as norms change based on the need for competitive advantages to out-groups (i.e., other church groups or businesses in general) (Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). This theoretically requires the in-group to differentiate themselves from the out-group due to the need for positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Secondly, there is a spiral of pressures from employees (i.e., pastors and prophets) that gain pressure to further corruption gains, due to the need to ward off identity threats of being weaker than out-groups (Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). The third spiral is the spiral of opportunity, where corruption has existed long enough for leaders and managers (i.e., church elders) to have their power limited on the

continuous power gained from employee corruption; this then spirals to other organisational units even in out-groups to maintain competitive advantages (i.e., religions groups or denominations) (Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). The phenomenon of religious corruption is not exclusive to Diepsloot (Boyer et al., 2022), and the ramifications of such within Diepsloot are increasingly dire, especially when concerning a community ridden with crime, poverty, and unemployment (Mahajan, 2014). The socio-economic vulnerability of the people in the Diepsloot community can potentially be exploited through corrupt leaders and religious organisations.

The Cultural Clash between African beliefs and Christian beliefs

When considering the duality between traditional African cultures in Diepsloot and the Western-originating doctrine of Christianity, numerous tensions arose for the participants. Some churches, such as the ZCC, have incorporated African culture with Christianity, and therefore did accommodate both in their creation (Mashabela, 2017). However, even participants from ZCC, such as Participant 9 who is an African traditional healer that went through the process of "twasa", explains that she encountered friction from her pastor:

> *"So, one day I went to that Church and then they started telling me that and after that I think it went deeper. I started getting sick" (Participant 9)*
>
> *"… I remember that my Pastor said, the Zion Pastor, said no you cannot go to both Churches… I will rather go to a Church that gives me approval and who is going to accept me as I am […] He was like okay fine, continue instead of praying there in Zion [ZCC], then I am still seeing problems like I started speaking. I was scared though but if I see something then I just talk but then I got used to it and started speaking and all those kind of things. One day I got sick" (Participant 9)*

As these quotes demonstrate, Participant 9 was torn between the church and the African traditional healing centre she went to for her ancestral calling. Apart from Participant 9's experience, other participants also demonstrated their belief in African traditional healing:

"Sangoma I do believe in it, yes I do believe it" (Participant 5)

"Last year when I went home because I had consulted with a traditional healer and he said in his visions that he saw that somebody was going to give me poison and I must go do this at home and I did that. Then when I left I got phone calls calling me a witch and all of that" (Participant 2)

These participants show the appreciation and respect for African traditional healing, and Participant 5 and 2 did regularly go to a Christian church before but did not attend anymore due to being busy (Participant 5) or having dealt with corruption (Participant 2). This extract from Participant 12 showed the co-existence of both belief systems:

"Yes African Traditional and God and then in my Church we believe [ZCC]…. Yes African tradition or you believe in .... Yes it is fine, it is up to you." (Participant 12)

Participant 12 was a full believer in ZCC but still respected the duality of African traditional healing and Christianity. This shows some acceptance towards African traditional healing within participants that do not regularly attend church, as well as participants such as Participant 12 that does regularly attend ZCC church. However, as shown by Participant 9's account of ZCC tensions, there were sometimes clashes in the acceptance of the two. This was quite surprising to hear, as faith missions from African Independent Churches (AIC) were created and oriented to converge African and Western notions of religion, in African-Christian religious communities, such as those that exist in South Africa (Zion/ZCC), West Africa (Yoruba) and others (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). However, the ZCC pastor was opposed to Participant 9's calling.

In other participant accounts, there were issues that many had towards the African traditional healing methods as a competitor towards the Christian faith, and Christian customs, such as prayer and bible reading:

"People are just taking something and saying God lead you to it maybe a lizard or a snake. In which Bible is that, people are raping and after raping, when they want to rape people they say we want to heal you but first thing we want to… in which Bible is that?" (Participant 8)

> *"He [the prophet] told me my ancestors were calling for me they want me to be to practice African culture and I have to be a Sangoma… Ya, they want me to do that [twasa] but eish I don't believe in those things I don't think it really exists. I did go there for seeking health but deep down I don't believe in them" (Participant 4)*

> *"No because I cannot believe someone to tell me, this bone said you must do this and this. If this man is passed away that means my life is going to be destructed" (Participant 1)*

These participants shared their resistance towards African traditional healing. As for the participants that were more accepting of these beliefs, some were regular church attenders (Participant 8 and 4), while others were not (Participant 1). Based on this observation, it seemed that the church and type of church was not necessarily the catalyst for religious conflict here. Instead, culture may be the factor involved, as cultural acceptance may be an important factor for these participants and others in the community of Diepsloot. As stated by Participant 7, there are cultural aspects and identity-based aspects that contributed towards this tension:

> *"The disadvantages of religion are that to us Africans, it keeps us limited in terms of information […] now Christianity is a thing that originally was for us. We had our own beliefs then… Ya, then when people from the West came they bought this thing and said "no, what you are doing is evil, don't do this, don't do that". So, I still think that we don't really understand what Christianity is or some other religious beliefs." (Participant 7)*

The idea behind many participant accounts illustrated tensions, or at least acknowledgement of the differentiation of Christian and African cosmological belief systems. Participant 7 raises the colonial ideology perpetuated in South Africa due to the view of traditional African cosmology and spirituality as being "evil", and yet cultural norms, traditions and practices associated with African cosmology are widely prevalent in many predominantly black communities (Nwoye, 2015), including Diepsloot (Mashabela, 2017). The participants' accounts portray the high variation of culture and religion for many in Diepsloot, even when people come from similar backgrounds.

South Africa is unique in its context, as many use an African worldview that often intersects with a Western worldview (Kaminer et al., 2018; Nwoye, 2015). The colonial origins of this conflict come from Western influence and thought, as Western colonisation changed African cultures that functioned in different epistemological and ontological forms (Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). The West perpetuated a sense of "methodic knowledge" (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 433) that entailed a normalcy that denied or manipulated other ways of understanding and approaching truth, as this truth was seen as objectively factual (Maldonado-Torres, 2017). This led to a Western doctrine that "interpreted" religion within South Africa, as well as culture, philosophy, and other subjectively experienced entities (Nwoye, 2015). This relates to what Participant 7 explained, as well as what the other Participants experienced in the different views towards tensions of Western based Christianity and African meaning making.

When searching for existing SIT empirical research on these tensions raised by the participants in the matter of Western and African beliefs, the literature is scarce. However, when looking at SIT generally and theoretically, these tensions would come from the differentiation, assimilation, or rejection of different parts of African and Christian norms. This would cause a discrepancy of norms of a specific church group, even within the same denomination or religion, based on how social categorisation happens within a collective (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Even within the same denominational branches, teachings, pastors, and prophets differ, as well as their projected norms for the group (Boyer et al., 2022). A member of a church group may identify as a member of a religion, but it is more likely they first identify on the more influential level of the exosystem (immediate surrounding social structures) (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), therefore relating to their specific church group and not the whole religion.

The values and norms of what it means to identify as a group understandably also differ across religious orientations (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). An example would be a study from Cohen and Hill (2007), where Protestants showed higher levels of religious identification than Catholic and Jewish participants. It is

also essential to note that minorities have been shown in studies to often hold onto their religious identity, even in times where the same members of that religion may discriminate against them (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). An example is Sinclair and Milner's (2005) IPA study that indicated a need for minoritised, LGBTQ Jewish participants to feel wanted in their religious community. Interestingly, these participants felt even closer to a small group of LGBTQ Jewish groups, and whether that was or was not the case, they still commonly felt a "strong sense of social identification with other Jewish people and felt themselves to be members of an ethnocultural group, even in the absence of any religious feelings" (Sinclair & Milner, 2005, p. 112).

Given South Africa's diversity built from past developments (i.e., Apartheid), this intersection of Western Christian and African traditional beliefs cannot be separated, and there have been many attempts by South Africans to fuse the two together (Moscicke, 2017). The two belief systems (traditional African and Christian) differ on a fundamental level: African cosmological meaning making draws more towards non-tangible "mystical causality" (Nwoye, 2015, p.212) that involves a God but uses ancestral intermediaries, while Western based Christianity draws more towards a tangible, mythical God that can be reached through the use of physical tools to assert his presence (i.e., the Bible) (Agbiji & Swart, 2015; Kaminer et al., 2018).

Given the tensions between Christian and African belief systems that the participants experienced, it seems their understandings were based on their personal opinions. They seemed to have developed their own opinions about these two matters not exclusively due to their religion or religious groups (i.e., ZCC participants showed different opinions towards this matter), but due to other parts of their identities that exist, as they were in church groups with differing opinions on this matter but identified with other perspectives on this stance (i.e., being an African traditional healer and part of ZCC). This corresponds with Sinclair and Milner's (2005) study with minoritised LGBTQ Jewish participants. This also corresponds with Tajfel's (1970) social identity theory (SIT), which stipulates that there are many groups that one may identify

with, depending on the phenomenon that exists. The next subtheme delves into traditional Christianity and the issues that participants articulated with this religious doctrine.

Contention of Traditional Christianity and going to Church

One imperative aspect of religion was shown in the way participants felt about Christianity; this mostly involved the traditional notion of attending church every Sunday. As shown above in this theme, there are societal demands such as work, that disallow some participants from attending church regularly. However, the participants did express tensions related to the choice to attend church and practice their faith in general:

> *"For now I don't go every Sunday for now, because my Church is too big whereby it accommodates a lot of people and since the lockdown we don't have that … Yes, so what is happening is now I just pray on my own and read the Bible on my own" (Participant 8)*
>
> *"Ya you know the Church not that I don't go but sometimes if I have time I can go but most of the time I am not attending it" (Participant 5)*
>
> *"Ya I didn't go to Church because I don't have a choice for now because Church is too much, so I don't know which Church" (Participant 3)*
>
> *"Just wasting time for nothing, me I am not a church attendant, but I believe in the Big Man. Day and night everything I do I pray God help me and give me the power to do what I want to do and survive. In the name of my own God" (Participant 1)*
>
> *"I am so open to other religions; I can even go to any Church. I do that most of the time" (Participant 7)*

Out of all of the participants, the only ones that stated that they regularly attend are Participant 12 (ZCC), Participant 6 (ZCC), Participant 11 (Muslim) and Participant 10 (non-denominational Christian). The quotes show that other participants have diverse reasons towards their lack of church attendance, whether it be based on Covid-19 restrictions (Participant 8), busy schedules (Participant 5, 3) or a general resistance towards going to church in the first place based on preference (Participant 1 and 7). Participants

2 and 4 reflected on church attendance as part of their familial upbringing, but had discontinued this practice once they were adults, preferring their own ways of practicing their spirituality:

> *"…My Grandfather was a priest, so on a Saturday we would all go to Church; that is how it is done until we grew up[….] but what if I don't want to go to this Church, what if this Church does not have any spiritual meaning for me?" (Participant 2)*

> *"Okay, I was going to Church since I was young through my parents. Going to Sunday school, I was raised in Church up until I was old enough to do everything on my own. That is when I started to see things in different ways but I am still a Christian, still believing in God but I am no longer going to Church like I used to before." (Participant 4)*

Based on the participants accounts of church attendance, there seemed to be conflicted views about whether one should be part of their religious community or should rather focus on the personal relationship one has with their God. When considering secularisation theory (Bruce, 2008), it stands to reason that church attendance, along with other religious behaviours that were popularised before secularisation, are declining due to how scientific modernisation and technology is contesting traditional religion (Zuckerman & Shook, 2017).

