

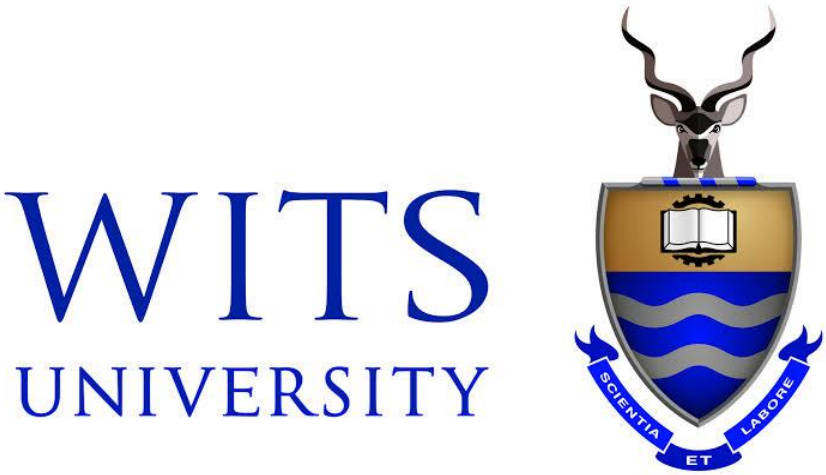
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Power, privilege & perceptions: what do straight cisgender Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality diversity?

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Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

WITS CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY STUDIES

POWER, PRIVILEGE & PERCEPTIONS: WHAT DO STRAIGHT CISGENDER INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS THINK ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUALITY DIVERSITY?

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A research report in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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(Ethics Protocol Number: DIV200805)

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I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies for giving me an opportunity to write about what I believe in. When I started my studies at the centre in 2019, I knew the bare minimum of what diversity truly looked like in the world, let alone even understanding experiences of marginalisation. Unlearning my privilege as a straight, cisgender individual, enough to write this research report has been an uphill battle. It has been three years and most days I feel like I am still learning about the wonders, struggles and strength of the LGBTQIA+. Thank you for all the kindness, patience, and a space to unlearn.

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Lastly, to the participants of this study. While we all shared differing experiences, what you all shared was the willingness to have a conversation about privilege – something, not many people are willing to do. Some moments came easily for you all, and others not and while some of you taught us all something, others still have far to go when it comes to learning and unlearning. What is evident though, is that there are people in the Indian South African willing to have conversations. Yes, there were people not willing to be a part of this study, but it is with hope that the future we build is one where you all venture into conversations like these with new and old friends, colleagues, and family members. Good luck in everything you do.

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, **Kerisha Kistoo**, student number **1108735**, am a student registered for the Masters (MA) degree in Critical Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in the academic year 2020-2021.

I declare that this research report titled **Power, Privilege & Perceptions: What do Straight Cisgender Indian South Africans think about Gender and Sexuality Diversity?** is my own work. It is being submitted for the Masters (MA) Degree in Critical Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

I hereby declare the following:

- I hereby submit my research work (**MA research report** / ~~MA dissertation / Doctor of Philosophy~~).
- I have checked all of my manuscript and am satisfied that no pages are missing or poorly reproduced.
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- I have followed the APA referencing conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I declare that I have obtained an ethics protocol number from the Research Office, if my research used human subject, patient records, student data etc. **(Ethics Protocol Number: DIV200805)**

DATE: 15.07.2021

SIGNATURE: Kerisha Kistoo

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ABSTRACT

Indian South African communities have been a part of South Africa for centuries, starting with the Indentured Labourers brought to South Africa in 1860 and growing into the current developing communities of people. What the ending of the racial segregation enforced during colonialism and apartheid permitted, was the merging of Indian South Africans into what is now considered the dynamic Rainbow Nation of South African social identities. However, little is known about what Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality diversity – a continuously growing topic advocating for the rights and equality of the LGBTQIA+ community. What this dissertation aims at, is an understanding of what do straight, cisgender Indian South Africans think about the topic, when falling under the cisheteronormative privilege historically assigned to them by society. This brief qualitative research with three focus groups and nine diverse Indian South Africans, tasked individuals with answering questions and being a part of multimodal activities. Whether it was discussing gender roles and expectations, education, or the necessity of these conversations, it is evident that Indian South African communities are not made up of perceptions that are monolithic or dichotomous. Rather these communities are made up of diverse perceptions that are indicative of South Africa's growing intersectional experiences with the LGBTQIA+ community. This dissertation attempts to highlight the importance of experience and the necessity of intersectional narratives when understanding how power works to develop perceptions. While short and unable to encompass all that makes up the experiences of every Indian South African community, it attempts to gain some understanding of where we stand with regards to LGBTQIA+ rights and freedom – a hopeful contribution to the many hardworking individuals who compile knowledge striving to build up this much needed database of information.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

If we all take a moment to close our eyes and try to imagine the many people we have met, interacted with, and learnt from – not just in-person, but in this age, online as well, we realise that we are made up of a multitude of experiences that have all led us to where we are right now. These experiences have impacted what we believe about our identities, and also, what we believe about the identities of others. This influences how we interact with other people and what we think of them. The knowledge we have about identities is not just the information we receive in academia, but also the everyday snippets of conversation, emotional experiences, and conversations with people around us. This knowledge indicates how our experiences are intersectional, made up of layers upon layers of knowledge all stratified together to develop and influence our perceptions, ideas, identities, and beliefs.

What makes experiences that develop knowledge relevant to my research, is that the knowledge produced through our experiences of the world affects how we interact with, and what we think about identities that are not our own. It is about how we treat, react to, and think of individuals that do not share our social identities – identities which according to society defines who we are.

What exactly makes our experiences of identities such an emotional one, where we attach feelings to who we are and how we feel towards other people? Sara Ahmed (2004) describes this phenomenon as *Affective Economies*, where "emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective

bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 117). Ahmed explains that we have emotional attachments to our identities, and these emotions are dynamic and in motion as we react to other social identity groups according to how our different emotions have historically interacted.

You do not even need to take a close look; even just a glance of history is enough to witness that there has been a conflicting binary development where systems of cisheteronormative privilege served to exclude people who are not heterosexual or cisgender. This is based on the reproduced knowledge defining any expression other than the cisheteronormative standard as one of deviancy.

Cisheteronormativity, a prevailing privileged set of identities, includes straight, cisgender individuals where a combination of the two creates a nuclear family – a cisgender male meets a cisgender female, and they have children. Here, straight or heterosexual is being used as a concept to define individuals who are attracted to the opposite sex in both a romantic and/or sexual way. Judith Butler (1990) phrased these cisheteronormative systems as the "heterosexual matrix" – where knowledge has reproduced an order of events – biological sex assigned at birth, societal gender expectations attached to assigned sex, with a resulting desire to occur between the binary sexes, male, and female (Butler, 1990, p. 45). As cisheteronormative knowledge has been reproduced as the expected way of life, an othering has developed where straight cisgender people, in their privilege, have been discussed as 'superior' to gender and sexually diverse people, who have been isolated, erased, and invalidated.

In response, these perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity, while learnt or presented differently, are of importance, as it contributes to the information that LGBTQIA+ rights and equality advocates can use towards undoing the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ people, including contributing to how LGBTQIA+ people come to know themselves in these spaces. However, with the experiences of individuals being intersectional – an abundance of multiple exposures to different beliefs and ideas across many spaces have contributed in different ways to dominant forms of knowledge that have served cisheteronormative interests. This is the foundation of my research. I attempt to begin conversations that provide us with some idea of what perceptions straight, cisgender Indian South Africans have of the LGBTQIA+ community as they have built on and continue to build on their perceptions through their experiences in different spaces, meeting different people and being socialized into unique ways of thinking.

In a study by the Love Not Hate (LNH) (2016) Campaign, titled *Hate Crimes Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People in South Africa*, a total of 52 LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans were sampled for the research project. This project served to document the discrimination and violence LGBTQIA+ people face in South Africa – contributing towards informing "services, interventions and advocacy" for LGBT South Africans – something not many studies cater for. This research served the purpose of empowering LGBTQIA+ people, directing important information to

relevant safety and security departments to inform their strategies of protecting LGBTI people and "building of evidence based for programming and advocacy (research)" (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016, p. 1).

This study informed different sections of my research. With such a small sample size compared to the other races involved in the study – Black, White and Coloured – Indian South Africans still rated the highest at 8% in 'No one knows', in the 'Level of outness' category. This was significantly higher than the second-highest race group, which stood at 3% for Black LGBTQIA+ people – indicating that there are LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans who live in fear of coming out. In addition, when answering the question, "In the past 24 months, which of the following forms of discrimination have you experienced due to being gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender?", the study revealed that, "Family members were particularly likely to turn on their own in Indian families" (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016, p. 9). These are distressing statistics that display that not only do LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans live in fear of coming out, but that some also live in fear of being exposed to violence from family members. The knowledge and perceptions Indian South Africans have of the LGBTQIA+ community may serve the purpose of advocating for the rights of LGBTQIA+ safety – a quality promised in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* to all citizens of South Africa.

However, whether it is through discussions with friends, representations of LGBTQIA+ people on a television series or the increase in visibility for LGBTQIA+ rights on the news, not many people can say that gender and sexuality diversity is something they have yet to come across – even if it was not included as part of their syllabi at a schooling level. The result is individuals who have been tasked to accommodate ways of thinking that may not be discriminatory towards the LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, this research can also serve a purpose in understanding where privileged people have received representation or influences that have positively impacted how they view gender and sexuality diversity. Non-oppressive perceptions indicate how LGBTQIA+ people and allies can continue to create and develop information that advances inclusive and empathic attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people. Attempting to find out what Indian South Africans, specifically, think about gender and sexuality diversity, through their experiences and exposure to LGBTQIA+ people, stories, and realities, is the task of my research. The significance of this task is based on the fact that existing knowledge, while serving the purpose of advocating for LGBTIQA+ rights, rarely takes a closer look at Indian South African communities.

The impact that perceptions have on LGBTQIA+ people, whether in public or private spaces, affects the way they see themselves and express who they are. I discovered Alok Vaid-Menon in my university years – an Indian American author, performance artist and LGBTQIA+ rights activist, who identifies as gender non-conforming and transfeminine. Alok's art, fashion, texts, and interviews tackle historical gender binaries and cisheteronormativity within society, that play a role in erasing and harming

LGBTQIA+ people. I want to add Vaid-Menon's (2017) voice into my research, not just because it stands as a source of information and inspiration for me, but because it also discusses exactly how LGBTQIA+ people are affected by the cisheteronormative perceptions prevalent in society today. Answering the question, "what feminine part of yourself did you have to destroy in order to survive in this world?", Vaid-Menon (2017) responded with powerful comments which I have summarized below, from their book *Femme in Public*,

> I'M TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT. what would it look like to leave the house and not be afraid of being bashed?...to leave the house and not be bashed? what would it mean to leave the house and not be harassed?...and not be objectified?...not be gendered?...to no longer be forced to do the work of gender?...to own my body?...to have a self beyond my body?...to log online and not being told to die?...to have people say "i'm here" instead of "you're fabulous?"…what would it mean to no longer have to be fabulous to survive?...to be able to go home wearing what i want?...to be desired wearing what i want?...to be desired for me and not my body? is it that i don't remember anymore or that i never knew? (Vaid-Menon, 2017, p. 3).

Vaid-Menon's experiences of being a gender non-conforming, transfeminine individual describes in a powerful way how perceptions impact the lives of LGBTQIA+ people. Vaid-Menon (2017) touches on how perceptions expect them to dress in a particular way, express their gender in a cisheteronormative, conforming way, and be a particular person. This has impacted how Vaid-Menon and many gender non-conforming individuals are desired, addressed, responded to – including violent instances – how they are victims of cyberbullying, stereotyping and gender policing. The above reactions and situations have developed based on the knowledge being reproduced to inform perceptions people have about the LGBTQIA+ community, influencing how they respond to LGBTQIA+ people. These are situations that many LGBTQIA+ people have to navigate each time they step outside their door or on to online spaces.

While I discuss Indian South African communities in this dissertation, the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals spread across many contexts and point toward similarities in action due to dispersed knowledge. The discussions of LGBTQIA+ experiences felt by South Africans and Indian American author Vaid-Menon is relatively similar to Jessica Hinchy's (2014) description of the experiences *Hijras* are exposed to in India.

The article by Hinchy (2014) titled, *Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity: Hijras in Public Space in Colonial North India*, exemplifies boundaries created to keep positionalities out. This article discusses gender diverse individuals, in particular *Hijras*, a blanket term for eunuchs, intersex, and transgender individuals from India. Hinchy (2014) deals with the term *Hijra* as "generally male-born persons who describe themselves as emasculates or "eunuchs from birth", wear feminine clothing, usually adopt feminine names and have a socio-cultural role as performers at the time of births." (Hinchy, 2014, pp. 274). Hinchy (2014) goes through a detailed description of how Hijras were made to feel during British colonialism and how they faced erasure, violence and exclusion – much like Vaid-Menon (2017) and the Love Not Hate campaign (2016) describes of the current time. Why this conversation is still relevant today is because, according to Hinchy (2012) and many other authors, the

experiences of *Hijras* themselves with current laws in India and the impact of colonial disgust and exclusion towards *Hijras* are still carried out in post-Independent India today, parallel to colonial ideologies. In fact, Hinchy (2012) cites the following in her conclusion,

> "Anthropologist Gayatri Reddy shows that hijras are characterized by many in Indian society as a public nuisance, a threat to public order and a source of contagion. Hijras are "constructed in the popular imaginary as 'dirty', socially marginal outcasts" (Reddy, 2005a, p. 257), a perception that stems, on the one hand, from Indian notions of sharam (shame), and on the other hand, from concepts of public order and contagion with a colonial history. The CTA also established a pattern of police-hijra interactions premised on the criminality of the hijra community and the legitimacy of policing measures different from and more excessive than those applied to broader society, forming an important backdrop to the widely documented contemporary police abuse of hijras (People's Union for Civil Liberties, Karnataka, 2004)" (Hinchy, 2012, pp. 288)

Here, in a locative context thousands of kilometers away from both South Africa and the United States of America, LGBTQIA+ people experience similar methods of control that erases, shames, violates and exposes them to violence just for existing. Much like in the Indian South African context, perceptions play a large role in impacting the lives of LGBTQIA+ people, and while a single source cannot be found to eradicate discrimination, it is vital in our understanding of how we can provide safety and security to know what exactly these perceptions are.