Secularisation is most concentrated in first world countries, and it has been argued that third world countries are retaining a traditional sense of religion (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011; Paloutzian, 2017). This is theorised due to the need for religion in third world countries where social and economic control is lessened (Inglehart & Norris, 2006). Although there may be truth to the reliance of religion in a third world setting where hope and dread exists (as shown in Theme 1), this does not remove the notion of secularisation from Diepsloot; it would be reductionist and diminutive to assume that Diepsloot simply remains a traditional religious community where there is an absence of modern ideologies. As theorised by Bruce (2008), science and technology have created an era of rationality, where cause and effect settings are emphasised. An example of this is how working on a Sunday instead of praying may rationally, but not religiously, create more income for someone and improve their economic security. For example, technology has allowed for cohesion amongst people, but also separation in that many relationships that

could only have been experienced outside in social communities can be replicated in personal settings (Bruce, 2008). There is proof of South Africa having experienced this technological change (Togarasei, 2015), as well as Diepsloot residents having access to online technology that allows contact and interaction with different religious communities and worldviews. An example of this is when Participant 7 said "there was even one video clip of a Pastor on a phone, "hello is that God.". Therefore, considering that there is evidence of Diepsloot residents do have at least limited access to technology and online platforms due to secularisation within South Africa, there may be a lack of group cohesiveness. There may be different beliefs and positions held within the church community, despite identifying with a specific Christian denomination. SIT indicates that norms and group cohesiveness impact on the self-esteem that one has in their in-group (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). If members are not cohesive, this threatens the perceived group strength and lowers group identification and the benefits that come from such (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1970; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). This indicates that the expectation to adhere to traditional Christianity has lessened, which is discussed further in the next subtheme.

Traditional Familial Influence and Conflict

Following from the religious leader subthemes, the influence of one's personal religion was shown to stem from a level of learning from one's immediate environment. Participants communicated a generational bias towards seeing the youth as reckless or seeing the traditional, older beliefs as stale:

> *"…you have a friend who believes in the old system of Church, where you see a Preacher just preaching no miracles and performing what, what what that type of thing" (Participant 7)*

> *"Ooh yes. You know for example when I am talking about the youth, when they are in this country, most of them believe that they are just Christians but somewhere somehow they just believe that somebody will give them the blessing not God. Maybe you might notice or notice, most of the youth they believe in going to other countries to seek for whatever they need." (Participant 8)*

Participant 7 explains that the older generations perpetuate a sense of authoritarianism and traditionalism as religious leaders, which create a sense of being an outsider looking in as a passive youth. This participant also alludes to the expectation of more lively events (like miracles and performing) in religious worship than are practiced in the older generation. Participant 8 provides a contrasting view by explaining how the Diepsloot youth are use wrongful, impatient methods to practice religion by adhering to "quick" and impulsive acts that can involve someone giving them a blessing but not God, even though they may believe it to be. This shows a level of disconnection coming from a generational difference in religious practice.

These quotes illustrate a sense of disconnection and judgment based on generational differences; however, familial systems were also shown as having generational differences towards the views of traditional Christianity. This would be sensical in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), as there are direct learning opportunities that all would go through in different periods of time (the chronosystem) within the microsystem (i.e., parents), mesosystem (i.e., interactions amongst immediate family members) and exosystem (i.e., youth leaders and elders from the church). Given the vast change in secularisation and the emergence of more modernised thinking, it would make sense that there are different opinions towards church behaviours across different generations (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Rambo & Haar Farris, 2012).

More importantly, familial influence, which is an immediate influential social structure impacting one's development in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), was shown as an essential vessel for tensions within one's decision to behave in certain ways within the community. Many of the participants spoke of being within the church based on their family's influence; this was either in the past or currently occurring:

"I was born in the religion so, I know a lot of things about Islam I live Islam" (Participant 11)

"She [mother] was a we call it a… I don't know how to put it in English… Evangelical Church" (Participant 4)

"My mom is also in Church, the whole family we are in Church there is no one that doesn't know about God we are one united in [ZCC] Church" (Participant 12)

"No, during that time when you are growing up you see other people going to Church and the parents going to Church so you adapt that thing" (Participant 5)

"Ya, it came from my family but during my time when I was young I used to go to the Church that plays the organs and everything" (Participant 8)

"Religion comes from your family, when you grow up you grow up knowing too well it is how you change yourself when you grow." (Participant 9)

"If I tell my mother that I am going to school my mother say let's pray first. So, if I am going to school, I am praying first. So, I see even school if my mother is praying before going, I see things going right. So, I believe God." (Participant 3)

"…my grandfather was a priest, so on a Saturday we would all go to Church – that is how it is done and that is how it was until we grew up and decided…" (Participant 2)

These quotes do ascertain that the familial system has an impact towards one's feeling of safety, security, and interpersonal acceptance within a community, such as the family but also spanning towards the church community. The participants' accounts ascertain that their phenomenological experience around family influences their initial church group, as they still attend or did attend the same church their families were from. Some of these participants still attended the same church denomination or religion (Participant 11, 4, and 12) and some had left their past denomination based on their interests (the other participants). Based on this decision, there could be a myriad of factors implicated in these choices that relate to the participant's specific family or the participant's specific characteristics.

One important feature that came up was when the participants decided to leave that religion and church and move away from their family's chosen religious groups. There were many negative consequential factors towards this decision as shown by their descriptions of family conflict:

"She [mother] is a Christian and when it comes to this thing [African traditional healing] we clash […] I cannot perform my own duties we had a huge fight. She said you are old now you can pack your bags […] I was not free I couldn't do anything." (Participant 9)

"Ya, it came from my family but during my time when I was young I used to go to the Church that plays the organs […] I did not tell them I am leaving this Church I am going there [ZCC]…. It was not because of my parents" (Participant 8)

"My mother would be like how come you grew up in the Church but you don't like the Church. I said because I sit there and all these men they talk and talk […] I don't see why I have to go to my Grandfathers Church." (Participant 2)

"Ya, so we grew up in that system it is generation after generation we belong to that same thing and we cannot allow anybody to criticize or make us think otherwise" (Participant 7)

These quotes show the reasoning of leaving; they involve the participants not resonating with their family's church or belief as well as their need to seek another church (Participant 8). Participant 8 avoided telling his family when seeking out the ZCC church as he felt that "they will complain". This suggests an avoidance of potential conflict that many emerge in relation to religious differences within the family. The common thread for the participants is that the consequence of staying in a religious group they did not resonate with was worse than the choice to leave.

When considering attachment theory, the caregiver attachment figures have a lot of influence over the decisions a developing child makes towards straying away or embracing their attachment to God (Cherniak et al., 2021). This is because one's experiences of their parents can either be safe and secured (correspondence) or insecure (compensation), leading towards the pursuit of God as an attachment figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2014). However, when one does not come closer to God, this does put the correspondence and compensation model (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2014) in question, as it does not answer for when people still decided to move away from God, and not just religion. One must therefore view the ecological and social determinants of behaviour. When considering the ecological levels

associated with influence as described above in this subtheme, there are more influential factors other than parental influence that determine one's psychological disposition (Botero et al., 2014).

SIT would indicate that due to these participants developing their beliefs and affiliations over time, this also points to the role of the larger chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) in a person's religious development. The participants' expected norms, needs and evolutionary drives may differ in their context when compared to their family's generational context, especially when secularisation is occurring and progressing over time (Zuckerman & Shook, 2017). This would lead these participants to seek a group with differentiated norms that could allow for them to maintain and uphold a relevant self-image (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). An example is the study from Minwalla et al. (2005), where LGBTQ Muslim participants felt that having a certain sexual orientation did not deem them as sinning, which contrasts with their older family members. For instance, one participant stated that the Qur'an did not show a line about homosexuality, and yet their parents enforced this narrative that it was wrong for him to be homosexual (Minwalla et al., 2005). This study's participants did not necessarily leave or change their pre-determined religion to defy one's family or not be around family. Participant 8 simply wanted to become part of the ZCC church, and yet felt he had to keep it secret due to the fear of their reactions. Therefore, using SIT, the norms the participants wished for in their needed group simply differed from their parents'; whether this caused the following or unfollowing of their attachment to God, this is what they personally wanted to pursue.

Theme 3: Discrimination based on different Beliefs

The *Discrimination based on different Beliefs* theme is the third theme of this chapter. Considering Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1992) ecological systems theory, this section covers even more systemic levels; these would be the microsystem level (i.e., friends), mesosystem (interactions amongst immediate figures), exosystem level (church), with a special and heightened focus on the macrosystem (cultural elements).

Considering the former themes towards more personal and interpersonal aspects of religion in forming SIT aspects of social categorisation (categorising people to understand norms in one's group), this theme embodies a furthering of such in looking more at social identification (adapting identity of group as a member) and social comparison (comparing one's in-group with other out-groups) (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Due to this process in SIT, there are more convergences of opinions and group thinking processes; this is due to how groupthink and discrimination becomes more apparent in this process (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). When religion is more personal as shown in the first theme, perspectives vary amongst the participants of the same religions and even denominations at times. Group behaviour on the macrosystem differs, as more broad aspects of culture group individuals together (Botero et al., 2014). This section will look at groups in more depth, but this is not intended to generalise participants; this is rather to understand the mechanism behind group behaviour and how it may sway individuals in their decision making and beliefs. Discrimination is a key construct of this study, as it depicts an in-group and out-group application towards how judgments are made about the "other".

Friends and Discrimination

The aspect of friendship has many social benefits towards one's survivability within a group context, and it would feature as an important aspect in the case of religious groups too. Friendship promotes group cohesiveness and strengthens one's feelings of belonging not just within a group, but more importantly towards one's building of their own self-identity (Hogg et al., 2004). In a study on stress in Norwegian heart surgery patients, Haslam et al. (2005) showed that identification with family and friends indicated a lowering of stress, stress being mediated by social support, as well as social identification having a positive association to social support. This supports the way residents in an adverse community such as Diepsloot (Mahajan, 2014) can alleviate stress through the right social channels (i.e., friends).

The Choosing of Friends

Interestingly, there was some aversion shown to making friends in Diepsloot; this was shown by Participant 6 and 3, as they stated that they generally preferred not interacting with friends due to a mistrust of being used by them and being asked for money when they did not have any money to give. Despite this, there was an established pattern; participants with stronger links to churches often had friendships only with members of one's religion or denomination group:

> *" I talk nicely to them [Muslims]… they are just not my friends" (Participant 6)*

> *"On my part it [friend's beliefs] is not conflicting with each other, maybe I am just fortunate because we might differ with the congregations but we are the same we understand each other. Whoever is saying whatever we are fortunate that we do agree with each other. So there is no problem with that." (Participant 8)*

> *"I have friends… They are going other [Christian] denominations" (Participant 10)*

The reason as to why the connection with friendship and religion stood out in these quotes was because the participants either explicitly or implicitly stated that their group of friends were from the same religion, all of which are Christian. Although Participant 6, Participant 8, and Participant 10 indicated their inclination towards having friends that were Christian, Participant 12 also indicated that her friends came from "another Church"; This does suggest some favouring of friends that attend a Christian church, and not differing religions.

All the participants were closely linked towards their church groups, which indicated that the Church was a place in which friendships did form from. In a deeper sense, it seemed to be a preference for friends in Diepsloot to have similar belief systems too; this does therefore cause a bias and perhaps an implicit discrimination towards people with different belief systems. As shown by Participant 6 (ZCC), she "talk[s] to them nicely", "them" being Muslims, but was not friends with them. The same civility is shown by Participant 8 (ZCC), who felts it was simply more convenient for him for people from the same "congregations" to form his friend groups. Participant 10 was a non-denominational believer, and he did

state that his friends come from different denominations; these denominations can reasonably be assumed to only be Christian beliefs due to the “denomination” term.

The participants above showed an interesting bias with the link being their closeness towards their church. However, there is a different pattern shown for participants that were not fully committed to their faith, or were part of a less popularised faith in Diepsloot:

> *“I don’t have friends I only have one best friend but she does drinking and going out… Yes, we do have friends but they don’t do the same things” (Participant 9)*
>
> *“My current friends don’t believe… they do Cultural things… they feel hopeless, they don’t have hope in religion” (Participant 4)*
>
> *“For my friends they just think of it as I don’t know like a hobby or something like that. Because they would be like I believe in God, God is there. Some say no God is not there, they don’t believe they don’t focus on any of those religion stuff” (Participant 11)*

Participant 9 followed the ZCC church as her family member was a pastor there, and yet she was also an African traditional healer. Participant 4 was highly involved in her Evangelical church group and yet as shown in Theme 1, she “does not don’t know what to believe or what to believe anymore”, which does indicate some doubt towards her religious beliefs. Participant 11 was heavily involved in his Muslim faith and regularly attended Mosque, and yet he was different in the fact that he was not part of the popular Christian religions within the township. Therefore, the pattern that seemed to link these individual exceptions was towards their detachment or disidentification from the more popularised traditional, Christian church. This contrasted with Participant 6, 8 and 10 who had strong friendships and did not question their faith within their church.

Other participants, who were not involved in the church, understandably showed a wide range of friends from different belief systems, as shown by the following examples:

> *“I have got a diverse kind of friends, like I said in Malawi you belong to different tribes and different beliefs” (Participant 7)*

"I can interact with anybody, some of my friends are very religious and some are atheists" (Participant 2)

Less religious participants all showed an acceptance towards people with different belief systems. This did indicate that the less socially involved one was in their religious group, the more opportunity there was to interact with different people with different religions. Based on these findings, it seemed that friendships were enhanced by the amount of cohesiveness within a social group, such as a religious commonality. Since the Christian presence in Diepsloot is so high (Mashabela, 2017), it may be understandably used as a tool to create social currency for the followers of the more popular groups; this ripples into groupings that have a hierarchy of sorts.

When applying SIT, this does correspond with the hypothesis of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2001), due to the initial social categorisation stage of finding and associating with the norms that one wants to associate with (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). These social norms would entail being Christian and being part of the more powerful ZCC denomination for reasons such as familial association, or social currency and power. The second stage of SIT would involve social identification, which is adapting and corresponding with the identity of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). This would involve finding friends that have the same religious norms, such as the case with several of the participants of this study. Lastly, social comparison would occur when comparing oneself to others (Tajfel & Turner, 2001); this is the stage that happens next as explained.

Friends that do not Understand Religion will Judge One's Beliefs

In terms of friends who did not understand or respect one's beliefs, this was a regular occurrence felt by many of the participants for a myriad of reasons:

"For my [Christian] friends they just think of it as I don't know like a hobby or something like that [believing in Muslim faith]…Some say no God is not there, they don't believe they don't focus on any of those religion stuff." (Participant 11)

"They are going other denominations, they are saying my religion is too hard for them, so… Ya it is open, they are afraid of public confessions." (Participant 10)

"[describing friends] Ya, but according to me ne people are judgmental… Too judgmental just because they don't believe in it" (Participant 9)

"Yes they would because like I told you they would feel that religious people are inflicting their beliefs onto them trying to change them to believe in something that they don't believe in… between friends and family members" (Participant 2)

Yes definitely, I eat pork my friend doesn't so it's like our friendship is compromised […] I have seen cases where in some instances people have been beaten or killed just because you are thinking in a different way…" (Participant 7)

"Ya, these guys that are not church attendant but they don't know inside of my heart and my belief" (Participant 1)

"No they [friends] are not, they are talking like I don't like ZCC because I don't like this and this I like my Church I will never go to the other Church, its like that… I don't argue with them because they don't know my Church and I don't know there Church" (Participant 12)

These participants' accounts are varied but all link under the point that they do regularly feel judged by their friends. This is essential towards the phenomenon of religious experience, but Diepsloot and the environment of religious diversity may also play a part in this, as there are many differing cultures and religions shown considering the size of the township (Mahajan, 2014), as well as the overpopulation shown in *Figure 2*. As shown in the personal aspects of religion and the communal aspects of religion in Diepsloot, it is fair to state that there is a sense of "othering", even amongst friends within the same denominations; this occurred when they were judged based on how they worshipped their God. For instance, Participant 1 stated that members of his denomination judge how he only prays and reads the bible, but he feels this is enough. These judgments within the same denominations were often therefore made based on the participant's behaviours towards worship and practicing one's faith. Many of the participants stated that there were instances where their friends did not "know" fully where they were coming from (Participant 11, 12 and 1), yet judgment still occurred. A lack of understanding seemed to be the catalyst for judgment.

Friendships can provide supportive structures that allow one to become strengthened in their mesosystem (Haslam et al., 2005). Unfortunately, there is strain in this regard, exacerbated by the impoverished context of Diepsloot. In this subtheme, there was a common occurrence of in-group and out-group behaviour, mostly due to the comparing and judging of others based on group norms. This occurred by outwardly judging an out-group based on their differences, which is the third SIT process called social comparison (comparing one group to another to maintain one's self esteem) (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Another way this occurred was by judging one's own in-group religious behaviours (i.e., not going to church as a member of the denomination) in order to align the norms to the desired outcome for the membership to be uplifted. These SIT processes are therefore relevant and imperative to consider.

Discriminating One's Personal Characteristics Instead of Religion

Friends did seem to show judgment towards the participants in this study; however, the issue here also seemed to exist towards the way participants equally and contradictorily judged others too, including friends in and out of the same church groups:

> *"…when I enter like it was my first time he first thing is look at the candles they were black and red… eish he is also like an albino you know the bad people that have got this mentality of albinos they use them and stuff, so like I don't even feel comfortable with this person, grabbed my child and ran back to the house…" (Participant 9)*
>
> *"Yes Roman Catholic I am sorry I just feel…. it's a bit too strict […] I don't have any friends that are Catholic, I try stay away from conflict" (Participant 2)*
>
> *"They got Methodists, Roman, but even now, those people they pray every day and night they attending Church I am not for that as maybe because of church attendance, they attend but don't have that belief" (Participant 1)*
>
> *"No because I cannot believe someone to tell me, this bone said you must do this and this. If this man is passed away that means my life is going to be destructed" (Participant 1)*

> *"You see, sometimes in marriage affairs you can't just divorce cos the people of the Church will come and try and talk you into staying in the marriage. You see, you are being abused you cannot just leave because you are following a certain religion." (Participant 7)*

> *"We are still praying, corruption through religion. Most of the people that are praying are not really praying they just using religion for their own benefit." (Participant 4)*

> *"Since now it's Covid they don't usually go but before I used to see them, you see them walking down the street and you can see now something in the mind is not right like maybe they are doing something to them." (Participant 11)*

These quotes highlighted some judgment towards the way others practiced religion, whether it is based on behaviours, the way one looked, following African traditional healing (Participant 1) or being wronged through religious corruption (Participant 2 and Participant 4). Some of these judgments were directly affected by monetary corruption in the church which is understandable given how they had been adversely affected by other's actions.

Based on SIT, people are biased due to their expected norms, backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs when seeing other ways of behaving (Paloutzian & Park, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Bègue (2001) explains the judgment of others as an often occurring "black sheep" phenomenon, using Catholics as an example, where there is judgment towards people that do not practice or follow through with the same values and norms that another person or group has. The "halo effect" also occurs through viewing others as dichotomies of positive or negative based on only one trait. An example is how Participant 9 clearly was fearful and biased towards Albinos and sees "Albino mentality" as a definitive construct; however, being Albino is simply a predisposed skin pigmentation, and yet based on that one characteristic they are untrustworthy to her. This is a personally and socially influenced perception of difference, unrelated to their actual character.

The point is that these judgments about others are not always based on a shared religious belief or ethos; they are at times towards specific overt differences, behaviours, and non-religious traits, and influenced by personal and social prejudices, that are looked on through the halo effect. This is pertinent to

mention as the conversational topic in these interviews was around the phenomenon of religion, and yet personal characteristics were at times focused on. Therefore, an essential aspect to this study is that the discriminatory act was more related to personal and social prejudice than their religion on its own.