My study is contextually located in South Africa, concentrating on individuals falling within the demographics of straight, cisgender Indian South Africans between the ages of 20 and 35. The research was planned as a qualitative study, involving a series of three focus groups with multimodal questions, such as words associations, finishing the sentence and power flower activities[1] that were used to scaffold the interview questions relevant to this study. What this research aimed to achieve as described above, was not just to discuss the perceptions individuals have been directly taught about gender and sexuality diversity, but also to take a closer look at the everyday experiences that have impacted their perceptions on gender and sexuality diversity. These experiences are of importance, as discussed by Joan Scott, an American feminist and gender studies professor, who explains that,

> "…experience is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion. It serves a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is "unassailable"… The study of experience, therefore, must call into question its ordinary status in historical explanation. This will happen when historians take as their project not the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself." (Scott, 1991, p. 797).

Scott (1991) discusses how important it is to consider experience, as it plays a fundamental role in the way knowledge is (re)produced about different identities, people, and ideas. These experiences are

[1] A power flower activity is one where individuals are expected to draw a flower, with inner and outer petals. Each pair of petals signifies a social identity – in this research, gender and sexuality. To colour in your inner petals means your identity is labelled as marginalised, whereas to colour in outer petals means you are part of the group in power. The purpose of this activity in this research, was to ascertain how would the position of individuals within society change if their privileged identities were switch to a marginalised identity.

responsible for the discrimination and fears faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, as described by the LNH Campaign's study above, as well as the biases, stereotypes and myths that may drive certain indifferences. These experiences are also mixed with those that can contrastingly provide positive spaces for LGBTQIA+ people. This is indicative of the 52% of Indian South Africans who are 'completely open' about their gender and sexuality diversity, the 41% who are open to some people, and the 58% of LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans who have not experienced discrimination 24 months before the Love Not Hate Campaign (2016) study.

With the formal dissolution of colonial and Apartheid laws that prohibited interracial, intercultural, and sexually diverse interactions, many South Africans have established families, relationships, colleagues, and friendships that transgress the physical boundaries put in place during colonial apartheid. As a result, many Indian South African perceptions can no longer be assumed to be monolithic or homogenous, where knowledges and experiences are solely based on what are considered to be exclusively from Indian norms, families, or histories. The knowledge of, and experiences with gender and sexuality diversity may come from a variety of spaces, both in-person and online, from a variety of people with different identities, beliefs, and experiences.

This research study is necessary to better understand the ideas and beliefs that are being passed down to, and circulated amongst, young Indian South Africans in relation to gender and sexuality diversity. Currently, there is only a small sample of LGBTQIA+ related research projects which examine Indian South African perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity, let alone what privileged Indian South Africans have been socialized into thinking. Thus, what I aimed to achieve was to learn about the experiences of straight, cisgender Indian South Africans with regards to LGBTQIA+ identifying people.

What these narratives revealed was how individuals navigate their privilege, when answering the sub-questions related to, 'what do straight cisgender Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality?' Melissa Steyn (2015) explains that "Those socialized into positions of relative privilege tend to have less insight into the social dynamics that have created their advantages" (Steyn, 2015, p. 383). Hereafter, it becomes necessary "to act into the world with a will to bring about more socially just arrangements: not only to understand them but also to change them; to become an ally to those whose oppression would otherwise be further entrenched through conscious and unconscious assumptions of privilege." (Steyn, 2015, pp. 387-388). Steyn describes a world where those placed in positions of privilege may not have accessed the wealth of knowledge that exists regarding how they have reached their positions of privilege. However, to create a world where there is no societal allocation of privilege – we have to have conversations about privilege.

This is a topic that brings about discomfort, but this is the way forward Steyn believes, to create a socially just world. Zembylas and Boler (2002), in an article titled, *On the Spirit of Patriotism: Challenges of a "Pedagogy of Discomfort",* support this claim of having discussions facing the

privilege being awarded by society. Zembylas and Boler (2002) state that, "a "pedagogy of discomfort" can be used to analyse the contradictions and emotionally-embedded investments that underlie ideologies" (2002, p. 2). These authors claim that when we place individuals in a space where they feel discomfort, they are taken out of their space of comfort awarded to them by their privilege, "[inviting] students to leave behind learned beliefs and habits and enter the risky areas of contradictory and ambiguous ethical and moral differences" (Zembylas & Boler, 2002, p. 2).

My own experiences of discomfort and unlearning have played a role in the road leading to this research. Growing up cisgender and having mainly straight experiences in the Indian South African community I was born into; I easily went through most of my life never challenged to get more information about the LGBTQIA+ community. Whilst my family, friends or school did not play an active role in directly developing a negative knowledge base of gender and sexuality diversity, for many years the only exposure I got to the LGBTQIA+ community was snippets of conversation, the very rare person being 'out', television shows and for a brief period, hearing LGBTQIA+ terms being used as insults or slurs. These all provided the bare minimum of knowledge about gender and sexuality diversity, and through navigating my personal school experiences, not much of my time was spent doing more. What changed this indifference was coming into a public space at university and being exposed to a multitude of experiences, identities, and people. It was through my experiences of learning how to be a teacher, that I worried that without a basis of knowledge about the multitudes of diverse identities that do exist – I would not be able to provide learners with the information they needed to navigate the world. Also, I would not be aware of the diverse learners in my classroom who have their own needs and experiences. I was taking a complacent role in reproducing the erasure of LGBTQIA+ people.

While this research does play a role in engaging with people who are privileged, I do want to point out that it in no way attempts to speak 'for' people from the LGBTIQA+ community. In the recently published *Routledge Handbook on Queer African Studies*, there is an empirical study by Smout (Thorpe) (2020) titled *LGBTIQ political participation in South Africa: The rights, the real, and the representation*. Smouth (Thorpe) (2020) discusses the findings of a research project, Triangle Project and LGBTQ Victory Institute that was commissioned in 2017. This project served the purpose of "finding out the extent of the political participation of LGBTIQ persons in South Africa" (Smouth (Thorpe),2020, p. 63). Smouth (Thorpe) (2020) concludes that,

> "The Triangle and Victory Institute's study shows that LGBTIQ persons in South Africa have the desire to participate politically, and that they would participate more often if spaces were openly supportive of their human rights and if political parties promoted diverse leaders…This study showed the active participation of LGBTIQ individuals and organizations in South Africa's democratic culture, and the influence that they wield in the future with more political leadership within democratic party system." (Smouth (Thorpe), 2020, p. 74).

The significance of this informs the understanding that LGBTQIA+ people are not complacent in their silence, erasure, and invalidation. Rather, efforts to speak about and advance rights are challenging

because of the systems put into place that exclude them from spaces of power as marginalised individuals. LGBTQIA+ people are kept out of spaces by cisheteronormative systems of power and until we begin conversations with privileged people to understand this, we may never reach a countrywide, let alone worldwide space where conversations about change may take place.

Through this research, I hoped to achieve three things: (1) to continue building on existing knowledge of gender and sexuality diversity in South Africa; (2) understanding Indian South African communities and their experiences and perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity; and (3) aiming to begin a conversation in a way that was never had with me with other individuals in Indian South African communities who are privileged on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This research was about opening up space as an 'insider', a person who may share experiences and have exposure to related beliefs and ideas with participants – but also as someone who appears similar in identity. The many Indian South African communities that exist span across South Africa, but as an Indian South African myself, my intention was to welcome individuals to have these conversations with someone who they may feel they can relate to. Some participants initially, were either keen, wary, or indifferent. Other Indian South Africans were not keen to participate at all. This itself plays a role in witnessing how experiences and perceptions are built up with a multitude of layered differences – just taking a close look at how each individual responded differently when asked to be a part of this study.

Each of the participants of this study, while falling under the demographic information stipulated above, came from differing career and study backgrounds. They come from a wide variety of locations, have attended public and/or private schools, and have different relationships with their families and friends. They also play important roles in their careers, being between the ages of 20 and 35, as students, managers, first job workers, planning for children and being the group of people looked towards to lead the future, in turn passing down the knowledge they have learnt.

With the dissolution of inhumane methods of control in the early 1990s, that served to racially separate people during apartheid, South Africa became celebrated as the Rainbow Nation, as a country encompassing a variety of people from different social identity backgrounds. This temporal context placed many individuals who participated in the study in positions where many of their experiences growing up took place in a country without formal racial segregation – although, this history continues to shape everyday life as demonstrated by the findings of this research. All but one had been raised and educated in the post-apartheid period.

Participants fall into the generations labelled as Generation Z and the Millennial Generation, and what makes this important is because of how many of them have spent quite a bit of their lives being exposed to social media and the information that comes from technology. Pascale (2010) explains that "youth are not only consuming media but also producing it", and so "social research must be able to consider the technological mediation of social relationships" (Pascale, 2010, pp. 159-160). Factors of

generational difference and exposure to technology were therefore also relevant contextual dynamics that I needed to take into consideration.

What is also important to note about the easy accessibility of online spaces, is that multiple perspectives exist online as well. Andre Cavalcante (2019) goes into detail about this in an article titled, *Tumbling into Queer Utopias and Vortexes: Experiences of LGBTQ Social Media Users on Tumblr*. Cavalcante discusses how Tumblr, an online platform, has become a space to create awareness, meet people and share experiences of being an LGBTQIA+ person, terming it after Muñoz's (2009) "queer utopia" and Whannel's (2010) "queer vortextuality". Cavalcante explains that online spaces are,

> "a "queer utopia" (Muñoz, 2009)—a space where queer potential flourishes, where new more expansive ways to think about the future materialize—and queer "vortextuality" (Whannel, 2010)—an experience of being sucked into an online black hole with severe limitations." (Cavalcante, 2019, p. 1716).

Cavalcante explores the merits of an online space like Tumblr, acting as a space of belonging and understanding when or if users are unable to receive these experiences from the real world. However, Cavalcante (2019) explains that often, users can be exposed to the negative sides of social media, the "site's dark underbelly", where a research participant explained that,

> "There are a lot of nasty, dark sides of Tumblr, as there are with any social media platform. There are some really disgusting parts of Tumblr. I'm talking like racist parts, homophobic parts, parts that outright call for the killing of queer people" (Cavalcante, 2019, p. 1730).

Social media, while a tool for spreading awareness and interacting with people who are understanding of your identity, is, much like society, filled with an abundance of perceptions developed from different knowledge bases. Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of what straight, cisgender Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality as individuals being exposed to the world in unique ways. This study makes it possible to identify some systems that have socialised and developed perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity, impacting how they act in-person, as well as who they are and what information they seek and are exposed to through social media. It also allows us to determine if there are differences between perceptions about similar topics – for example, do all participants share the same opinions about equal access to opportunities and recognition for LGBTQIA+ people? In doing so, we can develop an understanding of how educated and/or exposed individuals are to gender and sexual diversity.

One of the most important purposes of this study is to begin conversations about gender and sexuality diversity amongst straight cisgender Indian South Africans, where this research acts as a learning space, sharing experiences, navigating privilege, and understanding where individuals stand regarding LGBTQIA+ issues and people.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Cost of Unequal Power Relations in Knowledge Production

Historically, unequal power relations have played a role in reproducing the construction of gender and sexuality binaries and hierarchies, and the phenomenon of gender and sexuality as conflated experiences. These have been based on reproduced cisheteronormativity, which then and now, has permitted the invalidation, erasure and exclusion of individuals who experience gender and sexuality differently from predisposed cisheteronormative norms. Taking this conflation into consideration, even though gender and sexuality as different identities, led to it becoming a necessity to incorporate both gender and sexuality into any research that discusses either topic. Sylvia Tamale (2011) has stated that,

> "Sexuality and gender go hand in hand; both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central and crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies. They give each other shape and any scientific enquiry of the former immediately invokes the latter. Hence, gender provides the critical analytical lens through which any data on sexuality must logically be interpreted" (Tamale, 2011, p. 11).

These unequal power relations have constructed models of gender and sexuality reliant on the biological classification of individuals into the two-sex gender binary. This need for classification, which was developed by Western science, has been normalised through time and contexts using medical models, cultural practices and societal and colonial ideals by the dominating powers who have enforced this ideology. Through doing so, both gender and sexuality became definable by the standard model of feminine-masculine binaries and heterosexuality, labelling cisgender and heteronormative individuals as 'normal' and in turn, anyone else as 'different' and unequal.

It is important to consider how power and knowledge have become dependent on each other – especially when they impact the lives of individuals. Michel Foucault (1976) stated that, "[t]here is no escaping from power, that it is always-already present, constituting that very thing which one attempts to counter it with" (Michel Foucault, 1976, pp. 82). In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1976) determined a relationship between knowledge and power – not as equivalent entities, but intertwined entities. Foucault (1976) determines that power is embedded in knowledge and knowledge in power. The way individuals think is determined by a power that influences and is influenced by the knowledge they are exposed to – individuals may be influenced by different forms of knowledge about the same topic. Foucault (1976) developed the term power-knowledge, elaborating that this combination has an influence on an individual's identity and how they interact with other individuals. Foucault (1976) enabled the observation of our interactions as being the result of the power behind why and how we act towards certain groups. In turn, power drives the perceptions we have of groups of individuals as perceptions are the result of power embedded in the knowledge we have of these individuals.

These (re)produced knowledges serving cisheteronormativity in the form of perceptions have normalised actions like the conflation of gender and sexuality, resulting in these two different identities

being seen as interchangeable and unquestionably so. Society encompasses a variety of perceptions denoting the powers that socialize individuals into ways of thinking – and often these powers are hidden by the normalization of them. Foucault (1976) states that "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to an ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Foucault, 1976, pp. 86). Individuals may rarely question the perceptions that have become so normal in their lives, enveloped in this way of thinking through how they live their everyday lives, not questioning why they do so, or how they came to this understanding.

In response, queer theory has challenged these pervasive dominating binaries and hierarchies within societies, which favour certain knowledges over others, oppressing those who do not experience their gender and/or sexuality as per cisheteronormative social expectations. Queer theorists state that gender and sexuality are very differently experienced and the act of conflating them places individuals in further danger of having their identities and experiences continually and unquestionably excluded, erased, and invalidated. What queer theorists and/or many LGBTQIA+ and allied individuals call for when discussing non-cisheteronormative identities is a dire need to unlearn deeply ingrained knowledges about sex, gender and sexuality that continue to endanger those historically represented as 'different' because of said misunderstandings.

Melissa Steyn (2015) in *Critical diversity literacy: Essentials for the twenty-first century*, explains that one of the first ways to critically look at society, is to witness "an understanding of the role of power in constructing differences that make a difference" (Steyn, 2015, p. 381). Steyn uses Stuart Hall's theory to denote that some differences within society make a difference because they are marked as socially unacceptable. While some identities are privileged (such as heterosexuality, whiteness, middle-classness, able-bodiedness) and remain unmarked and thus, not likely to be named and interrogated, subordinated identities (such as homosexuality, blackness, and disability) are constructed as 'other' and therefore become marked as different and inferior. Dominant privileged identities become normalised as the accepted norm through the power that keeps them dominant and invisible, saved from scrutiny or critique. Unequal power relations enable the reproduction of societies that continuously follow frames of knowledge that normalise dominant regimes – where difference manifests as 'marked', 'noticeable' and 'up for interpretation'. In doing so, societies do not offer an alternative version of the dominant reality to be experienced, where those who cannot follow cisheteronormativity are marked as different, facing exclusion, erasure, and invalidation.