What was more surprising to this study was that personal judgment featured more prominently for participants that comes from a less strict religious position; these are the participants that practice dual religion (Participant 9) and are commonly open to exploring different beliefs (Participant 2 and Participant 1). Previous research has predicted that less religious or non-religious individuals are more analytical, assertive, and expressive (Zuckerman et al., 2013). This could explain why they often communicated their general dislike towards the church that they came from or the religion or denominations they felt were oppressive in Diepsloot, and why there was less judgment from participants that were more commonly adherent and strict towards their belief.

Ironically, Participant 10 (non-denominational) who showed harsh and strict judgment in the first theme towards the condemnation of non-believers in his denomination did not directly discriminate or cast judgment towards others and friends in terms of their personal behaviours or characteristics.

> *"I would feel like to them everything is fine and they are some who want salvation more and they are like to me now, they don't know where they are – this is not part of God's plan. So what they are doing is fine since they find it that way or they believe it firstly so they can be more in religion or looking for salvation from that denomination they can be pure." (Participant 10)*

> *"Ya, they are not on God's plan but they don't know so like it is not their problem" (Participant 10)*

Participant 10 explained that you would not be saved if you were part of Christianity Christian denomination, and yet he did not express judgment towards anyone's personal characteristics. Although Participant 10 had strong beliefs in the condemnation of non-followers of their religions, it was not discrimination towards personal characteristics, but only their beliefs. These aspects and differentiations in

discrimination impact the way judgment towards personal characteristics occurred in the community. For Participant 10, the discriminatory act comes from judging one's personal characteristics because of their religious affiliation. As mentioned, the harsher discriminatory biases surprisingly occurred more for the open-ended believers that were not strictly adherent towards their church groups.

In terms of the existing literature, this phenomenon of judgment was not found to be existent within many of qualitative studies that used SIT. Emphasis in these empirical studies, as well as this study, were placed on giving the participant a full respectable narrative of their feeling of being judged by others. However, for every member of an in-group, there is an out-group. Stereotyping and prejudice occur from both sides when one searches for coherence and an elevated self-esteem as a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). In a study by Lips-Wiersma and Mills (2002) who studied diversity in the workplace through SIT, there was an established finding indicating that people often tended to relate, coincide, and accept others if their personal values were aligned. In fact, Lips-Wiersma and Mills (2002) even stated that "personal vulnerability is magnified for those who perceive themselves to be spiritually different to the majority or norm" (p. 200). Vulnerability and a fear of discrimination therefore seems to perpetuate discrimination towards others, as the participants of this study that judged personal characteristics did not have an established, adherent religious group that they felt part of.

Religion being used to Justify Xenophobia

When considering the phenomenon of religion, xenophobia came up as a relevant subtheme towards using religion for xenophobic discrimination. Xenophobia is a form of racism that causes the defining of groups through social categories (a form of SIT); these groups are based on phenotypical determinants such as skin colour (Sanchez-Mazas & Licata, 2015). Phenotypical determinants are only how one identifies a victim of xenophobia; victims of xenophobia are also treated as strangers and minoritised due to the way they are viewed as uncommon and threatening towards people that are more accustomed to the context presented (Sanchez-Mazas & Licata, 2015). A xenophobic occurrence is found

in studies to cause more extreme outcomes as one knows they are personally being discriminated against when experiencing it (Garcia-Rios et al., 2019).

Xenophobia within the experiences of the participants, the context of Diepsloot and its diversity would likely have some bearing on the way in which foreign members of the Diepsloot community were seen. My study deeply infiltrated this, as Participant 10, 3 and 5 were from Zimbabwe, Participant 7 was from Malawi, with the other participants being South African. Diepsloot is probably one of the most diverse South African townships based on the percentage rates of economic migrants that come from African countries (Mahajan, 2014). This is therefore a common location for xenophobia, and there are often occurrences reported with vigilantes and mob killings directed towards economic migrants, such as Zimbabweans (Gilili, 2022; Mohamed, 2022). Stating this, it was expected that participants from countries outside South Africa would have said the most about xenophobia. However, only the South African participants spoke of experiences with foreign members of Diepsloot.

> *"Sometimes it [fighting] involves that because if I could ask you what is religion like if you could just, the way they do it now is just because I am a Pakistani I have to look at you in a particular way because mostly Pakistani's, like Zimbabweans you know culturally ahh there is no connection […]Ya foreigners ha shame." (Participant 9)*

> *"…Maybe you go to Malawi for example and you say no I want to get rich, they are giving you what they are giving you I don't even know so that you must get rich[…] they [South Africans] just fly to other countries to ask for people who can help them, others especially the Africans we believe that there are some people it might be secret maybe but it is what the African people knows, they can go to other countries and seek for 'injanga' and say no you know what I want to be rich so how might I do that." (Participant 8)*

> *"They the only people I hate, I hate only the people that come from Zimbabwe because they are naughty… that people is naughty […] yes their families come from Zimbabwe" (Participant 6)*

These quotes clearly illustrated xenophobia towards foreign nationals, as they have grouped their phenotypical determinants (identifiers such as place of origin) with biased interpretations of their behaviour.

It is interesting that economic migrants not from South Africa did not share many xenophobic experiences; only Participant 7, who was from Malawi and very open and expressive, shared his experience:

> *"Yes mostly South Africans they believe we are inferior so it presses on a disadvantaged place because we are not that open and we fail to associate sometimes because I don't have a say, I can't say anything. You feel like an alien sometimes."*

Participant 7's statement did match the above feeling of alienation and othering that occurs in xenophobia (Sanchez-Mazas & Licata, 2015). As shown, there was a negative connotation towards foreign nationals in these quotes. Participant 9 explained that there is "no connection" when involving people of diverse origin, and this was a reason for fighting, and verbally placed them as being on the "outside". Participant 8 also explained that many sought fortunes by attempting to try quick methods from other African countries and saw this as the wrong method. Participant 6 used the word "hate" to describe the "naughty" Zimbabweans that perpetuated violence in Diepsloot. She grouped the country of origin in a negative light and separated them from Malawians and Mozambiquans.

These quotes did speak towards an othering of non-South Africans in a general sense, but there was an assimilation of this with religion and church groups as well:

> *"…a Church which I know from Malawi it's called CPS – Central Presbyterian what what what… now these people belong to two if not three different synagogues so living in Diepsloot for them workers one who becomes a problem because they say no I belong to that Synagogue and you belong to that Synagogue how come we are not together? They end up splitting having more branches, more Churches but under one name. So I have seen that thing." (Participant 7)*

The foreign national participant quotes describing xenophobia were only from Participant 7. Participant 7 was the only one that explicitly mentioned their experience of discrimination based off being forced by Diepsloot to join one path based on his origin of birth. There is little spoken from the viewpoint of foreign nationals in general, as mentioned above as well. Culturally, Participant 7, Participant 3 and 5 were Ndebele, and Participant 10 did not disclose or engage in his ethnic differentiation from South Africans in

Diepsloot. This is an interesting finding for cultural and religious aspects in being a foreigner, as it seemed power had a part to play in discrimination and some used religion to discriminate against a group based on xenophobia. As Participant 7 explained, there was a need for separation amongst Christian denominations, and it seemed to perpetually become that way through country of origin in this case as well. Other than Participant 10 who was staunchly non-denominational, the other foreign national participants were less religious and although attended church, they were not connected towards any stable, singular church community. Based off the prejudice from some South African participants who come from the ZCC church (Participant 9, 8 and 6), the power one had in their social group and the tethering to such a group seemed to create further bias in these participants. They may have felt more power due to the higher social currency of having a supportive church structure that they strictly adhered to. Of course, there were exceptions, such as Participant 12, who is ZCC. However, given the fact that the analysis only found xenophobic quotes from members of this group, it does suggest the expression of power relations as ZCC was the most popular and powerful church within Diepsloot.

With SIT in mind, this process of xenophobia occurs based off the need to categorise social groups to retain one's power (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). This leads to stereotyping behaviours as one searches for coherence and an elevated self-esteem as a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). The ZCC South African participants that did have xenophobic remarks came from more empowered positions, because ZCC is the most powerful church in Diepsloot (Mashabela, 2017). Being South African and part of ZCC seemed to have caused a drive to protect this group image.

When considering existing studies that have used SIT, there are some studies that explained xenophobic actions with religiosity in mind. In Cao's (2010) study of Christians in Wenzhou, China, Christian rural immigrants also faced prejudice through the religious community. This occurred through the Chinese natives often questioning their faith, while holding the immigrants in subordinate roles within respective churches despite the need for immigrants to be further involved. It was therefore found that

religious involvement did not help in any economic or social sense for these migrants (Cao, 2010). These findings do correspond with this Diepsloot study, as it seems to form a reason for why many of these foreign national participants were without a strong religious group that is popular in Diepsloot. Of course, there would be exceptions to this reason, but it still does provide a possible reason.

Interestingly, Peek's (2005) study on Muslims after living in the US after 9/11 showed that they held even more onto their religious social identity, based on the need for a collective association amongst each Muslim in America. Although this study's participants mostly disclosed their culture and religious affiliation, there has not been many mentions at all of them emerging as a collective group based on their country of origin or Ndebele culture. This shows a sense of helplessness amongst these migrants, as they may not have had the resources or strength in numbers to assimilate and become a stronger in-group that to alleviate attacks on self-esteem. These quotes asserted that xenophobia was common within Diepsloot and given its very diverse context with many differing cultures and beliefs, as well as the lower socio-economic status of those who live in Diepsloot, it seems to elevate in this context through discrimination. The accounts show that religion was used here to often justify a xenophobia difference between foreign nationals and South Africans, which does implicate a case where religion is used to justify and discriminate other individuals that do not practice or follow the belief that South Africans popularly follow. However, it equally seems that foreign nationals are socially pushed out of more popularised religions implicitly. Evidence is how all the foreign national participants were not part of any popular church groups or denominations and felt that they do not feel welcome by the more popularised groups that have more social currency, such as South Africans or the ZCC church group.

Consequences of leaving are being Lost and Mistrusted

Notably, the consequences of leaving one's religion seemed to have a price in the context of Diepsloot; however, this varied based religious belief. The consequences of leaving one's church group included some form of backlash from the members of that in-group:

> *"Um, like they didn't understand, they will think that maybe you have taken the wrong way according to them. They are having many pressures, like why were you preaching us so you mean all this time you were lying? So now we just leave it, they just leave it like that. So we have a problem with the community…" (Participant 10)*

> *"I went through all the consequences by just leaving the Church… My mother, my friends being against me, the whole lot… I left… The immorality and the way things were pushed onto me, the responsibilities I couldn't" (Participant 2)*

> *"So when I leave that Church they just saw that that person is not coming at all, I was scared that if I am going to ZCC without telling them or they can see me going there they will do what, they will complain" (Participant 8)*

These quotes indicated the fear and adverse consequences of leaving one's previous church. Participant 10 left to join a Non-Denominational Christian religious group, and he said the group received backlash due to the act of recruiting others from denominational churches. Participant 2 left her Apostolic church due to the corruption from her pastor, and the consequences led to judgment not just from the church and friends, but her mother too. Participant 8 feared judgment from his previous church group that his family was from, as people were questioning his actions as he was secretly going to ZCC without them knowing. Based on these quotes, there were some aspects of not being able to freely leave one's church without negative consequences. This had noticeable effects towards family, friends, and other supportive structures, and may have been a reason for why one became outcasted or decided to stay in a church group contrary to their wishes.

When considering SIT, a member of an in-group has a few options to gain more self-esteem and a feeling of belonging; one of these options include physically or psychologically leaving the group (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). This may be due to the member being of a higher status or a lower status. The commonality is that the person would seek another group for their expected norms and values to coincide if their in-group could not provide this. People with lower self-esteem would therefore have less confidence in their actions and will often only psychologically leave the group (Trepte & Loy, 2017). SIT has a blind spot when

considering its theoretical use. It does not focus enough on the consequences of leaving a social group, and as a result, SIT studies also do not focus on this aspect either. It focuses only from the first person's perspective. In Diepsloot, these participants had a myriad of reasons for why they viewed the consequence of leaving a church as dire and worrisome; it is an impoverished community with little options for protection. As shown in Kushitor et al.'s (2018) study on trust and distress on Ghanaian participants, social spaces within these contexts can alleviate distress. With impoverished, disorderly communities riddled with crime, the lack of social support equally causes stress (Kushitor et al., 2018). This may be why these participants had immense fear towards the act or thought of leaving their community; one's social support or social currency is lowered.

Theme 4: Diepsloot Factors Contributing to the Disconnected Community

This theme is the last main theme of this chapter, and it ends directly and physically in the larger social context of the participants. Considering Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1992) ecological systems theory, this theme is placed on the outer boundaries of influence. Although it includes all the structural levels in some capacity, it focuses mostly on the exosystem (specific social structures that may impact microsystems for the developing person), the macrosystem (cultural aspects such as socio-economic class and ethnicity that impact one's beliefs and perceptions) and the chronosystem (systemic environmental changes occurring over a lifetime) (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1992).

Considering the former themes that were more oriented towards the SIT processes of social categorisation, identification, and comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 2001), this theme focuses more on how these processes ripple into continuous processes that create longer, societal, and systemic issues within communities and society. This therefore does not only change a groups social identity, but many groups based on a ripple effect, as is shown in the following themes below. Specifically, the functioning and contribution of the church is explored, and whether it plays a role in separation or cohesion within Diepsloot.

Disconnected Community due to Religious and Denominational Differences

Interestingly, when considering the discrimination in Diepsloot based on its many denominations, there was also a sense of overwhelm from some participants regarding their choice of church, based on the proximity of these churches and differing denominations (*Figure 4*). The proliferation of churches in Diepsloot is evident in Participant 3's quote below:

> *"Ya I didn't go to Church because I don't have a choice for now because Church is too much, so I don't know which Church" (Participant 3)*

Based on the overwhelmed response that many Diepsloot residents may experience when choosing a church group, there was additionally a sense of disconnection that many of the participants felt had occurred within their township. This involved an observation based on the macrosystem that they resided in:

> *"…Diepsloot, I would say it is a hope defined community[…] we are mostly low earners or middle class something like that, poverty there is abuse, rape, murders so we are psychologically affected. There is not that thing of oneness, whereby we can come together as a community and say can you stop please, can you think otherwise of these problems that we are facing, can we work together as people as a nation regardless of where we are coming from, religion or whatever it is we cannot be divided. So I think that is something that can make a change." (Participant 7)*

> *"Ya, but according to me ne people are judgmental… You guys go to schools and teach more people like teach the growing ones about religion so that when they grow up they wont be like us now, they will know exactly which direction to take and not be judgmental. I think less of crimes less of killing." (Participant 9)*

> *"But then they are still judging. I am not going to take you out of Christianity at all but then don't judge. It's good for you to live the way you are living and if it works for you then do it. If I do it the way I do it then I know it, don't judge me." (Participant 9)*

> *"Judging others, out of 10 religions 2 or 1 are the ones that are trying to shape people and read the Bible and know they are preaching the word of God, others they are just religions because they are gathering together, they are in fact they are not doing what God wants. So,*

sometimes it is really funny when you see some people especially on Sundays, people say they are going to worship not knowing why they are going to worship." (Participant 8)

"Ya, there are a lot of religions in Diepsloot so people get confused and say which one is correct, because people must follow one religion so we are one people so we must do one thing but there is a lot so people tend to get confused about what is going on. Never mind I will just do my thing." (Participant 11)

"[in the community] I just feel that sometimes Christians can be so discriminating that they can make you feel that you don't belong in this group, you don't belong in our club because you associate yourself with certain people or because you practice certain things like I don't mind burning incense sticks when I have got problems." (Participant 2)

"Because of fighting and that one likes this religion and that one likes that religion. Nobody will tell them that we can do one thing. That one says I don't like what what, this one says I like it." (Participant 12)

The participants' quotes variously illustrated the sense of disconnection that they experience when Diepsloot comes to mind. These reasons were commonly aligned with the idea of judgment. All of these participants, who differed on their religious affiliations, generally expressed that there was a sense of judgment, rejection, fighting and confusion towards different religious groupings. These groupings can create a personal interpretation of othering, as religious groups and groups in general are shown to direct behaviour and judge those that do not live by the standards, norms or values set by other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2001; Trepte & Loy, 2017). The power behind religious entities also played a role in shaping behaviour, as discussed in Theme 2, considering that the role of a religious leader was to challenge and project expected norms that benefitted the church community (Boyer et al., 2022).

The issue shown here is that although church communities and groupings might benefit from their in-groups, the participant explained that it is the interaction amongst these in-groups that perpetuate the circumstances that Diepsloot was commonly known for, which is high levels of violence, intergroup strife, murder, and many other issues (Mahajan, 2014) that break down the community, instead of strengthening it. Initially, it would be reasonable to expect that diversity of religion in Diepsloot would allow for religious

acceptance. However, based on the understanding of the participants, it seemed that some church groups stayed strong while others remained weak, and this seemed to come down to the sense of social identity, support and protection they offered. The participants, whether from more or less prominent religions in Diepsloot, clearly articulated much of the same issues within the community, that of being judged and the loss of cohesion regarding religious acceptance. Of course, the topic of the interview may have elicited these responses, as I was an outsider in this process; however, the interview process did hold an objective stance and ensured acceptance towards the participants' responses, whether it favoured or resisted religion.

Studies using SIT that supported or countered this finding of communal disconnect were scarce, as this is a broad finding that correlates with the more general components behind SIT, which are the aspects of in-group behaviour and out-group behaviour, as well as the process of social categorisation (categorising people to understand norms in one's group), social identification (adapting identity of group one as a member) and social comparison (comparing one's in-group with other out-groups) (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). As shown above in the Ghanaian study on stress and trust within third world settings (Kushitor et al., 2018), impoverished, disorderly communities riddled with crime and the lack of social support equally causes stress (Kushitor et al., 2018). This may be why these participants and residents from Diepsloot had a more disconnected community.

The finding of stress causing disconnect can also be supported by the religious and spiritual acceptance in the workplace study (Lips-Wiersma, 2002), which highlights that there are tensions and stressors between acceptance and self-expression, as one aims to achieve belonging and acceptance within a group while being able to be their authentic self. Lips-Wiersma (2002) also concluded that religious acceptance would require "appropriate intimacy" (Lips-Wiersma, 2002, p. 198), which entails the acceptance of the most intimate aspects of the self; these aspects are the psychological components of values, beliefs, and other internal processes. When considering this in the context of othering in a

community, the aspect of religion and spirituality corresponds with internal, intimate processes of one's belief system, and this vulnerability and risk of being rejected based on personal beliefs may therefore cause an increased risk of disconnect. This applies to the participants of this study and Diepsloot in general. The literature mentioned (Kushitor et al., 2018; Lips-Wiersma, 2002) therefore indicates that religious acceptance is a difficult area to action, as it has an intimate, vulnerable aspect that is required on both sides, and self-expression and authenticity can risk being outcasted by groups.

Money and Power's influence for Violence in Religious Differences

Violence in Diepsloot is an occurrence that appeared in many instances within the participnts' accounts, as well as the residents' lives (Mahajan, 2014). It is arguably the most violent township within South Africa, due to the murder rate, rape rate, inadequate education, and socio-economic bracket the Diepsloot residents find themselves in (Mahajan, 2014; Ngwenya, 2015). This could be due to a myriad of reasons as discussed above, such as the intense diversity that especially exists in the community, under conditions of severe adversity. The participants had many things to reflect on when it came to the unique phenomenon of religion and violence in Diepsloot. Numerous participants commented on the links between alcohol and violence:

> *"That is alcohol, money… Ya, there is always [violence]." (Participant 5)*
>
> *"Those people who are fighting are drunk … Ya, but if you have a sober mind you can't see any fighting it is 100% normal but when starting to apply something like alcohol the mind is not 100% and something is missing." (Participant 1)*
>
> *"I see maybe sometimes if people who… if people going somewhere if people drinking they fighting… fighting" (Participant 6)*

Interestingly, Participant 5, 1, and 6 attributed the violence in Diepsloot to drinking and money. Although the quotes did not directly involve religion in this conflict, they often explained that fighting was not due to the churches, but there was interpersonal, external violence due to the acts of monetary corruption

and drinking. This is not originating through religion, but conflict in Diepsloot was said to come from other needs.