What makes this information critical to my research, is that human beings have identities unique to the individual, made up of knowledge passed down from personal experiences and social interactions with other people, identities, organizations, and ideologies. What makes experiences of gender and sexuality themselves so challenging to navigate is because of the multitudes of experiences currently present in post-colonial South Africa. Democratic South Africa paved a way for an end to the segregation of

people, with a Constitution that envisions a utopia with diverse people living together. Currently, Democratic South Africa boasts a large population of individuals with intersectional social identities. With the dissolution of colonial and Apartheid laws that prohibited interracial, intercultural, and sexually diverse interactions, many South Africans have established families, relationships, colleagues, and friendships that transgress the physical boundaries put in place during colonial apartheid. As a result, many Indian South African perceptions can no longer be assumed to be monolithically or dichotomously inclined, where knowledges and experiences are solely based on Indian norms, families, or histories.

When living in Democratic South Africa, attempting to pave the way for equality, South Africans are expected to follow the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, which enforces the illegality of discrimination. *The Bill of Rights* (1996) reads as follows,

> "Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law"…"the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (South African Constitution, 1996, pp. 5-6).

Assessing the various sections within the Constitution which have become world-renowned, one would assume that the safety and equality of gender and sexually diverse South Africans is guaranteed. While formative protections exist for all people regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation, LGBTQIA+ people continue to experience discrimination, exclusion, and violence across South African societies. Deborah Posel contributes the following –

> "…given these extremities of the apartheid era, the changes post-1994 have been remarkably dramatic and swift, although by no means either wholesale or uncontested. Issues of sexuality have a newfound prominence, but not in ways that indicate widespread comfort or acceptance of these changes… anxieties, denials and stigmas that persist in the midst of new and unprecedented declarations of sexuality – often provoked directly by them – contribute directly to the new sites and intensities of the politicisation of sexuality." (2011, p. 131).

Posel's statements claim that due to the extreme lengths to which colonial and apartheid law went to criminalise gender and sexuality diversity, the negative ideologies have been reproduced and passed down in Democratic South Africa, where people experience isolation, erasure, and discrimination remnant of the apartheid and colonial era.

In a study by Nyeck and Shepherd (2019) titled *The Economic Cost of LGBT Stigma and Discrimination in South Africa*, key findings reveal that gender non-conforming individuals are less likely to be employed compared to cisgender individuals (Nyeck & Shepherd, 2019, p. 3). Further, those who are employed receive significantly lower earnings compared to cisgender individuals (2019, p. 3) and the majority of LGBTQIA+ participants were dissatisfied with healthcare, felt unsafe in public and experienced perceptions that their identities were "disgusting".

Whilst not many research projects have delved into gender and sexuality diversity within Indian South African communities, there is an existence of LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans. In a study from the Love Not Hate (LNH) Campaign (2016) by OUT LGBT Well-being titled *Hate Crimes against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people*, 52 LGBTQIA+ Indians took part in the survey. Of the fifty-two Indians that participated in the study, 45% were victims of verbal abuse, 18% threatened with physical violence and 11% sexually abused or raped.

It was quite a challenge attempting to find existing information on LGBTQIA+ South Africans, especially with many of the existing statistics indicating the violent lives experienced by LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans playing a role in silencing them. However, during my search for examples of LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans and knowledge production, I came across a *News24* article titled, *Growing up queer in an Indian South African family* by Theron Moonsamy. Theron Moonsamy (2020) detailed an article of how growing up queer meant he felt out of place in the Indian South African community he was born into, like there was something different and 'wrong' about him when he compared himself to his family members – his role models. Moonsamy detailed his experiences being a queer Indian South African, not taught about what it means to be sexually diverse, even culminating in almost losing some of his close family and friends upon coming out. However, Moonsamy ended his article detailing how he left Chatsworth, Kwa-Zulu Natal, to study at Wits University, where he learnt and began to love his identity, and realised that "I can be the hero of my own story". Moonsamy ended his article letting all queer people know that,

> "P.S. It doesn't get better – you get better. I now have the full love and support of my family and live with my amazing partner of nine years as we look forward to what the future has in store for all of us" (2020).

Both these texts, from Moonsamy (2020) and the Love Not Hate Campaign (2016) indicate the need for more knowledge to be produced on LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans, who live different lives, with shared or contrasting experiences. However, Indian South Africans have lived in South Africa for decades upon decades already, starting with the first group being brought in as Indentured Labourers as early as the year 1860, and this poses a question as to why there are not many studies denoting the experiences of LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans.

Grada Kilomba (2013) in her book *Plantation Memories*, discusses academic margins and centres. This, Kilomba explains is a centre where knowledge is produced, and a margin where marginalised individuals are placed, to keep them out of spaces where they can produce knowledge. Centres then rely on the individuals allowed into this privileged space and have access to opportunity, to produce knowledge from their point of view, speaking for marginalised individuals, or in some cases, choosing not to speak about them at all. As a result, the true experiences of marginalised individuals at the centre are not documented, and the knowledge that continues to be produced does not cater for their rights, dignity, and experiences.

Critical scholars like Melissa Steyn, Grada Kilomba, Awino Okech, Sylvia Tamale and Deborah Posel, amongst many others, have pointed towards remnants of colonialism as a reason behind the almost omnipresent hierarchies that have followed into democracy in many different previously colonized African countries. Communities within South Africa have created their own hierarchies, even though they shared the status of being oppressed during colonialism. Steyn (2015) explains that "Oppressed groups often vie for advantage relative to one another; to create a hierarchy of oppressions would prioritize their interests above those oppressed differently", citing the need for a critical skill that considers intersectionality (2015, p. 384). Steyn explains how even in a system comprising of previously oppressed people, there are hierarchies established that dictate inferior and superior positions. In this case, gender, and sexuality diversity, with its sparse knowledge is placed in an inferior position – even in Indian communities who previously experienced oppressive methods of control under colonialism and apartheid.

Awino Okech (2013) touches on this need for intersectional research when producing knowledge in *'In sisterhood and solidarity'; queering African feminist spaces*. Okech explains how some feminist spaces affiliate themselves with a particular group of women based on factors like heterosexuality and motherhood, excluding and invalidating the experiences of women who are not heterosexual or are unable to or do not want to be a mother, respectively. Sylvia Tamale (2011) in *Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa* claims that "research in the area of reproductive health on the continent has a long and chequered history. Because reproduction was viewed as the role par excellence for women in heteropatriarchal societies, it became the primary definer of their sexuality" (Tamale, 2011, p. 15). As a result, Okech (2013) states that activists, lawmakers, and academics treat sex and the sexuality of women in Africa in terms of their "health, mobility, employment, inheritance" and reproductive rights (Okech, 2013, p. 10). Conversations about "bodily autonomy and sexual integrity continue to remain tenuous sites of legislation and activism" (Okech, 2013, p. 10). The rights catered for some women has turned into the same rights catered for all women through homogenisation. Tamale claims that,

> "Conspicuously missing from the mainstream sexuality research repertoire prior to the 1990s were studies on positive aspects of African sexualities, such as pleasure, eroticism and desire." (2011, p. 23)

Judith Butler has written about this type of knowledge produced, when writing about the heterosexual matrix, and how it establishes a standard for desire. Butler (1990) explains how knowledge on gender and sexuality has been conflated based on medical models enforced by Western societies, where once the biological sex of an individual is assigned by medical individuals, their gender is allocated based on the performative acts societally assigned to their biological sex. Their sexual desires are then determined according to the heterosexual matrix – where cisgender women are attracted to cisgender men exclusively and vice versa. This knowledge produced relying on cisheteronormativity has been left

behind, as a result of stringent colonial ideals that have been internalised in the minds of those who lived under colonial rule and then passed down to those who came after it.

Tamale (2011) states that the studies before the 1990s described African sexualities along the lines of heterosexual standards, discussing aspects like reproduction. What was not discussed was desire, due to the unquestionable knowledge of African sexualities to be between a man and a woman – especially kept in a private space. This results in queer individuals in public spaces feeling and experiencing threats, which is noticeable when considering the "violence against women and men who perform their sexuality differently" (Okech, 2013, p. 10) that Okech references. This lack of intersectional data, taking into consideration how non-white-previously-oppressed people have become hierarchised, leads to the continued exclusion, invalidation, and erasure of groups of gender and sexually diverse people.

Paulo Freire (2005), in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, unpacks what it means for previously oppressed people to take on a role of power. Freire explains that the oppressed in envisioning a future where they are powerful, see themselves with power like their oppressors, as this was the only version of power they were exposed to. Freire explains that,

> "But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors."…This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor". (2005, p. 45).

Democratic South Africa offered freedom for South Africans, but unfortunately could not provide what was promised as the hegemonic ideals left behind by colonialism, leaning on cisheteronormativity and the nuclear family became too normalised and internalised by individuals. This allowed groups of individuals, who had previously experienced marginalisation and segregation to continue reproducing ideologies that served the purpose of hierarchising those who experience gender and sexuality diversely, to a lower position.

This internalisation of ideals can take place on both a conscious and/or a subconscious level. Carrim and Nkomo (2016) exemplify this in their article *Wedding Intersectionality Theory and Identity Work in Organizations: South African Indian Women Negotiating Managerial Identity*. Carrim and Nkomo research the experiences of Indian South African women, who navigate the societally separated experiences of family life in a home with gender roles versus Indian women in managerial positions which, through expectations in Indian communities is more commonly assigned to males rather than females. Carrim and Nkomo discuss how Indian South African women have this conscious understanding of how they have to,

> "construct hybrid identities in both spaces that resisted the essentializing practices of each. It appears the effort was to compartmentalize what they perceived to be non-convergent identity influences, yet at the same time make adaptations." (2016, p. 272)

An example presented of how Indian South African women were affected in this hybrid identity, was the manner in which they were isolated during social events. A participant explained how social events, a space of networking and socialising, are a necessary 'given' when working in a managerial space (Carrim & Nkomo, 2017). However, in her experience of being from an Indian South African family, the participant claimed that because she has no experiences being a part of a conversation about managerial duties and especially with men, white bosses are less likely to socialise as easily with Indian women than they are with white women. Indian South African female managers would leave the social events earlier – displaying how they do not have a sense of belonging at home because they transcend gender role binaries, or at work where they have internalised these actions of having the identity that is 'should not' freely socialize in a business space with men.

Carrim and Nkomo state that,

> "The life stories of the women in our research also confirm that identity work does not begin at the point of entry into a managerial role (Watson, 2008). Instead, identity formation is an iterative process of reconstructing and renegotiating aspects of the multiple sources of one's identity over the life course. Such an approach can assist in capturing the temporality of social categories, identities and identity work." (2016, p. 274)

The cost of unequal power relations in knowledge production here indicates how knowledge itself has the power to continue unquestioned for decades – using very similar methods of control that has previously been attributed to colonial oppression – the normalisation and internalisation of enforced ideals. These relay the importance of understanding why research needs to be intersectional, to cater for the needs of all marginalised people, rather than assuming that, for example, Indian South African women are now managers and are no longer in need of rights-based discussions and changes. The relevance of this to my research is to ascertain what the motives are behind the dominant knowledges being (re)produced about gender and sexuality, including who is allowed to speak in spaces of power and interactions that have impacted individuals enough to build on their knowledge on gender and sexuality diversity.

2.2 Power and Privilege: Who Can Speak and What Are They Saying?

What is fundamentally clear from the information discussed above and in many existing works of literature and experiences, is that historically, cisheteronormativity has been the prevailing privileged identity when discussing gender and sexuality. Looking closer at society and the lengths to which LGBTQIA+ people and allies have to go to advocate for equal rights indicates that the development of gender and sexuality beyond the model of cisheteronormativity has not been favourable to diverse identities. Historically, people who believe in ideas of heterosexuality, cisgenderism and nuclear families have been systematically and unfairly advantaged, inevitably creating a hierarchy, displacing people from 'accepted' positions the moment their gender identities and/or sexual orientations diverge from this cisheteronormative standard.

This research focuses on privilege because in doing so, we can interrogate forms of power and dominance that often go obscured in research on inequality and injustice. My approach to understanding cisgender and heteronormative privilege in the Indian South African community has a strong focus on the intersection of identities and experiences, something Linda Alcoff (2006) in her book *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* terms as "interpretive horizons". Alcoff describes interpretive horizons as,

> "a substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves" (2006, p. 95)

Moya (2011) who quotes Alcoff's interpretive horizon theory, states that "the knowledge we produce is nevertheless intimately influenced by how we conceptualize our shared social world and whom we understand ourselves to be in that world" (Moya, 2011, p. 81). Both Moya and Alcoff claim that how we view both our own identity and the identities of others, is through our experiences with the world and how we position ourselves and interact with others as a result of it.

By researching privilege, we begin to see a clearer picture of what ideologies people are socialised into when developing perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity through the knowledge (re)produced. Here, assimilation into society is based on how privileged people make sense of cisheteronormativity. Through looking at the ideas privileged individuals get socialised into, we can answer the question: 'who has been allowed to speak about gender and sexuality?', through asking, 'what have people been taught to think about and how to act?' Here we get to answer the questions, 'who can speak?' and 'what are they saying?' in terms of gender and sexuality diversity in the lives of straight, cisgender Indian South Africans.

Here, I refer to Grada Kilomba's (2013) book *Plantation Memories*. While Kilomba discusses race and gender as the main focus of her article, her ideas can shed light on other social identity experiences that have been marginalised within the field of knowledge production. Kilomba discusses how discourses are not neutral – they all serve a particular purpose and in the case of oppression, serve the privileged. Quoting Derrida, Kilomba writes that there exists "a violent hierarchy that defines who can speak" (2013, p. 26). What Kilomba discusses is that those who have been oppressed are not silent out of choice – there is no access to space and resources for them to speak and advocate for the changes that are necessary for their equality.

Instead, oppressed scholars are made to doubt and question their opinions and knowledge by being described as "very personal, very emotional, very specific", etc. (Kilomba, 2013, p. 26). Kilomba's book further explained how she was marked as a Black female student at a predominantly white university but was rendered invisible as she was not given access and opportunity to the very university she was provided acceptance at. What is important to note is that what Kilomba explains can be a

paradoxical situation, providing an even bigger challenge for marginalized individuals. Individuals who are considered different from the standard model society adheres to, for example, cisheteronormativity, are marked as different and their bodies are placed within the hierarchy, lower positioned compared to straight, cisgender individuals. While their markings make them visible enough to be up for interpretation, a simultaneous and paradoxical method of control makes their rights and needs invisible, for example, marking them as Black females in a university space but telling them their research is too emotional and does not belong in said spaces.