Some participants reflected more directly on violence and conflict in the community in relation to the phenomenon of religion in Diepsloot. Some participants expressed general judgment towards religion as a whole and violence within the community:

> *"Yes they would because like I told you they would feel that religious people are inflicting their beliefs onto them trying to change them to believe in something that they don't believe in… People are very scared of being manipulated… No, like I said I try to keep away from fights… Yes, some of them [fights] are religious based." (Participant 2)*

> *"Because of fighting and that one likes this religion and that one likes that religion. Nobody will tell them that we can do one thing. That one says I don't like what what, this one says I like it." (Participant 12)*

In another light, some participants also shared insight towards specific churches and how violence is involved in such settings:

> *"You see that Church in the street, the other Church here that they wear all white… You see them? They always fighting there… No, like [fighting] themselves" (Participant 12)*

> *"They are fighting, most Nazarene and ZCC people are fighting why because the ZCC believe that there ancestors right, but Nazarene are against everything. They call the ancestors demonic… They are fighting against each other… You can't, this makes me think because all of us are praying God, the same God but at the end of the day it is the Christians that are fighting." (Participant 4)*

> *"So sometimes we first have difficulties, some people are fighting for their religions – like 'why are you saying this'? Who is that prophet, what is more important about him, (laugh). So you are serving the prophet, we are right in our denomination, so that we fears but some have good responses." (Participant 10)*

These different accounts indicated that violence is a prevalent component to life in Diepsloot, even when religion was in mind. Other participants speak more towards religion being the vessel at which

violence gets perpetuated through. Participant 2 explained that the violence occurred through the infliction of one's beliefs on another. Participant 12 explained that there was fighting amongst the same church groups and outer church groups. Participant 4 explained the direct tensions between the "Nazarene and ZCC people" due to the ideology of ancestors. Participant 10 explained that differing religious ideologies were the reason for conflict towards his own church group. It is imperative to view these explanations as equally valid as each may play a role in perpetuating violence in Diepsloot.

These reasons are contextualised specifically towards Diepsloot and are extremely varied. It is conclusive to note that these participants had differing, subjective takes on why religious conflict existed within their experiences. It is also vital to note that religious acceptance seems to become conflictual at the level of group behaviour, based on the way there is an acceptance and denial of certain behaviours from that church group that perpetuate peace and acceptance within an in-group, but othering and discrimination towards out-groups. Individuals have multiple, personal identities and are part of different groups (Tajfel, 1970), but as broader and larger groupings are looked at (i.e., one's religion), the othering increases.

When considering the chronosystem (systemic environmental changes occurring over a lifetime) (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1992), there were many broad circumstances that perpetuated similar understandings in Diepsloot and any other geographical area for that matter. However, the more intimate, personalised microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem likely explained these different understandings of conflict within Diepsloot; these immediate influential ecological structures in the ecological systems theory influence one's understandings very differently to another, and this is why these levels are integral towards understanding the mechanism behind more personalised thought that could be explained through attachment theory (Lun, 2015), and more group-based thought that could be explained by SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 2001).

Conclusion

This chapter presented the research findings gathered from analysing the transcripts of the participants that were interviewed in this study. From an analysis of the data using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), relevant themes and quotes from participants were presented to illustrate their subjective accounts. In addition, the discussion featured throughout this section, where theory and existing studies based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), SIT (Tajfel, 1970), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) or other relevant topics were used to discuss the findings of this research.

Four main themes were extracted from the data. Each of these was discussed, contextualised, and described with numerous subthemes under them. The first theme, called *The Personal Relationship with Religion and God*, discussed the personal and intimate relationship one has with their religion and God. The second theme, *Internal and Interpersonal Religious Conflict*, discussed personal conflicts one may have towards their belief and relationship with God on a personal and interpersonal level. The third theme, *Discrimination based on Different Beliefs*, discussed the interpersonal conflict and tensions involved with social identities when pertaining towards religion in their context. The fourth and last theme, *Diepsloot Factors Contributing to the Disconnected Community*, covered the environmental and interpersonal aspects of experiencing religions and other religions within Diepsloot. A detailed synopsis of these findings and a further overarching discussion of these themes is presented in the next Conclusion chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

This is the last chapter of this research report, and it provides an overview of the findings of this study in a summarised form. This involves the themes gathered from interviews with the 12 participants in Diepsloot, with a specific focus towards the initial research questions, which involve what role religion has within the Diepsloot community on a personal, interpersonal, and communal level. This chapter engages with these matters in the overview of the findings section. The strengths and contributions of this study are then discussed, alongside the limitations and recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Findings

This research looked at the role of religion within the community of Diepsloot on the personal, interpersonal, and communal level from the perspectives of residents with diverse religious beliefs and affiliations in the area. It must be mentioned again that 11 of these participants held Christian beliefs either in the past or currently, and one participant was Muslim; this therefore did impact the conclusions made. Based on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, 1974), this overview covered the findings in a bottom-up approach starting from the more immediate influences from the microsystem and mesosystem (interaction with and between immediate influences), the exosystem (social structures such as the church), and the macrosystem (cultural elements such as socio-economic status); the chronosystem encapsulates all of the environmental changes over one's life, and it therefore features in all of these levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Probine, 2022). The structure of this overview will be shaped from the three research questions of this study, which are 1) how members of the community personally experience religion, 2) how members of the community interpersonally experience religion, and 3) what role religion and religious experiences bring to the community.

The Personal Role of Religion in Diepsloot

On the microsystem and mesosystem levels of the participants' view of religion (theme 1), there was a unique, personal experience of religion that differed per participant. However, there were patterns that were identified. One of these patterns would be the way in which God was often described with a masculine pronoun ("He") and presence, which commonly matches the patriarchal, historical view of Christianity and its depiction of God (Hoover et al., 2015). More personally, God was often described by non-church attending participants as an essential, omnipotent, paternal figure, which did differ from participants that regularly went to church or mosque, as they often rather saw "religion" instead of "God" as a sexless entity encapsulating knowledge and guidance for one's existence. Empirical and theoretical literature involving attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2014) demonstrated that a healthy attachment towards God was when he was seen on a personal, parental level (Cherniak et al., 2021; Currier et al., 2021). This is contrasting to other studies demonstrating that one's attachment to God would be assumed as healthier with less dependence (Krause & Ironson, 2019); this view was shown with the participants that attended church more, as they saw God in a less parental way. The view that less dependency on God as being healthier has empirically been shown to not necessarily be true (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2014). Therefore, a key finding of this study was that the lack of church attendance did not necessarily suggest an insecure attachment towards one's God, as it did not involve the personal relationship one has with their God. This points to the separation of observing religious practices such as church attendance from the personal belief in and relationship with God among many participants in this study. It also indicated that church attendance does not necessarily indicate a stronger bond with God; it rather indicates a stronger bond with the church.

God was often identified as essential and guiding for most of these participants; this matched Ainsworth's (1970) conceptualisation of secure attachment figures being essential as a "safe haven" (fulfilling the need for feelings of love, support, and care from an attachment figure) and guiding as a "safe

base" (using that attachment figure as a form of safety, that allows the individual to explore life and surrounding environments). Quantitative studies often coded these two requirements separately (Currier et al., 2021; Kimball et al., 2013; Miner et al., 2017); however, this study indicated that there is rather a spectrum that exists between the essential (safe haven) and guiding (secure base) aspects of God. When considering hope and dread towards beliefs, it was found that believing in God and/or religion allowed participants to find meaning through suffering in the present, while using hope as a tool to look towards a positive future. This was confirmed as a common occurrence across many studies as a tool used in experiences of acute trauma for victims (Currier et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2019; Joung, 2006).

Stating the benefits of God and religion, participants' beliefs were also seen as a source of dread at times by participants, as they felt that their prayers were not answered enough. This caused a lessening of faith with an increase in hopelessness. It also pointed to the difficult and desperate circumstances that many residents found themselves in, as they struggled to meet their daily needs. Based on other studies (Zuckermann et al., 2013), it was also shown that the participants likely found other ways of regulating themselves, instead of solely relying on God as an attachment figure. SIT demonstrates that participants staying close towards their God and religion relates to safety and security, as a member of the group may not have a high enough self-esteem to leave and seek something different (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Other participants stayed in their religions while still feeling their prayers were not answered, others often used different modes of self-regulation or positive reframing to seek a more active stance in dealing with one's problems; this included most of the male participants going to work to earn an income instead of attending church. This interestingly occurred for participants with differing levels of loyalty and confidence in their faith. Considering the adversities of Diepsloot (Mahajan, 2014), this highlighted the desperate need for self-preservation and safety for the participants and was not deductively linked to any reason for having lessened faith, as a myriad of issues (i.e., finances, mental health, childhood) seem to impact one's faith.

When regarding behaviours towards worshipping the participant's God or religion, it was shown that Covid-19 may have impacted worshipping styles and practices. This is because as ZCC does incorporate dancing and singing (Mashabela, 2017), but this was not mentioned at all when asked how they worship. In fact, participants in this study only either 1) attended church, 2) read the bible, or 3) prayed to worship their God. Based on the traditional Christian presence and adverse circumstances of Dieploot (Misago, 2019; Nair & Govender, 2016), another possibility is that this may be the only methods introduced in worshipping one's God, due to the traditional presence within Diepsloot. Another traditional aspect was the opposition towards Satanism within the township. Plausibly, Satanism was shown to be disapproved of in Diepsloot, despite the high occurrence of these activities happening within Diepsloot as shown by external sources (Milan, 2015; Masuku, 2015). Participants were found to often link the words "satanic" or "satanism" with actions in the community that were seen as non-religious abiding or morally wrong to them; it must also be noted that some participants felt judged in this way (i.e., Participant 10) while others were judgmental to others (i.e., Participant 9).

From an interpretivist point of view, it was interesting when considering how much emotion and fear was expressed by these participants when speaking of satanism and linking it to evil, as it seemed there was a fear of doing things that may have been disapproved of by other community members within their social circles. These judgments were harsh and suggested a sense of othering and vilification of difference. It also indicated that the fear of not being accepted by one's community caused this, as not being accepted threatened their sense of safety and belonging in their beliefs. Using attachment theory and the use of a safe haven and secure base, as well as social learning as a key determinant of attachment (Ainsworth, 1970; Sandage, 2014), these harsh judgments are shown to threaten one's sense of security and safety, as it harbours negative attachments to God and causes a negative internal working model (Cherniak et al., 2021). In the context of the intense, adverse context of Diepsloot, the need for a secure attachment and protection from God may be even more desperately needed, which indicates a heightened sense of fear of not being protected by one's God.