Sandile Ndelu (2017) provides two examples of this when it comes to being transgender at South African universities. A transgender student, in the study by Ndelu, from a South African university explained that their university transgressed boundaries by allowing gender-neutral bathrooms. This student felt that it was a "step forward" because as a transgender person, they were first marked and discriminated against based on them not being able to use a female or male-exclusive bathroom. Now they were allocated a space of belonging (Ndelu, 2017, p. 22). However, what this student also pointed out was that the gender-neutral bathrooms were simply refashioned disability bathrooms, where it was now a "gender-neutral and disabled bathroom". While this student had no problem sharing their space with a person with a disability, they felt as though they became invisible and had no sense of belonging once again – "But then also I feel like the bathrooms were created for people who physically [due to their disabilities] need those bathrooms. I even feel like I'm taking somebody's space when I do use gender-neutral bathrooms" (Ndelu, 2017, p. 22).

Another student in Ndelu's study explained that they were marked by their difference in names – their actual name and the name that was legally placed on their documents at birth. This student explained how they worked hard to get the university to call them by the name they felt was right for them when graduating, but while they did accomplish this, they "fought so hard" for their name to be on their graduation booklet, but because it was a legal document, they did not succeed (Ndelu, 2017, p. 31). This student states that "I think the biggest problem is that we don't exist" (Ndelu, 2017, p. 31). Both of these students were marked as different and felt the effects of being marked as different from cisgenderism, yet they were also placed in a position where they were invisible when it came to their rights and dignity.

Many privileged individuals are given the power to choose when to draw a particular line at what rights are granted to those who are marked as different and up for interpretation. This itself, displays a powerful manoeuvre when privileged individuals use ignorance to pretend that they have done all that needs to be done, or when they choose which parts of the past to erase. Melissa Steyn (2012) in *The Ignorance Contract*, discusses how the above description of being 'ignorant' of other social identities when you are privileged, is not the absence of knowledge, but rather a power manoeuvre to keep your privilege without being directly oppressive. An example of this can be found in a study by Deevia

Bhana (2014) titled *'Managing' the rights of gays and lesbians: Reflections from some South African secondary schools*, interviewing school managers who address the topic of the South African education curricula. Bhana notes how the curricula does not include gender and sexuality knowledge, a sharp contrast to what the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* adheres to when attempting to provide LGBTQIA+ people with equality. Bhana adds in a particularly profound quote by a teacher,

> "F(2) FCS: If that teacher has strong moral values or religious values, or cultural, whatever … that teacher might not … teach that topic adequately in a humane or good way, and then that teacher might um, come across as biased, prejudiced or whatever, and the kids will pick it up and eventually the kids learn from the adult about how to treat gays. If that teacher doesn't feel good about gays and the topic, the children will feel the same, some children will feel the same and then treat the gay person as a nonhuman being." (2014, p. 77)

Cisgender and heterosexual teachers can often misuse the authority provided to them in a classroom by developing the knowledge they teach to suit their own beliefs and perceptions. They use their own socialised ideologies and/or values to reproduce the ideas that they were exposed to, regardless of the effect it has on LGBTQIA+ students or straight, cisgender students and how they respond to their LGBTQIA+ peers. The effect of this is that teachers then impart a compulsory cisheteronormative way of thinking to their learners, in doing so passing down prejudices and biases without even directly stating that it is their own values or ideologies. As a result, these teachers create a whole classroom or grade of learners willingly partaking in this same form of ignorance each year they teach.

Steyn (2012) describes two main consequences of this ignorance. Firstly, she describes how privileged and powerful groups of individuals choose to 'forget' the past where their identities were the oppressive victors, encouraging the action of 'moving on' because 'that era is now over'. This form of ignorance is used to claim positions of power as one's own, by stating that now that an oppressive era is over, your social identity is not attributed to your success. Steyn describes how privileged people get to avoid the negative connotations attached to a time where their identities were in power – and in doing so, relieve themselves of the duty, need or desire to undo the very systemic injustices that were left behind by oppressive structures. Steyn states that,

> "Protecting the emotional well-being of the subject is necessary in a context that, if responded to honestly and accurately, would produce a great deal of personal anguish, guilt and shame." (2012, p. 16)

One does not have to act on the guilt about the privilege afforded to their cisheteronormative identities if they do not admit in the first place that they have acquired the privilege that historical structures have prized. While the equal future we work towards, is one where we can truly 'forget and move on', for now, identity politics are going to continue to be necessary to unpack, unlearn and then undo the unequal power relations that have been left behind and reproduced by dominant powers.

Chandra Mohanty concludes in the *SAGE Handbook of Identities*, that,

> "While borders continue to be held in place to construct insiders and outsiders, and power is exercised at all scales transforming difference into hierarchy, identities will continue to matter in social justice work…gender identities are less important in a world where gender justice is no longer a necessary form of collective struggle. This is the world we seek in the future. But it is not the world we have inherited or occupy now." (2010, p. 538)

Mohanty's continued focus on identity politics indicates a need to understand how identities are developed on, socialised by power into ways of thinking. While we prize a future where identities are not the reason behind opportunity or success, this is not the world we currently live in, and we cannot force it to be through ignorance without playing a fundamental tional role in continued marginalisation.

This leads up to Steyn's (2012) second consequence, which is the main focus of this research. Steyn describes how children who grow up in environments that used ignorance as a weapon, do not learn how to critically analyse society and do not question the very privilege they have been provided with. Through ignorance, their privilege becomes normalised, and the failures of those who do not identify with their social identities are read as a personal failure and not a systemic failure. Steyn, when analysing ignorance in racial injustice aptly claims that,

> "The child was mentored into repressing the impulse to question, thus minimizing opportunities for misgivings about the racial and political realities being played out in his home and beyond". (2012, p. 14)

This is the importance of conducting research with those who are privileged, because of the necessity in beginning conversations that may never begin within some contexts, because of the very people driving cisheteronormative motives of their own.

Dennis Francis (2019) displays how this takes place in the context of South African schools when researching, *"What does the teaching and learning of sexuality education in South African schools reveal about counter-normative sexualities?"* Francis claims that "In many previous studies on the teaching of sexuality education in schools, findings suggest that teachers are not willing to teach content about gender and sexuality diversity" (Francis, 2019, p. 413). Francis's article details how gender and sexuality diversity is placed in the hands of privileged people who then have the power to choose what knowledge is being taught about the topic – even choosing if the topic is taught at all. Francis (2019) notes that it is not just teachers who relay compulsory heterosexuality, but that gender and sexuality diversity knowledge is severely lacking in teacher-training programmes. This affects a whole education system, where gender and sexuality are erased through using ignorance as a mechanism, in such a way that if never brought up in the different levels of education, many individuals can live a large portion of their lives not knowing the LGBTQIA+ community exists, while simultaneously rendering LGBTQIA+ students invisible and feeling alone.

With regards to people who are privileged, the action of sharing power with those who are oppressed to open up spaces and opportunities of equality, begins with understanding the power one holds as individuals who occupy normative positionalities. It is the understanding that what we do with the power provided by society when we attempt to work towards a more equal future, is not to choose which way we believe that oppression needs to end, but rather to understand the very oppression we enable, and put a stop to it. According to Alice Wabule (2017), often through academia marginalised groups were kept in subordinated positions by privileged researchers who chose to research "on" participants rather than "with". For a future with equality, it is time for privileged individuals to cross the barriers of ignorance, offences taken, need for categorization and attachment to power which makes us feel comfortable, and start working 'with' oppressed individuals, rather than 'on' oppressed individuals. As James Baldwin stated in *Everybody's Protest Novel*,

> "Those categories which were meant to define and control the world for us have boomeranged us into chaos; in which limbo we whirl, clutching the straws of our definitions." (1985, p. 19)

What is important in research about perceptions is understanding that they come from a variety of spaces, people, and interactions, as well as historically inscribed ideologies and systems of power. Looking at the articles above, whether it was a teacher choosing not to educate their students on gender and sexuality diversity, universities that did not look beyond the first steppingstone to equality for transgender students, or black female academics being allowed into a space only to be isolated, what this research reveals is that humans are the very embodiment of the ideals, norms, and ideologies that they have been socialised into. This makes narratives a subjective representation of one's life.

2.3 Subjectivity, Embodiment, and Intersectional Experiences

On any given day it is evident that if one looks around, people are playing a role – wherever they may be or whomever they are. We unconsciously assimilate into roles that are dictated for our specific social identities because we are born into a world where social identities have existing meanings attached to them. We embody these expected meanings of what being an Indian South African is, for example, simply because we are socialised into societies that precede us as individuals. This embodiment places expectations on how we should mould our positionality within the society we are a part of, where we navigate oppression and/or privilege based on the meanings attached to our social identities. This role is an assimilation into the societies that we live in, where we interact with power as we develop perceptions of our own. With this role comes ways of thinking and acting, where we learn how to read our bodies, and then read the bodies of others, interacting with them accordingly. My dissertation focuses on these dynamics of diverse young, straight, cisgender Indian South Africans and the perceptions they have come to develop, through their process of embodying gender and sexuality in their unique spaces, experiences, and interactions.

Chandra Mohanty (2003) explains how humans carry around "growing-up places, the institutions, a sort of backdrop, a stage set" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 90). Mohanty elaborates that how we act in the present,

is based on the pieces of the past that we carry around because it provides a sense of familiarity. We become so attached to the world we are socialised into, that changing our perceptions presents a terrifying risk or loss even if or when we find out that our ideas are constructed by the past, rather than being our own (Mohanty, 2003).

In turn, we fail to recognise the symbolic violence we permit unto others when we simply exist in the status quo. In doing so, our very existence legitimises the status quo. This act of normalisation where symbolic violence is unnoticeable speaks to Pierre Bourdieu (1992) and his idea of misrecognition. Bourdieu (1992) explains that power within societies becomes normalised because we misrecognise or do not register dominant power as abnormal, as a violation of human rights or as symbolically violent. This misrecognition Bourdieu (1992) explains is,

> "the set of fundamental, prereflexive assumptions that social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, of accepting the world as it is, and of finding it natural because their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world."(Bourdieu, 1992, pp.168).

When we live in a world which normalizes cisheteronormativity through daily actions and in the dispersing of knowledge, we begin to misrecognize the symbolic violence and marginalization that continues to be perpetuated. Bourdieu (1992) explains that sometimes normalization can make marginalization so invisible or unmarked that individuals who are marginalized can simply think of their marginalization as unquestionable.

In positions of privilege, sometimes this misrecognition can manifest as a method of control, almost like ignorance was described above, permitting oppressed individuals some illusion of equality without needing to actively provide them with the rights promised. B Camminga (2019) in their book *Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa*, explains how South Africa's Constitution offers a space of refuge to transgender refugees, but what South Africa as a location cannot promise is their safety – a huge paradox. Camminga offers a powerful conclusion that,

> "Gender refugees, in coming to South Africa and applying for asylum, enter a kind of limbo; they cannot go but they also struggle to stay. They are allowed in but evidently nothing more. They cross the border…but that does not mean that the state or South African society for that matter in any way has to allow them a notion of home or recognisable life…beyond the doors of the RRO, the notions, perceptions, and imaginings of gender refugees—those ideas of 'freedom, freedom, freedom'—meet the actuality of a space that is structured very much like the countries most asylum seekers have just fled." (2019, p. 225)

What South Africans are being socialised into is a country that is not described in the Constitution. South Africa offers a space of legislative safety that unfortunately does not translate into safety in everyday life. To uphold the promises of a haven for any LGBTQIA+ individual within South Africa's borders, we need to begin conversations with privileged people, tasking them with actually understanding the perceptions gained from their identities and how it influences the existence of LGBTQIA+ people. This oftentimes presents further challenges.

Margaret Wetherell (2010), in *The SAGE Handbook of Identities*, introduces how challenging identity politics can be, stating that, "Nearly every scholar who works on identity complains about its slippery, blurred and confusing nature" (Wetherell, 2010, p. 5). Wetherell explains that since the beginning of identity politics, studies have displayed a link between membership and inclusion, where emotion plays a huge role in ensuring a sense of belonging to an identity. Authors like Iris Young and Judith Butler describe identity and embodiment in terms of a sense of belonging as well.

Young (2002) argues that a person is evaluated through their embodiment, in the form of the discourses they use and the interactions they have. Young states that embodiment is read by people in society – whereby the way a person reads how others perceive them, and how they react to others, is based on the embodiment of their identity. Young describes the embodiment of identity, almost as if it is a physical thing, where your experiences of socialisation are physically visible and reacted to.

In a study titled, *"Sport, Girls, Trouble and Humour: Black and Indian Boys Negotiating Gender, Race and Class in a Formerly White Single Sex School in South Africa"*, Bhana and Pattman (2010) discover ways in which young, Indian, and Black learners make sense of their identities. Bhana and Pattman witness how these students share experiences of embodying their masculinity, for example, through their shared jokes and sports. However, what these authors also note is how the boys in this study sometimes differ from the general perceptions and expectations assigned to masculinity. For example, sexual prowess is assigned to masculinity, versus sexual innocence assigned to femininity. However, these authors witnessed that one participant claimed that if their school became open to switching from an all boys' school to a mixed gender school, he would want to be friends with females as he thought of them as more than simply a sexual option (Pattman & Bhana, 2010). Results like these led Pattman and Bhana to believe that "there is no unitary masculinity or femininity, but different ways of being male and female and that these are produced relationally and inscribed with power" (2010, p. 548).

Masculinity and femininity may manifest differently person by person, but there are some expectations that result in the 'real identities' society expects individuals to embody to gain a sense of unquestionable belonging. Judith Butler (1993) questions what it means to embody this expected 'real' identity. Butler (1993) states that "realness" is not a category, but rather a standard by which one is judged according to how they perform their identity (Butler, 1993, pp. 129). Butler ascertains that,

> "…what determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect. This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of a racial and class norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates." (1993, p. 129)

Butler (1993) claims that by embodying predisposed norms and acting according to the way you were socialized into, aligning with the standard that was expected of your identity, you attain this 'realness'. When gender and sexuality are embodied diversely, individuals lose this 'real' status in

cisheteronormative societies and are marked as different, losing their status of belonging. Butler states that no person has the 'freedom' to not align themselves with these predisposed norms, that when a person is given the gap to be 'free' or have 'agency', powers are just negotiating what they are allowed to, and not allowed to do. This is relevant to South Africa – gender and sexuality diversity is protected by the law, but LGBTQIA+ South Africans cannot feel or be safe or equal because there are powers more pervasive than the Constitution that take away their sense of belonging. Thus, people in privileged positions tend to mould themselves into these 'real' identities, which is reinforced by belonging and an emotional connection and attachment to their identities. This might not even be a conscious decision or reaction, but rather an unconscious assimilation into who they have been taught to be.

However, Butler (1990) questions even further, "to what extent is "identity" a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity?" (Butler, 1990, pp. 23). Butler questions why we concern ourselves with gender according to reproduced norms to be followed, rather than the way we experience relative aspects of it within society. We define identities according to bodies, and how bodies are read and interacted with, but,

> "Within those terms, "the body" appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But "the body" is itself a construction, as are the myriad "bodies" that constitute the domain of…subjects." (Butler, 1990, pp. 12-13)

Butler states that if bodies do not have a meaning to them before the marks that are placed on it by society, how can we look at the body differently, "no longer as a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will?" (Butler, 1990, p. 13). Butler questions how do we move forward from this exact point of my research, where we have established that people's knowledge is made up of their experiences and interactions in different contexts and spaces? Where moving to a space of equality is an action where younger generations unlearn these continuously reproduced knowledge which essentialize bodies. The aim is to move toward a point where the marking of a body, or even the choice of wanting a label at all, is done by an individual through their own personal and emotional experiences, rather than of what has been written on people who look like them historically by society.

Unfortunately, it is not so simple. Individuals, for centuries, are expected to embody the femininity or masculinity assigned to them and pursue nuclear families – and if they choose not to do so, whether to not get married or to not conform to what it means to be masculine or feminine, they may lose their sense of belonging. They may experience exclusion, even though they are still heterosexual, cisgender individuals. Besides, the moment they align themselves with gender and sexuality diversity through social justice movements, their privilege is at stake. Identity politics display how even though people

have cisheteronormative identities, their sense of belonging can be taken away the moment they diverge from the standard detailing how they need to think. Identity politics confirms that a sense of belonging is very precarious, hard to negotiate and is held together by a thread that is easily cut once you diverge from what is expected.

How do we create a space where we teach people how to relinquish the power they have been given just for existing, if to them, losing said power means losing their sense of belonging? Nevertheless, Zembylas and Boler (2002), suggest that this state of discomfort, where one has to negotiate with the privilege one has been handed can be harnessed and used constructively to get individuals out of their comfort zones that permit complacency. Zembylas and Boler assert that dealing with those emotions can be helpful because,

> "A pedagogy of discomfort invites [people] to leave behind learned beliefs and habits and enter the risky areas of contradictory and ambiguous ethical and moral differences." (Zembylas & Boler, 2002, p. 2)

They go on to explain how learning about what you have been socialised into means understanding what you have been "taught to see (or not to see)", where "[a] pedagogy of discomfort entails creating spaces for epistemological and emotional problematizations of individual and collective emotions, histories, and sense of self" (Boler & Zembylas, 2002, pp. 5-6). They suggest that placing people in spaces and teaching them about "unquestioned values" (Zembylas & Boler, 2002, p. 7) that have been reproduced historically, may make them feel a sense of discomfort, but it is this discomfort that can lead to change. The comfort zone they are in because of their privilege may not lead them to learn about the experiences of bodies differently to their own, whereas a state of discomfort may, where they see marginalized bodies as those who deserve social justice.

While suggestions and proposals to address the need to change are useful, what is certainly a bit more comforting is that identity politics have also displayed that social justice movements and accountability have been taking place. Solidarity has been developing across contexts, people, and spaces – to a point where we are at a stage where we have already gained momentum and stopping does not seem possible, where power is not left unquestionable in many contexts anymore. Mohanty (2003) defines solitary, "in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 7). Mohanty claims that societies are so intricate, that assuming that oppression is a commonality, ignores the communities of people who have stood, worked, and fought together.

Mohanty references Jodi Dean's (1996) notion of ''reflective solidarity'', stating that she finds it useful. It is described as being,

> "…crafted by an interaction involving three persons: ''I ask you to stand by me over and against a third''. This involves thematizing the third voice ''to reconstruct solidarity as an inclusive ideal,'' rather than as an ''us vs. them'' notion." (Mohanty, 2003, p. 7)

The above quote explains that solidarity needs to include all of us collectively working towards the future together. Mohanty (2010) explains how identity politics has an important presence in social justice, offering two aspects – (1) "identities are often resources of knowledge especially relevant for social change", and (2) "oppressed groups need to be at the forefront of their own liberation" (Mohanty & Wetherell, 2010, p. 530).

These aspects show that the future we need to build on includes all identities offering their input of the knowledge productions they were socialised into. The way forward, or the next action, is to share the power one is given because of one's privilege, to place previously oppressed people at the front of social justice, so that their needs, which have historically been pushed aside, can be catered to. Camminga (2018) explains how South Africa's Constitution phrased a utopia for transgender people, allowing gender refugees into the country when their own home country rejected their identity. However, Camminga also explains that "on the other hand, their communities and the places wherein they seek shelter maintain the same attitudes as before" (Camminga, 2018, p. 93). This example displays how there is a gap between formal and substantive justice relating to gender and sexuality diversity.

Equality is about equal footing, and rather than react as if attacked, as if forced to lose your position, people with privilege need to understand that equality and justice are about making sure we use our power to create inclusive and equitable futures. It is not about defending the platform on which you stand on from being stolen, it is about extending your platform make space for those who have been unfairly positioned below you.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

For straight, cisgender individuals, acknowledging privilege and unlearning cisheteronormative ideologies may happen at different times during a person's life – some early, some later, some never. Any conforming or unlearning is influenced by the knowledge learnt through the people we meet and the things we are exposed to. My personal experiences before university were made up of snippets of conversation, the very rare person being 'out', television shows and briefly hearing LGBTQIA+ terms being used as insults or slurs. These were situations with minimum information, where I, as a privileged individual, was not challenged to understand more or seek further information if I did not wish to.

What changed this indifferent state was my experience with teaching and the understanding that I would never achieve any goal of helping learners if I could not understand how diversity worked, and how it affected the lives and experiences of said learners. Critical Diversity Studies equipped me with the experiences and knowledge of gender and sexuality diversity, but it also enabled me to become critically aware of the lived realities of those around me. I pay more attention now to how the people I have grown up with may or may not share my ways of thinking, having perceptions of their own driven by their experiences. While some may be negative towards the LGBTQIA+ community, some are positive, and others remain in a state of indifference. This indicates how the knowledge bases and perceptions people develop are very different, where our experiences take us to varying "interpretive horizons" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 95). Alcoff has explained the necessity of researching interpretive horizons, stating that,

> "The concept of horizon helps to capture the background, framing assumptions we bring with us to perception and understanding, the congealed experiences that become premises by which we strive to make sense of the world, the range of concepts and categories of description that we have at our disposal. It is thus useful in elucidating cultural, or group-related, and personal differences that affect interpretation." (Alcoff, 2006, pp. 95-96)

Alcoff's claims indicate this need to research the experiences individuals have had, that have impacted their ways of looking at identities and how they situate themselves in the world. This was relevant for this research, not just for the participants and the questions they would be asked, but also for my own positionality. Paula M. L. Moya (2011), details that "'who we are and from where we speak' is highly relevant for the intellectual projects that we are likely to pursue" (Moya, 2011, p. 79). Immersing myself in these perceptions, and wanting to know more, is what made up the foundation of this study and motivated the questions informing the project. This research was designed around a search for the knowledge and perceptions of those who share my privileged straight, cisgender identity, and Indian South African background. Taking on the form of a qualitative study, this research allowed me to be immersed in the varying knowledge and experiences individuals may have, focusing on what the participants retained through their experiences and how they were socialised into ways of thinking about gender and sexuality diversity.

The nature of this study called for a qualitative research methodology informed by Queer Theory and Critical Diversity Literacy frameworks. These approaches made it possible to uncover discourses of power behind perceptions, by attempting to answer the question "what do straight cisgender Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality diversity?' The main component and data source of this research were focus group conversations with nine straight, cisgender identifying Indian South Africans about gender and sexuality diversity using a range of multimodal questions. Through using multimodal questions, I was able to formulate focus group questions and activities that targeted informed insights into how gender and sexuality diversity is viewed by Indian South Africans – a topic with a combination that remains infrequently examined in existing literature.

3.1 Data Sources, Collection and Collection Techniques

3.1.1 Focus groups

The participants of this study were purposively sampled based on demographic information that they shared – Indian South African, straight, cisgender identifying and between the ages of 20 and 35. Alkassim and Tran (2016) describe purposive sampling as follows,

> "The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. It is typically used in qualitative research to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources." (Alkassim and Tran, 2016, pp. 2)

Purposive sampling, discussed in further detail in the section *Selection of Participants*, below, provided a technique for me as a researcher to find individuals willing to be a part of the study that were willing to have conversations on gender and sexuality diversity. From a number of individuals, I had to choose from – nine were selected because they presented a diversity in their experiences and identities. While each of them relayed that they do identify as Indian, straight and cisgender, all nine individuals were from different career and/or study spaces. In fact, no two individuals studied or work in the same faculty as another. They also live in a wide variety of locations, have attended public and/or private schools, and have different relationships with their families and friends. They play important roles in their communities, being between the ages of 20 and 35, as students, managers, first job workers, planning for children and being the group of people looked towards to lead the future, in turn passing down the knowledge they have learnt. While purposive sampling was used as a technique of finding participants, similarity in experience or other social identities was not a criteria I searched for – rather, diversity was more relevant and important to my study.

Individuals were placed into three focus groups based on convenience, where all participants were happy to meet on a required day and time. These focus groups were audio-recorded, allowing the

physical identification of all participants to remain anonymous, besides for those in the focus groups themselves. These audio recordings made it easier to transcribe the information gathered.

Krueger and Casey in George (2013) explain that "a focus group study is a care-fully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (George, 2013, p. 254). A focus group offered individuals who were similar in privilege, an environment to not just answer questions but to converse with others with whom they shared identities – agreeing or disagreeing through the sharing of experiences. This created a comforting environment to discuss privilege which is something many people can be nervous to discuss – discussions on perceptions were permitted in a way that one-on-one questioning may not have been able to delve into.

Due to the constraints of COVID-19, and the lockdown regulations that enforced social distancing, the focus groups were held on online platforms, to ensure the good health of participants. These platforms were Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp video calling. Reflecting on these two platforms, it became necessary to use WhatsApp video calling as the main platform of discussion. With Microsoft Teams, the connectivity needed to run a smooth focus group could not be effectively guaranteed – based on my experience with the first focus group. This focus group had to be halted at varying moments, to allow participants who lost connection to reconnect and join the video call again. This interfered with the flow of conversation that a focus group needed to succeed, and an alternative option needed to be switched to instead.

George explains that,

> "The interaction between focus group participants has the potential to create a dynamic synergy that is absent in individual interviews. As Morgan (1996:139) explains, "What makes the discussion in focus groups more than the sum of separate individual interviews is the fact that the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other." (George, 2012, p. 257)

What the move to WhatsApp video calling provided was a significant decrease in connectivity issues allowing communication to increase, displaying what George (2012) described as a "dynamic synergy". This reflexivity on the switch to WhatsApp video calling indicated the value of focus group conversations, displaying how a flowing conversation can include the discussion of privilege because of a built up atmosphere of comfort.

3.1.2 Selection of participants

All participants were considered using purposive sampling based on demographic information, where they fell under the bracket of straight, cisgender, Indian South Africans between the ages of 20 and 35. The initial set of individuals were identified from my personal networks, and included people I have met at school, during my university years and teaching experiences, friends of friends, and friends of family members. They had all expressed being both straight and cisgender prior to the interview during

a personal conversation I had with each of them separately about my study, unpacking what I was looking for and the definitions of straight and cisgender identities I was writing on. This purposive sampling allowed me to find individuals that fit the most basic criteria I needed – Indian, straight, cisgender and between the ages of 20 and 35. In addition, I chose individuals who came from a variety of backgrounds, limited but not including to private or public schooling, career and study choices and geographical location in South Africa. While it was not used to define an individual before the interview, the small sample of individuals I was able to accommodate and listen to properly in this brief study meant that I needed to incorporate a wide variety of experiences in my focus groups – this is where purposive sampling became an asset to this research.

It is important to note that snowball sampling was also used, due to some of the initial participants I contacted – both those who joined my study and those who did not – suggested individuals that may be interested in participating in this study. Thus, the subsequent individuals I had contacted were suggested by those in my immediate and extended networks – all of whom stipulated that they identified as straight, cisgender individuals.

Participants offered a close examination of the influences that are pervasive in their societies and contexts today, in the form of where they grew up, where they are now, and where other influences like social media have taken them to. My research attempted to gain an understanding of perceptions from people between the ages of 20 to 35, as it was at these ages where we could find influences experienced by both the Millennial Generation and Generation Z. This offered an interesting insight into generations that grew up surrounded by technology, who were entering into spaces where they have the power to influence others. I, being born during 1996, actively fall between these two generations – according to texts and websites, sometimes too young to be a Millennial and others, too old to be a Generation Z. However, what I can state, for both these generations is that technology and social media has become a way of life, where not many people are able to freely cut themselves off from technology – whether it is for their careers or personal lives.

Participants are at different stages in their lives and careers – some were employed full time, others based at Universities and colleges completing their studies, while some were applying for their first jobs, planning for marriage and/or children. Many participants were located in Gauteng; however, a few participants were located in KwaZulu Natal.

3.1.3 Ethics

Each of these participants was approached after I had received ethics clearance from the Wits University Ethics Committee (Protocol Number: DIV200805). The initial process for all individuals included a brief, separate, conversation with them about the possibility of being in a study on gender and sexuality diversity, where they were given a summary of my research idea, the protection they would receive, and the number of people involved in each focus group. Only upon agreeing were the interested

participants sent a participation information sheet, and a detailed consent form to be signed electronically. Only participants who were willing to be a part of this study were sent additional information, and those who were not agreeable were not contacted further or coerced into joining. The consent forms were signed before each focus group, with the reaffirmed assurance that each participant could withdraw their participation at any time if they were uncomfortable, and that both the Wits University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-Medical) and my supervisor could be contacted at the provided contact details for further questions.

While the identities of participants could not be hidden during focus groups, participants were made aware in advance and reaffirmed when signing a consent form that their identities would be protected as much as possible. Therefore, in all spaces post-focus group, no personal identification details, besides demographic information stipulated, were used for any participant, and from the stage of transcription until the writing of the final research report pseudonyms were used for each participant. In addition, participants were asked to keep all information shared in the focus group confidential. All recordings were promised to be destroyed after this research report has received a passing grade, which was approved by the Ethics Committee.

The main limitation of this study was that the length stipulated for a Master's level research report did not allow for LGBTQIA+ people's experiences to be cross-referenced with the experiences of these individuals. While the purpose of this research was to understand the perceptions held by privileged individuals, a future study should follow-up with LGBTQIA+ people discussing their experiences in relation to these same topics and situations.