The Interpersonal Factors Involved with Religion in Diepsloot

Considering the findings that occurred after the more personal relationship with God or religion, SIT was mostly focused on thereafter (theme 2), paying specific attention towards processes of social categorisation (categorising people to understand norms in one's group), social identification (adapting identity of group one as a member) and social comparison (comparing one's in-group with other out-groups) (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Considering the addition of the exosystem social structure in the ecological systems theory, which involves influence from social structures such as the church, religious leaders were a large part of this area of influence. Studies in general acknowledges the power that pastors and prophets hold (Boyer et al., 2022; Mashabela, 2017). This was no different for Diepsloot participants, as there was a sense of describing others as having been depersonalised due to the power and doctrine from the religious leader, shaping the norms for that particular church. Although not enough empirical studies were done on religious leaders in the context of SIT, the theory still furthered this explanation by explaining that social categorisation and depersonalisation occurs due to social norms (Hogg, 2001). Religious norms that pastors and prophets implement shape a group's belief system and allow to accept or deny certain attributes that would exclude or include members of the church (Boyer et al., 2022). The participants in this study highlighted the immense power of the pastor and prophet, and some were accepting of this while others were resistant to this power.

The aspect of the religious leader's power was also interrelated with a sense of mistrust and anger towards the corruption that had provably occurred within Diepsloot directly or indirectly towards the participants, which are vulnerable based on their socio-economic position. The participant accounts illustrated how there were struggles to pay towards the church which led to negative outcomes (i.e., not having a "dignified burial"), as well as monetary corruption that occurred through the misuse of funds paid by members of the church. Although empirical studies on this were low with SIT, the theory did provide a theoretical explanation for the religious corruption, as it related to the out-groups need for positive

distinctiveness and social comparison for self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Based on these needs, corruption permeates through organisations that spirals and creates a growth of systemic corruption as the need for power and competitiveness amongst organisations grow, thus causing the increased need for financial gain (Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). In this Diepsloot study, the church is not excluded from organisational corruption in the context of SIT, as shown from the participants' accounts of church corruption in Diepsloot.

Another instance of religious conflict interpersonally occurred through traditional African beliefs in contrast to traditional Christian beliefs. There is a definitive clash within South Africa showing tensions with Western vs African cosmological beliefs (Nwoye, 2015). The participants of Diepsloot had differing opinions towards this aspect, as some believed in African traditional healing along with Christianity, and some outright denied its usefulness and supported Christianity wholly instead. South Africa is unique based on how the African worldview often intersects with a Western worldview; this causes tension, due to the different way African cosmological meaning making is subjective, non-tangible and uses ancestral intermediaries while Western based Christianity is more objective and tangible in its approach to religion (Kaminer et al., 2018; Nwoye, 2015). This links to the debate on coloniality in South Africa, and how Western influence has changed the way African cultures function in different epistemological and ontological forms (Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). The instance of colonial influence was in unison to what the participants experienced, as they held many different, conflictual views towards tensions of Western based Christianity and/ African traditional healing.

Studies have shown how minority groups, such as Jewish members of the LGBTQ community (Sinclair & Milner, 2005), often hold onto a smaller minoritised groups causing more out-groups and a sense of othering (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). This seemingly occurred in Diepsloot, as the differing and norm-guiding confusion between African and Western beliefs creates more subgroups. Evidence is how some of these views of accepting or rejecting African or Western beliefs even differed amongst participants that

belonged to the same Christian denomination, which does indicate that there are multiple identities that occur personally, and not just their assigned church group. This corresponds with SIT, due to the way people are seen as having multiple groups that shape their identities (Tajfel, 1970); the participants' personal opinions on this African and Western clash may therefore differ based on the many social groups they are part of. Generally, it seemed religious leaders in Diepsloot hold the same principles that are flexible to a fault; an example is how a religious leader disallowed Participant 9 to attend the ZCC church due to her African traditional healer role, however, ZCC is supposed to accommodate such duality with African and Christian beliefs (Mashabela, 2017). This highlighted Bronfenbrenner's (1992) theory, as immediate support structures are more personally influential than outer social structures.

When it came to the opposition towards traditionalism and church attendance, this occurred on an interpersonal level through family and other outer interpersonal levels. There generally has been a conflictual link on whether one must be part of their community (traditional notion of attending church) or focus on the personal relationship with God (which is a form of secularisation theory) (Bruce, 2008). This has been shown in Diepsloot to transpire, due to the participants' accounts of increasingly becoming personally attached to one's God, while becoming more detached to the church associated with that God. SIT showed that group cohesion lowers when secularisation heightens (Ysseldyk et al., 2010), and this therefore lowers the strength of in-groups and group identity in the context of the church.

On a generational level, difference was also shown in younger participants and older participants; elders were often described by the participants as traditional and authoritative, and the youth were often described as reckless and wrong in religious practice and methods. On a familial level, many participants highlighted the strong familial influence that impacted their religious decision; some participants still attended their family's church group and others voluntarily drifted away from it. There was a myriad of factors found in why they chose to leave or stay at their family's church group. The correspondence or compensation model (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2014) falters when speaking of why some just opt to leave

certain religions that families had; instead, it was simply a difference in the norms that participants wanted to adhere by that made them leave or stay, and not necessarily their family structure or upbringing. SIT and ecological systems theory would indicate that as these participants develop over time, their expected cultural norms, needs and evolutionary drives to achieve a relevant self-image (Abrams & Hogg, 1988) may differ in their context when compared to their generation or family's context, especially when secularisation is occurring and progressing over time (Zuckerman & Shook, 2017). This helped to explain the difference between participants and their difference to their family and other generations.

The Communal Role Religion and Religious Experiences bring to Diepsloot

Moving into the more outer structural levels of ecological systems theory (theme three and four), such as the macrosystem (cultural aspects such as socio-economic class that are broad and impact many) and chronosystem (developments over a lifespan) (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), there was a vast amount of discrimination shown towards others based on differing beliefs. Group behaviour was focused on more in this section, as well as how behaviours can change and operate on this level in the context of religion.

Friendship and its connection to religion has been shown to feature as an important factor, due to the way it can enhance one's protection in adverse environments (Haslam et al., 2005). It can also harm someone, as friendship and discrimination were a topic of discussion for numerous participants. There was clearly some aversion towards making friends that were not part of a religious group, especially when the participant was part of a more powerful, popularised group in Diepsloot, such as ZCC. This suggests that religion plays an important social role for some in the community, as it is a way to gain social currency by being part of a more popularised church group, such as ZCC. Evidence is when Participant 8 (ZCC) felt it was simply more convenient for him to use his "congregations" to form his friendships. This was interesting, as participants who came from unpopular churches such as the non-denominational church (Participant 10), or from the Muslim faith (Participant 11), did not in fact judge others for their beliefs, despite the harshness and strict following Participant 10 had towards his religion. The less religious participants also

showed tolerance towards having friends in other religions, which was expected given the lack of cohesion they have to any particular church group. This bias did correspond with SIT, as social categorisation, social identification and social comparison form through choosing in-groups with norms that allow someone to elevate their self-esteem and safety in a social setting (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). When the norms and group membership allowed for increased social currency, such as being part of ZCC, it gives more reason for the participants to only associate with those in their respective group, due to the power and safety of the powerful in-group.

There was equally an occurrence of participants feeling judged by their friends, based on the idea that others do not understand their beliefs or ways of practicing their religion. This also occurred at times amongst members of the same associated denomination groups (i.e., being judged for not attending church as much as another member). Generally, a lack of understanding was a catalyst for judgment, due to the lack of understanding and the furthering of the third stage of SIT, social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). However, this social aspect of participants feeling judged was only one part of the bias; participants also shared their own biases towards friends in and outside of church groups. Some of these judgments were shown to exist through the halo effect, which occurred through dichotomously judging one trait as good or bad (Bègue, 2001). At times, judgments were not even regarding one's religion; sometimes, one's specific overt differences in characteristics were deemed as unreligious. What was more surprising was that the participants with less strict religious positions (i.e., using dual religion or explores different beliefs) (i.e., Participant 9) were more likely to judge others based on overt characteristics, and participants with stricter beliefs (i.e., Participant 10) and harsher judgments towards other non-followers of their religious group would only judge based on the religion itself, and not other characteristics. Using SIT studies, it was shown to support the idea that vulnerability and fear of discrimination in fact may cause further discrimination (Lips-Wiersma, 2002); this supports what occurred in this case, due to these more biased participants not having an established, strong belief in one protective group that may protect them.

The finding that people with less social currency had more religious acceptance for others outside of their church group followed through when considering the xenophobia subtheme. This is because foreigners often did not judge others as much when using religion but were oppositely judged harshly by ZCC members and others that were South African and part of popularised churches. Out of the five foreign national participants, only one spoke of being judged through xenophobia and othered. In addition to this, the foreign participants of this study were not part of any dominant religious group in the township, indicating a further sense of othering of foreign nationals. In general, these findings also indicate that when one is enmeshed within a popular religious in-group, the group is used to socially compare others as less worthy, based on the need for someone to uphold their self-esteem and social currency (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). In this case, the more powerful groups are South Africans, and they seemed to fit into more popularised religious groups, such as ZCC. If someone does not fit the social norm through the process of social categorisation and identification (Tajfel & Turner, 2001), they are discriminated against for aspects outside of reason. This is also part of the halo effect, due to the extreme xenophobic judgments made on factors such as phenotypical characteristics instead of their religious beliefs. This was also supported by another study that showed how rural immigrants in China were prejudiced through religious communities (Cao, 2010). The lack of voice of the foreign national participants in this issue indicated some helplessness; SIT furthered this by explaining that this lack of agency and power occurs through not being assimilated in stronger in-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2001).

Generally, SIT would explain that most of the bias, discrimination and judgment described above is due to the continuous strive for social acceptance, validation, and power, despite the awareness one may not have of their contradictory judgments (Trepte & Loy, 2017). The consequences of leaving for participants was equally a contradictory element, as one expects trust from the in-group yet seeks the relevant norms that allow their self-esteem to elevate and will leave a religious group to obtain such (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Often, the participants of this study did not plan to leave their in-group even if they were unhappy. As shown, healthy social spaces can alleviate distress in impoverished and disorderly

communities (Kushitor et al., 2018); this may be why these participants had immense fear towards the act or thought of leaving their religious in-group and being outcasted; one's social currency is lowered and the fear of being accepted in another group within an adverse context is heightened and riskier.