A further limitation of this study was the small sample sized of individuals – nine. Due to both the restraints of COVID-19 and the briefness in length and time allocated to this Masters dissertation, only a few participants were able to be accommodated, especially taking into consideration the length of time each focus group took. However, this study was to begin conversations and to gain an understanding, while brief, of what experiences individuals have in the many Indian South African communities. This is a topic of vastness which needs to be continuously studied in multiple spaces and articles, especially considering the gravity and importance of this study – and I hope in some way that I was able to contribute to some of the grassroot developments on the topic of the LGBTQIA+ community and Indian South Africans.

3.1.4 Focus Group Schedule: Multimodal Questions and Tasks

Focus group questions were designed to offer an open-ended discussion that allowed individuals to reflect on their perceptions about gender and sexuality diversity. The challenge was in allowing questions to remain direct to stay on par with my research, yet open-ended enough to gain a deeper insight of where foundations of perceptions were built upon and then maintained in the participants' experiences, without directing their answers. Questions such as, 'how did your family impact your

perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity?' points the conversation in a particular direction. This might not offer participants the experience of thinking further to multifaceted spaces and contexts, where their perceptions were garnered and maintained. The solution to this was found in an article by Katsiaficas et al. (2011) titled, *Everyday Hyphens: Exploring youth identities with methodological and analytic pluralism.*

Katsiaficas, et al. (2011) state that "narrative methods provide simultaneously systematic and idiographic ways of understanding how a person makes sense of the world around them and relates to and acts with others as a social being" (Katsiaficas, et al., 2011. p. 122). The focus here was on pointing out the amount of information one can gain from listening to a narration about how people make sense of a topic, an idea, or the world.

However, a challenge was how to gain the information necessary for your research, and Katsiaficas, et al. (2011) offered multimodal, pluralistic activities and tasks in combination with research questions, allowing for a wider range of information to be gathered. I drew on these ideas when formulating questions by scaffolding them with activities like finishing the sentence, word association, and 'power flower' activities and asking them to suggest what they think the questions related to my topic would be about. Also, this reflexively rerouted me in a different direction from asking questions that served the purpose of simply confirming my own experiences in Indian South African communities. While my positionality was an asset in the fact that I shared identities and experiences with participants, I did not want any of my own learnt ideas to silence or close down alternatives that may be shared.

These multimodal activities allowed me to gain answers to questions without the pressures of placing participants in positions where all they had to respond to is a single directive question. This allowed them to listen to what others said and relate to whether it is similar or different to their own experiences, giving them a choice to discuss their similarities and differences. Participants seemed keen to relate with others or divulge further into why their answers are different and excited to share experiences if they were similar. By giving them tasks to build their thought processes on and explore in more than one manner, I noticed that they were more eager or thoughtful when explaining their answers than when I simply asked a question. This multimodality took the pressure off at many times and turned this into less of a group interview and more of a conversation.

However, in turn, this altered the number of participants I could have in focus groups, due to the length of time participants from the first focus group took discussing their experiences. The initial planning of five participants, turned into three participants per focus group. This reflexivity and reassessment of my initial five participants per focus group was because of my experience with my first focus group which took two hours. Finding a time to allocate to a focus group taking 60 to 90 minutes was challenging enough already, and so planning for it to take longer than this allocated time posed a problem due to the fact that some participants were working full time or had their own personal duties – especially

considering the changes COVID-19 brought. In my previous experiences of focus groups, ones where I was the research participant, mediators and interviewers indicated the need to keep to a time frame that was not monotonous or tiring – focus groups taking longer than ninety minutes were not advised. This move from five participants to three was a necessary one, as the remaining two focus groups took longer than the allocated one hour – indicating that with five participants, the focus group may have taken a much longer period of time.

3.2 Data analysis and interpretation techniques: Reflecting on a thematic analysis

The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed, allowing for a deeper analysis of data. Transcriptions allow one to avoid missing important information, and this assisted in taking every bit of information relevant to my research into consideration.

Thereafter, I developed a coding system by comparing and contrasting similarities and differences. To do so, I used a thematic analysis method, with Queer Theory and Critical Diversity Literacy supporting lenses. Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as,

> "a method for systemically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning across a data set…. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences." (Braun & Clark, 2012, p. 57)

It is through thematic analysis that I was able to witness any commonalities and differences in the recorded results, referencing shared or differing perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity. This assisted in identifying and answering the objectives of my research, by analysing the themes relevant to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). What a thematic analysis offered was the coding of themes that pointed towards particular existing ideologies. Each participant of this study had their unique knowledge and experiences, developed by individual exposures, interactions, friendships, families, and education, presenting a challenge when attempting to summarise the wealth of information gained from the nine participants. While many of the participants shared experiences, what became glaringly obvious was that each individual had their own unique story that deserved to be told. This was a significant reason behind why thematic rather than discourse analysis was used. Thematic analysis offered an open-ended opportunity to look at similarities and differences – I was concerned that discourse analysis would result in the creation of rigid headings attempting to envelope all individuals underneath the same existing discourse. The essentializing of individuals into fitting underneath existing discourses was not the intention of my study.

The results of this study detail the importance of understanding intersectionality when looking at how gender and sexuality diversity is navigated throughout the lives of individuals, their education, interactions, and socialisations. Liben (2012) states that a quality that focus groups provide is that "within the social context of focus groups, participants can make meaning of their past and current life experiences" (Liben, 2012, p. 26). Gender and sexuality diversity has become complex branches of knowledge affecting individuals at different times in their lives, in turn creating a less linear experience

of knowledge production. This ultimately made answering the question, 'what do straight, cisgender Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality?' a challenge to navigate. As the findings below will display, intersectionality displayed more than just the overlapping social identities that embody who we are, but also the multitude of spaces we find ourselves in, the interactions and conversations we have, and the knowledge and actions powerful enough to define our understanding of gender and sexuality diversity. This called for reflexivity when considering how the focus group data needed to be presented.

What became necessary in the post data collection period was that the findings section needed to include two main components. One is brief ethnographical narratives for individuals, unpacking their unique experiences with gender and sexuality knowledge – as iterated above – each participant had their own story to tell. This, secondly, will be scaffolded in-between by sections detailing the similarities shared, which was be thematically organized.

3.2.1 Theoretical framework

When I started with this research, the major theoretical frameworks planned to analyse existing information and formulate focus group schedules involved Critical Diversity Literacy and Queer Theory. However, due to the results gathered from participants, it became necessary to also consult Feminist Theory and Affect Theory. These were in response to the gender roles and established femininity and masculinity binaries prevalent in Indian South African communities and due to the emotions discussed as well.

3.2.1.1 Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) Framework

The Critical Diversity Literacy Framework was developed by Critical Scholar Melissa Steyn (2015) in *The Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, outlining important skills needed within society. Steyn discusses that historically oppressed individuals are claiming their human right to be included and given space and opportunity to belong equally within society. This poses a problem, when individuals within society are not aware of, or open to discussing new spaces and opportunities where power needs to be shared between those historically privileged and those historically oppressed. Steyn asserts that what is necessary, is a more extensive list of skills to understand how power relations are present within your society and spaces, to understand how you are positioned within existing power relations. It is with this awareness that we can begin working collectively towards creating alternative and socially just futures. Steyn's goal is of a "socially just world" and to do so, calls for a "critique of society, and not just to understand or explain society" (Steyn, 2015, p. 381). Thus, Steyn articulates a list of skills one needs to learn and apply to be considered apt enough to gain "a qualification in diversity studies" – the Critical Diversity Literacy framework (Steyn, 2015, p. 379).

Steyn describes that,

> "'Critical diversity literacy' can be regarded as an informed analytical orientation that enables a person to 'read' prevailing social relations as one would a text, recognizing the ways in which possibilities are being opened up or closed down for those differently positioned within the unfolding dynamics of specific social contexts." (Steyn, 2015, p. 381)

The CDL framework informs the conceptual framework of this research, informing my development of research questions and the processes of analysis to uncover power relations, and the reproduction of normalised binaries and hierarchies. This framework was used as a foundational framework, scaffolding my activities from the beginning – thinking of a topic, writing my proposal, finding information relevant to my research, relied on when contacting participants, creating a focus group schedule and also analyzing and writing my results. It offered not just knowledge or information but also the skills I needed to consider how to critically analyse the information that I had in a way that contributed to LGBTQIA+ studies in a meaningful way.

When discussing South Africa, the word 'diversity' gets thrown into conversation easily and often – no surprise, considering the spectrum of different South African identities. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* paints a utopic picture, inviting people to live in a non-racist, non-ableist and non-sexist society, for example, where equality and justice are guaranteed to all. Unfortunately, the implementation of these Constitutional rights has not been evenly distributed amongst all South Africans. South African remains one of the most unequal countries of the world where the majority of the population live in poverty and the majority of the nation's wealth remains in the hands of the white minority population. Thus, Steyn argues that we must go beyond the word 'diversity', by understanding difference in relation to power, drawing on Stuart Hall's articulation of differences that are constructed as making a difference (Steyn, 2015).

Steyn explains the skill of critically analysing the persistent binaries that continuously divide people into categories, and then allocate advantages to some while disadvantaging others. This study focuses on individuals who are privileged by their gender identity and sexual orientation. By painting cisheteronormativity as the historical 'normal' or 'acceptable', LGBTQIA+ and gender non-conforming people are co-constructed as different and unequal. Thus, this framework is of importance to gain an understanding of what perceptions individuals in privileged straight and cisgender positionalities are socialised into in their experiences, and whether they are a threat or an opportunity for the dismemberment of inequalities. Steyn talks about society as 'messy', stating that CDL,

> "asks of us to recognize and interrogate these 'messinesses' and yet still to act into the world with a will to bring about more socially just arrangements: not only to understand them, but also to change them; to become an ally to those whose oppression would otherwise be further entrenched through conscious and unconscious assumptions of privilege." (Steyn, 2015, pp. 387-388)

Steyn's paper describes intersectional identities as overlapping with power relations and hierarchies, a messy space that is a challenge to unpack. However, Steyn states that the way to a socially just world needs to bring the theory of CDL together with practice to unpack the "messinesses" of society, to ensure that privilege, whether unconscious or conscious is critically understood. As Steyn further describes,

> "A commitment to social justice requires being open to, and affirming of, such multiple realities: seeking out knowledges constructed from non-dominant positionalities, speaking out as a voice from a marginalized space, acknowledging the legitimacy of the organic experience of othered groups, recognizing value in alternative histories, putting in place and supporting affirmative programmes" (Steyn, 2015, p. 384).

Steyn (2015) suggests that to unlearn and dismantle bigotry and inequality, one needs to begin having conversations that discuss the processes that ensure its survival. Steyn (2015) highlights the importance of considering the emotion behind perceptions, to understand what or who socialises us, and why we are so emotionally invested in maintaining ideologies that we become complacent to oppression. If we are socialized into ideals by the provision of a sense of belonging, how much are we adhering to on what is 'normal' or acceptable'? Steyn calls for self-reflexivity, which is what I hope my focus groups provided – a beginning or continuing point of questioning one's privilege, including my own.

"One of the key insights that frames CDL is that power never names itself as such" (Steyn, 2015, p. 386) and so many of us who are privileged can survive not being aware of or not contributing to the struggle for equality because we already belong. Therefore, using CDL as a framework was not just about gaining skills to analyse answers for research, but contributing to "the willingness to bring together theory and practice in everyday life" (Steyn, 2015, p. 387). It is a way to look at society "to become an ally to those whose oppression would otherwise be further entrenched through conscious and unconscious assumptions of privilege" (Steyn, 2015, pp. 387-388). I wanted my research to go beyond the academic space, and this framework offered a space to begin trying that.

3.2.1.2 Queer Theory

A prevailing assumption surrounding queer theory is that it only caters for the study of LGBTQIA+ individuals – a group of people not being interviewed in this dissertation. However, Eve Sedgwick (1990) states that although queer theory was established to interpret the discrimination of queer sexuality and gender, it has been developed as a framework that investigates normalized, reproduced binaries and hierarchies.

These ideologies that categorise individuals into binary positions dictate how people are supposed to act through the reproduction of norms. Through queer theory, we begin to understand how binaries, hierarchies and norms are reproduced, not just by those in official positions of power, but also by those in privileged positions whose very actions and reproduced beliefs contribute to infringe on LGBTQIA+ rights without active awareness of the impact of their actions. Queer theory assists with questioning

whether these binaries or hierarchies of femininity and masculinity benefit all cisheteronormative individuals, posing questions such as 'who exactly benefits from these ideologies when the way you are supposed to live your life is unquestionably dictated from birth?'; 'How does maintaining these binaries come at a cost to some individuals?'; 'Does it affect who you are friends with, or whom you admire?'; and 'is your privilege secure if you think differently or challenge dominant ideologies?'

It is with this understanding that I analysed existing ideologies within Indian South African communities that shaped perceptions of gender and sexuality. With queer theory, I identified institutions, ideologies, individuals, and groups that socialised people into a system of perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity – whether positive, negative, or indifferent. Using a queer theory lens enabled me to see through any normalised ideas expressed by participants, to witness how, if so, do individuals conform to, or resist, societal ideas of gender and sexuality, and how they feel towards LGBTQIA+ communities. This approach includes going beyond the boundaries and binaries that society imposes to separate the 'acceptable' from the 'unacceptable'. This lens also allows for the identification of perceptions that are gender and sexually diverse, and that incorporate inclusivity and complexity.

Additionally, what queer theorists offered for my research was the need to focus on the intersectional identities of Indian South Africans. Audre Lorde's (1982) address, *Learning from the 60s*, included one of her most frequently cited quotes that, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives". This indicated the dire need to understand how intersectional society has become, where ideologies, socialization and reproduced knowledge come from a variety of spaces, people, and organizations – but all still serving the same purpose – a method of control. Patricia Hill Collins has asserted that,

> "Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions… Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression." (Collins, 2000, p. 18)

Using this idea of intersectionality, especially in a topic as widely experienced as gender and sexuality diversity, was important when asking questions that began the discussion and grasping of different perspectives developed in the lives of all participants in this study.

Much like CDL, in fact, used in partnership with CDL, queer theory offered both the knowledge and skills to analyse information, with my main aim being the contribution to existing LGBTQIA+ knowledge and databases. These frameworks informed all of the actions I took, from the way to chose my topic to the end result submitting my dissertation. It informed the noticeable actions in this dissertation such as the articles I chose in the literature review section and the way I analysed results –

but also the work behind the scenes such as writing my proposal, how I asked questions during focus groups and even through following the advice I received from my supervisor.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

As human beings, we have been subjected to classification into social identities across multiple eras – that is what we share – when our bodies are read, it is according to the social identities we are a part of. This reproduced need to classify individuals into existing labelled boxes means that we often look past unique experiences that play a role in moulding us into the people we become. It is through these experiences that we navigate who we are and what we believe in, and through this research, I attempted to find out briefly, what do young Indian South Africans who are straight, and cisgender identifying think and feel about gender and sexuality diversity.

The process of organising how this data would be presented posed multiple problems of overlapping themes. These stories that emerged were about growing up, socialisation, advocating for change, internalisation, as well as privileged and/or indifferent perceptions. The data included narratives of gender roles and expectations, education, and the necessity of having these conversations. There are also narratives of how participants negotiated with their socialisation – or did not – and how they navigate privilege, some contributing and some not contributing to the LGBTQIA+ community. What was apparent from these discussions with privileged straight cisgender Indian South Africans was that three main topics of discussion came up – (1) gender roles and expectations, (2) education and (3) the necessity of having these conversations. While these are the main themes, interspersed between each section are subsections led by the different questions and tasks encompassing these focus groups as deduced using a thematic analysis. While similarities are a big part of summarizing the results of this study, unique experiences were always the aim of this study, due to how many different life stories individuals can have being a part of the many Indian South African communities.

These stories focus on gender and sexuality as a whole; the experiences participants have with their gender and sexuality, and the diverse identities linked to gender and sexuality. These results cover many of their shared and differing experiences growing up, and who they are now. While these stories hint at a possibility that Indian South African communities offer spaces where the LGBTQIA+ community is equally valued and recognised, some stories hint that it is not as safe and welcoming as the Constitution expects of us as South African citizens.

4.1 Gender Roles and Expectations

What was evident throughout these focus groups was that these participants shared experiences of gender role expectations dictating what they should wear, do, think and how they should act. All nine participants experienced the mechanisms Judith Butler referred to as ‘boying’ and ‘girling’. Making it clear that while not all Indian South African communities enforced gender roles, it still is a widely normalized action according to these participants. Butler in Ahmed (2017) explains that ‘boying’ or ‘girling’ is when a person’s life is dictated according to the sex identity assigned to them at birth. Individuals, upon being assigned a sex identity by medical staff, are expected to carry out the societal

standards already determined and predisposed historically for said assigned sex. Ahmed (2017) elaborates on how this mechanism shrinks the world by stating that,

> "Even before birth: we might watch on the screen to see whether it's a girl or boy, where that is decided by virtue of the absence or presence of a penis. The attachment to gender rests from the very beginning on phallocentrism: on the penis as the decider of the future, two sexes as two paths: the sexual binary as fate, as fated, as fatalism." (2017, p. 25)

Ahmed's elaboration assists us with analysing how the gender roles experienced within Indian South African communities play a role in the earliest memories and foundational developments of gender for some Indian South Africans. As discussed by many participants below, to reproduce this normative binary of gender identity means you are given a sense of belonging. This is the privilege awarded to individuals when they conform. This sense of belonging that is promised ensures that the gender binary is secure, omitting those who are diverse in gender identities from spaces completely.

These experiences with the gender binary have had an impact on how these participants view their own gender identity and, how they interact with other individuals based on what they were taught to believe. This speaks to Sara Ahmed's (2004) *Affective Economies*, a state of emotional attachment to one's identity based on emotive experiences that impact how one interprets their own and other identities. Ahmed (2004) explains that "In such affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119).

This sense of belonging to a family, community, or group of friends, enables ways of thinking that impact how one interacts or does not interact with those outside of their identity. For example, Avery, Delta, and Ellis, in one focus group, when talking about the questions they thought would be asked, brought up possible judgement and prejudices. This pointed to the possibility of there being a deeper meaning for those experiencing gender and sexuality diversely, where they are seen as more than just an everyday person, where their identity is up for interpretation being against a norm.

This points to Steyn's (2015) Stuart Hall reference, where some differences are socially marked as different from the model standard of cisheteronormativity, which places gender and sexuality diversity in a space where any existence is up for interpretation. This marking of bodies indicated that within some Indian South African homes, there is this Affective Economy that Ahmed (2004) discusses where belonging is determined by cisheteronormativity and how one reacts with gender and sexuality diversity is based on how you have grown up to believe your cisheteronormative identity states you should.

4.1.1 When did you first know you were male/female?

When tasked with answering the question, 'when did you first know you were male/female?', each narration brought us to a recurring language theme used on each participant in the form of 'cannot' and 'should'. Participants explained how rather than finding out they were male and female, they were

placed in situations where they were told 'you cannot do this because you are a boy/girl', and instead 'this is what you should do', as per their assigned sex.

Allie was told by her mother that she cannot play outside with her brothers, she should be inside cleaning and learning how to cook. Leighton was told, 'because you are a girl', after asking why she should be wearing pink. Michael and Parker explained that from the time they were able to understand words, they were told they cannot be with their mothers in the kitchen, but they should rather be outside with male family members fixing cars and building things. Delta, who wanted to fit in with her brothers was told she cannot dress like, or play like them, but instead, she should sit with her legs closed and dress a certain way. Avery was told she cannot go out whenever she wanted to like her brother. Instead, she should ask permission first and even then, she was not always allowed to go out. Ellis, who loves soccer, was told she cannot always be with the boys in her school who enjoyed soccer too, she should be with girls.

The language used with many participants in the environments they were in, indicated how from a young age their gender was policed according to what they 'cannot' do and what they 'should' do. Priyal mentioned that,

> "to be fair right, before you are born, if your parents want to find that out, they already making way for you to be a girl, or be a boy, so that is kind of imbedded in the process before you get there…obviously you are dressed as a girl, pinks only, boy its blue only. So, I think as soon as you start, like, comprehending and understanding, then yeah. So, for me, it was also from a young age." (Priyal, 24 years old)

This speaks to Butler's analysis of the 'boying' and 'girling' mechanism used in society to dictate how a person's life will be affected, according to the medical assignation of their sex. Priyal has this shared awareness that the process of gendering bodies according to society's definition of gender, is not just embedded in the process of growing up – but the process can begin even before birth. This can become a challenge to unlearn when all your very first foundational blocks of gender and sexuality ideas is that cisheteronormativity is a norm, where aligning with ideologies that were engrained from a young age affects how you view certain people, bodies, and ideas.

Word association activities tasked participants with answering what was the first thing they thought about when hearing the words 'gender', 'masculinity', and 'femininity'. While some of them did have differing associations, which will be discussed in the following sections, many of them adhered to gender binary associations, as highlighted in bold in the table on next page.

	Gender	Masculinity	Femininity
Ellis	The person you are	**Physical strength, physical appearance like muscles**	**Sensitive**
Avery	**Male or female**	**Strong guy with muscles**	**Calm, fragile and perfect**
Delta	Fluidity and social construct	Hegemonic, social construct and the way you want to express yourself	Social construct and the way you want to express yourself
Michael	Male, female and other	**Man**	**Female or woman**
Parker	**Male and female**	**Male and strength**	**Female**
Priyal	**Male, female**	**Dominant**	Equality
Teagan	**Clothes**	**Dark, wood, toxicity**	**Gentle, light and strength**
Leighton	**Toilet**	**Lack of masculinity in Donald Trump**	The depth of South African women
Allie	Non-Conforming	Conversations about equality	Trevor Noah video – You strike a woman, you strike a rock/*'Wathint' Abafazai, Wathint' Imbokodo*

Table 1 - Answers to an Introductory Word Association Activity on the words Gender, Femininty and Masculinity

The answers in bold, describe an alignment to the gender binary that each participant thinks of first when they hear each of the words. They follow the binary format of gender being read as 'either or' of the two assigned sexes, or simply, gender as being male or female. The answers display gender performativities, such as masculinity being aligned to being a man, and femininity with being a woman. This affected different aspects of their lives, for example, (1) the characteristics they assigned to femininity and masculinity, and (2) the way it affects their everyday experiences.

The first thing to consider is the characteristics attached to femininity and masculinity. Masculinity was associated with physical strength and appearance and dominance, according to both Ellis and Avery – a strong man with muscles. Femininity, on the other hand, was associated with being sensitive, calm, fragile, perfect, and gentle. This highlights the stereotypical roles individuals, when assigned a sex at birth, are expected to follow to be rewarded with a sense of belonging, where males take on the roles of being strong, breadwinners of families, and women are expected to be the binary opposite. It is

important to this study to note that participants also spoke about how they were aware of their privilege associated with performing their gender identity according to social expectations – they were aware of their sense of belonging.

Adhering to these roles is required to benefit from the relative privileges allocated to those who perform the gender that corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth. Allie, who is aware of this privilege, speaks about how she knows that she is lucky because she likes dresses and long hair. So, even though she dressed in trousers when she was younger and had a short haircut, the change expected by both society and her mother as she started growing up, to that of a more cisgender performative experience was not a challenge:

> "I think around, when I got into my teenage years, that's when it like started changing. I started getting more into dresses, and you know I love my dresses, so while I do wear a jeans and t-shirt, I do still wear a lot of dresses too. Uhm, so yeah around my teenage years I started getting into all of it… But as I started growing older, mostly around 11, 12, was when I started growing out my hair, that was also like, my mother would tell me you need to behave in a certain way. But I also wanted to grow out my hair." (Allie, 24 years old)

Teagan is also aware of her privilege and explains that her dressing when she was younger was the choice of her mother – but whether she was wearing dresses or trousers, she was comfortable with the clothing she wore. This reminded me of a bell hooks (2000) quote – "it has never been a simple matter for women to unite a love of beauty and style with comfort and ease" (hooks, 2000, p. 32). hooks (2000) states that young feminists may never understand the emotional importance of 'comfort clothing', and why protests wearing pants were bigger than it appears now. What we can take away from this privilege is that some individuals may never understand what it might be like to be oppressed for the way you dress because they have learned to conform to societal expectations of their gender performance, or can freely dress however they please. This poses a problem for gender non-conforming individuals, who cannot simply feel comfortable in clothing that does not reflect how they feel inside and so dressing in a manner considered 'different' from their assigned sex places them in a position to be interpreted and/or marginalised.

Outside of the home is a space contributing to the second takeaway from this table, displaying how gender roles and expectations affect the everyday life experiences of participants – indicating how reproduced ideas can affect gender and sexuality diversity. Teagan and Leighton explained why 'toilets' and 'clothes' came to mind – the main recollections of where they see the gender binary being enforced. Teagan and Leighton claim that they do see how within societies the gender binary serves to exclude and erase gender diversity. Teagan explains that the reason behind words like 'dark', 'wood', and 'light' came to her mind first, because these are the types of aesthetics applied in advertising for gendered products. This further enforces ideas of masculinity and femininity, displacing individuals from the simple act of feeling comfortable purchasing products.

This introductory section provided an insight to how most of these participants have had their knowledge and in turn perceptions structured around cisnormativity. Many participants stated that their experiences in their respective Indian South African communities have been ones where their gender defines many of their actions, including what actions is considered not for them. This indicates that in some Indian South African experiences, gender as cisnormative is very normalized. However, it is of importance to note that not all participants viewed gender in this manner. While it will be discussed more in detail in the relevant sections below, Priyal experienced workplace inequality which altered her views of rigid gender roles, Allie as a teacher with a firm interests in politics and a supportive father differed in all three definitions and so did Delta a Humanities scholar with an interest in equality. This paints a picture of how Indian South African communities are not homogenized groups.

4.1.2 'If someone in my family had to come out, I would feel…'

One of the most common experiences described by individuals, was that gender and sexuality diversity was not a topic spoken openly about. Most participants, when asked to finish the sentences, 'if someone came out to me at campus or work, I would feel…' and 'if someone in my family came out to me, I would feel…', express differing emotions. Participants explain that within their home and families, they already knew how strict ideals of gender roles and expected straightness were.

Delta explains that,

> "I would feel like I would be needed to be there to support them…I know that in my family, I would definitively try to be more supportive of them because the environment is definitely not ideal." (Delta, 22 years old)

Avery:

> "I will support them, of course I know others might not support them, it might be scary that not everyone is going to think the same…they wouldn't accept it, so you would do whatever you can to support them." (Avery, 21 years old)

Leighton:

> "Uhm, depending on which side of the family, I would also be protective of them because of the older generation." (Leighton, 33 years old)

Teagan:

> "I think I would be sad because it's going to be such a difficult thing and it shouldn't have to be. It's something that is normal." (Teagan, 24 years old)

In some Indian South African families of these participants, individuals are willing to negotiate with reproduced ideologies, however, some may not, and this continues to reproduce ideals that a person has to be either cisgender male, or cisgender female, and then attracted to the opposite sex. What was concerning to hear, was the answers to a question asking participants to just think about, not reveal, any other cisgender straight Indian South Africans in their lives that they would be able to have conversations with about gender and diversity. All participants responded that people are missing from

their lists, some of whom would not even want to begin a conversation, others stating that their attempts to have a conversation will be ignored or reacted to in offense.

What was noticeable though from many participants is that in some cases, gender diversity is looked at more critically than sexuality diversity. For example, when Parker was asked what he associated with the word 'sexuality', he had nothing come to mind. He explained that whether you are attracted to men or women, is personal to you. However, when it came to 'gender', 'masculinity', and 'femininity', as evident in the table above, Parker responded with binary ideas like, "male and female", "male and strength", and "female", respectively (Parker, 24 years old).

When asked to do a power flower activity, to put himself in a position where his gender identity and/or sexual orientation changed to a non-normative identity, Parker agreed with Michael and Priyal that there would be more judgement if someone had to come out as a diverse gender. From Parker's experiences, it is noticeable that gender roles within these Indian South African experiences are more enforced and encroaching on those gender roles would receive a more negative reaction. He explains that he was never taught to like girls exclusively, he just did, but he was taught how to act like a male individual.

Priyal agreed with him, but adds that,

> "Also, I think, to be fair, that we are Indians, and we see that if you are an aunty, you should be with an uncle and if you are an uncle, you should be with an aunty, and that is probably what I grew up around. (Priyal, 24 years old)

These teachings are at a point where gender needs to be taught, but sexuality did not, because sexuality became so normalised that participants internalised it as the only possible form of desire based on their gender identity. Pattman and Bhana (2010) reference Judith Butler when explaining this phenomenon, stating that,

> "gender differences are expressed, highlighted and reified through heterosexual practices and heteronormative thinking (Pattman & Bhana, 2010, p. 550)

Priyal's point about sexuality being a 'taken-for-granted given', speaks to Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix, where a strict gender role socialisation gives way for a binary manner of looking at sexuality, where it is normalised that you are supposed to desire the opposite sex. This conversation about stricter gender roles took place amongst Leighton and Teagan but highlighting a different point.

Teagan explains the challenges she would face if she wanted to change her gender identity:

> "I think that's like a different thing. So, I didn't grow up in a gender-conforming way, I dress how I want, I do what I want, it's not like I do what I want *laughs* but at the end of the day, there is that thing that I am still female. I still fit into a box. So, if I had to change my pronouns to they/them, [for example], I know for a fact that [family member's name] wouldn't give a shit. He is going to call me whatever he wants me to call me, he will respect that I can be what I want, but he is not going to make the extra effort, to address me in a way that I want him to. So, like,

> *sighs*, I think it does affect things, because then I am different to what they think I am, like, it does impact Indians and behaviour." (Teagan, 24 years old)

Teagan's experiences indicate that sexuality may not be reacted to as negatively in her spaces, but that gender non-conformity may be, because of the reliance on strict gender roles and the emphasis on not deviating from them. Leighton initially stated that her family did not have strict gender roles but changed her mind after hearing Teagan's explanation. She states,

> "Listening to what Teagan said now, that actually made me change my answer, because so we grew up in the same household, where we didn't have to dress up as a girl, we could wear boys clothes all the time. I think when it came to pronouns, I think that's when the game changed. Because now you want your family to address you as them, they and their, and that's a different thing. I don't think our family, especially the older generation, I don't think they will get it. (Leighton, 33 years old)

Leighton discussed the idea that you are given a space to express your gender identity however you want to – and this is their privilege, being able to wear comfortable clothing. However, when it comes to being addressed according to a gender identity that is not assigned to you at birth, that is where you meet a crossroad – as if you have now reached the point of unacceptability. It appears as if clothing may not be a threat if you still claim your cisgender identity, but when you come out as non-cisgender you become a threat to cisheteronormative ideals and you can receive backlash. In addition, Teagan did not even go as far as to suggest "he" as a pronoun for a situation where she is not comfortable with the medically assigned "she" pronoun she was given. This shows how there seems to be a divide between cisgender identities and non-cisnormative identities, where boundaries in her experiences are secure around 'she' and 'he' being in opposition to 'they'.

Leighton touches on the fact that she witnesses more Indian South African conversations about sexuality diversity. However, this space is not given to gender diversity in her experiences. When asked to elaborate, Leighton states that,

> "I think that society is still learning, I think society is still learning. Like, 5 years ago, it was just [about] sexuality, now its gender and sexuality, I think society is just learning, especially because this words never existed, now you come up with words, that explains…" (Leighton, 33 years old)

This speaks to Camminga's (2019) research point that,

> "In all cases, the word 'gay'—a word with a far wider circulation—was something heard in the media or used pejoratively by religious or political leaders. The word 'transgender' was introduced through contact with organisations or 'educated' individuals in countries of origin." (Camminga, 2019, p. 15)

It appears as if 'transgender' or more inclusively, 'non-cisheteronormative, gender non-conforming' individuals experience barriers that those who are cisgender and non-heterosexual do not necessarily encounter in Teagan and Leighton's experiences. This appears to be linked to the same ideal that bell hooks (2000) addressed about the need for intersectional feminism. hooks (2000) stated that "Sisterhood could not be powerful as long as women were competitively at war with one another" (hooks, 2000, p.

3). Intersectional change has to consider all diverse groups, and by separating the rights of gender and sexually diverse people, after centuries of conflating their experiences is causing a further division. It leans on the idea of 'if not now when?' which was used by hooks (2000) to ask why white women were being allowed to vote, but women of colour were expected to wait their turn – they were both groups of women but were dealt with separately.

What was apparent for many participants was that their reactions to someone coming out to them in their family versus someone at work or campus would be different. Their experiences indicated that their families would not be as welcoming to any LGBTQIA+ identity, and while at their work and campus they would need to just be a listener, in their families they may need to be a supporter for their LGBTQIA+ family member who would receive negative responses. This speaks to the Love Not Hate (2016) campaign's study introduced in the introduction section of this dissertation, where Indian LGBT South Africans had the highest percentage of individuals stating 'no one knows' they identify as an LGBT individual. This is disappointing to note, considering the referenced statistic in the same study that 52% of LGBT Indian South Africans are 'completely out' and 41% are 'open to some people'. However, participants stating that sexuality diversity may be more accepted than gender diversity can be one reason for this level of outness – the gender roles in some Indian South African families are rigid enough that transcending those boundaries appears to be a bigger worry for some families than being in a sexually diverse relationship. However, through these types of speculations, we can understand how Indian South African experiences can be unique on their own, indicating the lack of homogenization in experiences and ways of thinking. The key in this case is to gain a further understanding on the homes that have negative reactions to the LGBTQIA+ community – something a new study would have to research.

4.2 Education

4.2.1 "The first time I heard about the LGBTQIA+ community was…"

A second common point of discussion across the three focus groups was that of participants allocating blame to their lack of opportunities to have these conversations on their schools. The recurring theme when finishing the sentence 'the first time I heard about the LGBTQIA+ community…', was the lack of basic education in participants' experiences of gender and sexuality diversity. Participants discovered the LGBTQIA+ community or looked more into it later in their lives. This makes answering the question, 'what do straight cisgender Indian South Africans think about gender and sexuality?' a challenge to answer, when each person explained how they were directed, not freely moved, into ways of thinking. Their education on this topic at a basic school level was lacking, with only two participants claiming that they heard about it in Life Orientation.

Some of the first and most common experiences from all the focus groups were a lack of LGBTQIA+ knowledge in their schools not offering a safe space for questions to be asked. Avery and Delta both

explain how they were introduced to the LGBTQIA+ community in high school, but not in detail, with no time or space to ask any questions. While Delta went ahead to learn additional information, Avery said it was something that was put out of her mind, until this focus group. This provided different spectrums on Indian South Africans, one where Delta's curiosity led her to believe that she needed to know more information, and the other Avery's privilege enabled her to put these discussions in an 'out of sight' box.

Priyal, Parker and Michael were all agreeable with the point that they only became open-minded after school because in school they were not educated enough on the topic to be anything but close-minded about gender and sexuality diversity. Priyal even going as far as to claim, "I don't know if the boys noticed this, I never ever saw any of that happening in school, it was strictly only straight", which both Michael and Parker agreed on. They stated that the only time this would have ever come up in their school would have been if there were a "trigger" in the form of someone at school coming out, but this never happened. This is an unlikely situation – experiencing a space where gender and sexuality were only and would only ever be experienced as cisgender and straight in a large, dynamic space. This plays a role in understanding that some spaces individuals were exposed to in their schools were ones that enforce cisheteronormative expectations to a point where it becomes normalized and internalized; displaying the extreme difficulties for LGBTQIA+ and/or gender non-conforming people to come out. This, for privileged individuals, places them in a position where cisheteronormativity is considered the normal, making 'coming out' a challenge, thus not providing the necessary 'trigger' Michael, Parker or Priyal indicated would be needed for conversations to be had about gender and sexuality diversity.

Teagan explains that while she was exposed to different races, cultures and religions at her school, gender and sexuality diversity knowledge was not something she was exposed to:

> "In school, well for me…while I was in school with a whole bunch of races, it wasn't common to see gay people…I didn't have LGBT people in school with me. It was just different races, and it wasn't something that was taught, and focused on, so that is why, even though I was exposed to different races and different cultures and things like that, I wasn't exposed to different sexualities." (Teagan, 24 years old)

Teagan had the same experience that Michael, Priyal and Parker did, being in a space where cisheteronormativity is normalised to a point where there was an impression of no LGBTQIA+ people. While the environment became open enough for different cultures and races to be welcomed into the space, queer sexualities and gender nonconformity were not embraced. This plays a role in why changes that occur need to be intersectional, where marginalised identities are not dealt with in a mutually exclusive manner. If Teagan's school could open up to a diverse range of races and cultures, why was cisheteronormativity not simultaneously tackled? This speaks to how in certain spaces, some forms of diversity are accepted, or at least discussed, whereas others are not.

For example, Dennis Francis (2017), in an article titled, *"I think we had one or two of those, but they weren't really": Teacher and Learner Talk on Bisexuality in South African Schools,* discusses bierasure. Francis (2017) explores how teachers in South African schools enabled bisexual erasure by creating further binaries that serve to exclude the existence of bisexual learners, thinking of sexuality as exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. Francis's results display how teachers were more likely to discuss homosexuality as an identity, but not bisexuality. A form of bierasure was based on misconceived perceptions as described by Francis who explained how surprised he and his colleague were in a previous study when teachers indicated that learners were bisexual because they were born with both male and female genitals. This acted as a merging of intersex and bisexual individuals, both different identities with different experiences, thus trivialising the experience of both (Francis, 2017, p. 209). If teachers were willing to have conversations about homosexual sexualities, why were they not open to discuss or believe that other forms of sexualities existed?

Teagan then paints a picture of her school, which further grouped learners according to interests, such as sports, leading her to claim that her school would have not been a safe environment for anyone to come out, since even being interested in a hobby was a means to exclusively classify individuals accordingly. For Teagan, there was no space for LGBTQIA+ people to feel safe enough to come out in the first place. Leighton shares this experience with Teagan, claiming that her high school would not have been a safe place, adding that in general, from her experiences, her community would not have been safe space. Leighton points out that even though there is a 10-year difference between her and Teagan, she does not think LGBTQIA+ rights have changed much, given the high levels of homophobic and transphobic hate crime and murders in South Africa that she reads about. While she does believe that new spaces have become open for LGBTQIA+ people, she believes that not many spaces can be considered entirely safe, in her opinion, and that makes her worry that privileged groups are a continued threat to LGBTQIA+ people.

The basic education in the experiences of these nine individuals were ones where they had a lack of or complete absence of LGBTQIA+ education or awareness in schools. This turned their experiences into ones where they were led to assume that all learners were expected to present and express straightness and cisgenderism to have a space of belonging. This becomes a superficial place of belonging for LGBTQIA+ learners who may have had to hide their identities out of fear – especially considering that their existence may have felt silenced, as if cisheteronormativity was so normalized in these school spaces that their identities did not exist or were outliers to the cisheteronormative standard. While none of the participants expressed experiences of outright negativity where schools, teachers, or learners purposefully harmed LGBTQIA+ communities or members, it speaks to the earlier point mentioned in this literature review section of cisheteronormative privilege being allowed to choose which education and awareness they wish to spread. It also plays a huge role in how an LGBTQIA+ learners in these schools may see themselves growing up.

4.2.2 Teachers and comfort

An additional recurring theme was that of teachers and their role in educating individuals on gender and sexuality. Teagan explains how some of her teachers need to be taught how to be comfortable with the topics they are expected to teach. She narrated two stories, one where her male Life Sciences teacher was uncomfortable with answering female students' questions about the female body, and secondly,

> "I think it also, the environment we teach these things needs to be welcoming, uh, do you remember when we were in school? And all the girls would be called to the hall because they would be giving us a period talk, and it's kind of that thing where all the boys knew what we were talking about, but it was so uncomfortable for us, because it wasn't a welcoming environment, it wasn't something that you could feel like you could ask questions about. It was just a huge talk, and you have to sit through it and be quiet and leave. So, I think when it comes to these things, you need an environment that is welcoming and accepting and also like, when I think of my LO teachers, they were all not people I would go to and talk to about my problems, especially if they are the ones that are going to be teaching these things." (Teagan, 24 years old)

In an article by Ngabaza, et al. (2016) titled, *"Girls need to behave like girls you know": the complexities of applying a gender justice goal within sexuality education in South African schools*, authors touch on Teagan's point about comfort and teachers. Ngabaza, et al. (2016) state, "Some scholars question the values the school sexuality curriculum focuses on, arguing that teachers are uncomfortable with teaching sexuality as they grapple with reconciling their values with the content in sexuality education." (Ngabaza, et al., 2016, p. 72). Ngabaza, et al. discussed the findings of their research, explaining that,

> "The principals from two different schools suggest that gender equality work in LO is subverted by "cultures" or "society" in which binary gender stereotypes are woven into cultural practices" and that "Studies have shown that some LO teachers' responses to sexuality education are shaped by gendered and moralistic discourses which dominate their perceptions and engagements with learners, and which are particularly directed towards young women" (Ngabaza, et al., 2016, pp. 73-74)

Teagan spoke about how her experiences, where being a young female meant obstacles like uncomfortable teachers and one-sided talks were placed when learning about bodily autonomy and sexuality. Ngabaza, et al. (2016) support this point when they explain that comfort in teaching sexuality is integral to sex education – if these teachers have situated their teaching according to cultural and societal standards rather than in a realm where their goal is to provide education, education about bodily autonomy is not provided to learners.

These instances where Teagan was not given a space to explore her bodily autonomy impacted how she viewed herself as a woman. Teagan explains when being asked 'when did you know you were a female?', that, "I had no moment where I knew I was a girl, but the one moment that came to my mind, it was the day I got my period…I didn't have a moment where I was like 'oh I am female' besides periods" (Teagan, 24 years old). Her education led her to define herself according to her reproductive abilities aligned to societal ideals of femininity, rather than personal experiences.

Leighton and Allie, who were in the same focus group as Teagan, were able to contrastingly respond, bringing light to how some of their teachers permitted them bodily agency to begin developing their perceptions about their gender and sexuality. Leighton claims that it is the mindset of a teacher that permits learning because she had a Biology teacher who allowed students to freely ask questions about bodily autonomy, and this empowered students. Leighton – "I think it's how your teacher acts every day, you know, 'I have students who are going through puberty right now, and they are going to be learning the reproductive organs, how am I going to handle this?'" (Leighton, 33 years old).

Allie agreed with this, stating that Life Orientation has the potential to open up spaces that develop perceptions well, but it is about the teacher enabling spaces of comfort. Allie states that in school she too was empowered by her Life Sciences teacher, who opened up spaces for questions. However, now she works with a young teacher, who refuses to have these conversations with her classes or other teachers. Pascale (2010) explains that "hegemonic culture provides structural validation for epistemologies of ignorance that reproduce existing social hierarchies" (Pascale, 2010, p. 157). This speaks to many of the participants' experiences, where their perceptions were not developed because the culture of cisheteronormativity is so ingrained in their school culture that their ignoring of a topic allowed for the continuation of societal hierarchies.

This brief section provides contrasting experiences from participants, highlighting the idea that LGBTQIA+ equality in some of the schools these participants attended was evident. While some individuals spoke about the challenges some teachers faced with regards to the comfort they felt about addressing topics, other teachers took on the task with ease. This comfort that teachers exude while talking about the human body and an individual's experience with the own body can be a skill developed in tertiary institutions who train teachers especially in abovementioned subjects like Life Orientation and Life Science that already have topic that offer the addressing the topic of gender and sexuality diversity. These answers displayed how education has an influence on a learner's life and how in cases where there is an absence of comfort, individuals remember how uncomfortable they felt for many years to come.

4.2.3 A change in times

One aspect that participants noted which many hegemonic Indian South Africans in their lives had no control over, was the information participants could gather from the growing wealth of knowledge in alternative spaces like universities or the internet. Participants alluded to these experiences constantly