This study also investigated the larger, communal sphere of religion in Diepsloot (theme 4). When the participants discussed the general social context of religion in Diepsloot, there was a sense of overwhelm shown towards the many churches that exist in its context. This made the process of choosing a church group difficult, but it equally illustrates the sense of disconnect, due to the way there were an intense amount of church in-groups that created a personal interpretation of othering. When SIT was applied (Trepte & Loy, 2017), the disconnected community in religion was appropriate as a feature, as there are more norms developed through each church in-group that outcasts and pushes others from out-groups away. This therefore illuminated the dual effect religion has on the community of Diepsloot. This is because the issue shown throughout this study is that although church communities and groupings may benefit in their in-groups, it is the interaction amongst these in-groups that perpetuate the circumstances that Diepsloot is commonly known for, which is violence, intergroup strife, murders and many other issues (Mahajan, 2014) that seemingly break down the community more often than strengthening it. It would be understandable to attribute religious diversity to create peace within such a setting, however, it rather perpetuated a system where certain religious groups (i.e., ZCC) remained stronger with the members while others (i.e., non-denominational) remained weaker with the members. Using SIT, it was clear in how the mechanism of in-group and out-group behaviour caused this issue in Diepsloot. Studies showed how impoverished and more disordered communities create more stress (Kushitor et al., 2018), which does contribute to the disconnect. In another light, studies also found that religious acceptance requires a certain level of intimacy on both sides, due to how vulnerable it is to articulate and express psychological factors such as belief systems while equally being accepted for these belief systems (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). This indicated that religious acceptance was therefore a difficult area to action in Diepsloot, as it has intimate, vulnerable aspects that is required on both sides that risks being outcasted even further by social settings.

Generally, the participants articulated that money and power were often determinants for negative intergroup behaviours (i.e., violence) within Diepsloot when religion comes to mind. At times, less religious community members were described by participants as often unemployed, crime-orientated, violent, and alcoholics. Some linked the violence to the phenomenon of religion in Diepsloot, sometimes through specific church groups or through religion in general. These responses indicated that violence is generally a commonality in Diepsloot, whether or not religion is seen as a vessel in this aspect. Considering the exclusively religious aspects of violence, it seemed that religious acceptance does become conflictual at the level of group behaviour; using SIT, this is based on the denial of certain behaviours shaped through group norms for in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel, 1970).

Generally, there were many broad circumstances that perpetuated similar outcomes in Diepsloot when considering religion as a factor. The more personal aspects of behaviour and religion indicated more specific, different psychological aspects that the participants shared towards their understandings of their environments. However, as the group level expands and is seen on a larger contextual scale, it was found that religious discrimination increased with the increase of group cohesion and in-groups and out-groups. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) was used to explain the personal relationship these participants had with their God or religion, and SIT (Tajfel, 1970) was used to explain the aspects of intergroup behaviour that emerged, while using the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) to provide a contextual backdrop.

Strengths and Contributions to Knowledge

Firstly, the contribution of knowledge in South Africa towards intergroup behaviour is a strength in and of itself; more studies need to illuminate the struggles that South Africans experience, and there was almost no information given on the reasons for violence and despair in Diepsloot. Academically, knowledge production could aid in understanding reasons, and this study aimed to do so by giving a contextual understanding of the role religion plays in such a setting, to better understand the location.

Secondly, religion is such a prominent factor within disadvantaged communities; Diepsloot was no exception in this (see *Figure 4*), based on the powerful church presence differing in strength depending on the religion or Christian denomination. Based on the fact that there is a lack of research on PoR in general South African literature, this research found that people within disadvantages communities have a lot of reliance on hope and faith, which coincides with religion. By contributing to a gap in research involved in understanding PoR in a disadvantaged community, this study contributed to this area that needs furthering.

Thirdly, one key strength of this study that many studies seem to neglect is the power of diversity; the sampling of participants via geographic homogeneity (based on location) allowed for a diverse range of individuals to share their experiences of religious phenomena, something each of them have encountered in some way or another. This is a strength as it allows for the location of Diepsloot to be understood more deeply. As shown in the literature review, this was a significant gap in research based on impoverished settings, especially when considering attachment theory and SIT. This is because most religious studies on this were from population groups that experienced acute trauma (Currier et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2019; Joung, 2006); this study focused on a larger, impoverished setting that has consistently been impacted by long term trauma (Mahajan, 2014), and understanding religion's role in the long-term setting this adversity has existed for.

A fourth notable strength is that this study focused solely on this research from a qualitative stance; religion is an extremely subjective phenomenon, and this paper's literature review indicated a need for more of a qualitative presence in the PoR field. Noting this, the research fills a gap in the field, and allows for subjectivity to take pertinence and allows for future mixed methods and quantitative studies to build off from. This is more suitable than doing what PoR has often done the other way round with quantitative studies suggesting for further qualitative studies to add to its contribution.

Limitations

Considering the limitations of this study, they arose mostly throughout the process of the research itself, such as gathering theory and data. However, there was still value in pursuing these areas, despite the limitations. Firstly, there was not enough of a focus on parental involvement or impact in the participant interviews; this study utilised attachment theory, and it would have brought in further insight into the interplay of familial relationships and how that transforms in one's attachment to God.

Secondly, it must also be mentioned that 11 of these participants were from Christian backgrounds, which does represent much of the population of Diepsloot given the religions presence there but under-represents the way people outside of Christianity feel about their experience. The Muslim participant contributed greatly towards this study, and without him it would be even more unbalanced in this sense. However, it also points to the need for research on the different religions present in Diepsloot.

Thirdly, there was a limitation in the use of SIT, due to its lack of focus on the consequences of leaving a religious group, and as a result SIT studies do not focus enough on this aspect. The literature was also outdated for SIT and ecological systems theory. This study aimed to improve on such by bringing relevance to it contemporary application in South Africa; however, studies used to draw back on for religious experiences did not always consider pertinent aspects happening in contemporary society, such as the ever-increasing rise of secularisation in religion (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011).

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on township settings and the phenomenon of religion will help to further understand the underlying, systemic issues that perpetuate the similar oppressive cycles to oppressed members of society. With a more inductive, qualitative stance on this phenomenon, it can be furthered in the South African context, as the quantitative paradigm of studying religion in PoR is highly Westernised, and often adapted from research from the West. South Africa is unique in experience, and more research

that aims to uncover subjective, phenomenological aspects of their experiences can add to understanding and benefit this country over time. This understanding can also contribute to the development of community intervention programmes can be shaped and moulded based on what is uncovered within these contexts.

Final Comment

The enrichment I have gained from this research is more than I could have ever hoped for. The level of vulnerability and trust the participants had towards me in these interviews is something I will always value and remember. Above and beyond my development, I hope this study gives a voice to the voiceless and can contribute to knowledge. I equally hope that the psychology of religion is a field that can grow, and not be ignored based on its controversial nature within psychology. What is to be ignored is to be neglected, and a key part of social growth, development and experience cannot be neglected.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Brenton Stephen Thornton, and I am a Master's student in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am studying religion and religious experience in the community of Diepsloot. The aim of this research is to understand what religion brings towards the residents of Diepsloot. This study does not aim to view religion in a good or bad way, but rather as an interesting part of Diepsloot.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in a 1-hour interview with me. The interview may happen online, or in person at the SADAG Container (897 Ingonyama St, Extension 2) at a time that suits you. This interview will involve questions about your experience of religion in the community. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview using a digital device. All recordings will be stored in a locked filing system and only the researcher will have access to this recording.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. The University will pay for any data fees if the interview happens online. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you choose to leave, withdraw or not answer any question from the study. This study will be published, and you can ask for a summary of the report from me or find the final

version on the University library website. The interview will be confidential and anonymous, as I will not be disclosing any identifying information to the public. With your permission, the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymous format. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point, we will stop the interview. If you need some support or counselling services after the interview, this information will be given to you and are listed here:

- SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group)- 0800121314
- Lifeline- 0861322322
- Adcock Ingram Depression and Anxiety Helpline- 0800708090

NB: COVID-19 protocols will be strictly performed throughout this process to ensure your safety; this will include keeping a 1–2-meter distance between the interviewer and interviewee, and sanitization practices.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Shaun Schoeman, +27(0) 11 717 1408/ Chermaine Khumalo, 0117171788/ email: hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za .If you have any questions during or after this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Brenton Stephen Thornton/btenton.thornton4358@gmail,com/ 0799842264

Research Supervisor: Tanya Graham/ tanya.graham@wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Exploring the Personal, Relational and Communal Role of Religion in Diepsloot

Brenton Stephen Thornton

I, ……, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

I understand that I was given time to read the participant consent form/ had it read to me in an understood language	YES NO
I understand that my participation will remain anonymous	YESNO
I understand that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YESNO

I understand that the interview may be audio recorded/ video recorded if online	YESNO
I understand that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YESNO
I understand that there will be no immediate benefit to me, should I agree to participate, nor will I receive any payment; participation will not cost me anything but my time.	YES NO
I understand that if I initially consent to take part in the study, I can withdraw at any time and would not be required to give any reasons; if that happened, any data collected about me for the purposes of the study would immediately be destroyed, unless I give consent for it to be retained	YES NO

I have been given contact details in the participant consent form of people I can contact should there be any issues/ queries I have YES NO

I understand that, if needed, I will need a translator that will translate/listen to questions that I will answer, while they also would have signed a confidentiality agreement. YES NO

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

…… (signature)

…… (name of person seeking consent)

…… (date)

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Note: I do plan on having a translator/ a translated set of questions for them that can be translated at a later stage.

Introduction

1. Establish friendly rapport and explain the process to them. Ask if they have any Questions.
2. Ask and verify demographic details (education, religious affiliation, age, country of origin, gender, extension of residency in Diepsloot, marital status and if the person lives with anyone or not).
3. Ensure openness and confidentiality in this process, explain how ethical procedures will work to ensure confidentiality.

Part 1: What Religion Means to You

1. Can you tell me what religion means to you?
2. In what ways are you religious?
3. In what ways is religion important/not important?

Part 2: Why is this so?

1. Ask participant to elaborate and explain why without any hinting
2. Is there is anything else you would like to mention about your own experience of religion?

Part 3: Interpersonal Factor

1. What does religion mean to your family?
2. What does religion mean to your friends?
3. Are these members religious or not and in what ways?
4. How do you feel about people from other religions in the community?
5. Is there any in particular that makes you feel uncomfortable? Why?
6. How does your family and friends view other religions within the community?

Part 4: Choices

1. How did you come to practice/not practice your religion?
2. Have you ever wondered about changing your religion or not being religious?
3. If you did leave your religion, what would the consequences be?

Part 5: Closing

1. How did you feel about this interview, was it difficult talking about religion?
2. Are you thinking about anything after this interview?
3. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make before we end this interview?

Appendix D: Ethics Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/21/12**
PROJECT TITLE:	Exploring the Personal, Relational and Communal Role of Religion in Diepsloot.
INVESTIGATOR	Thornton Brenton (1348542)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	19 July 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 30 July 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** ___ (Dr Vinitha Jithoo)

Cc: Prof. Tanya Graham (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ Signature

_____/_____/_____ Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES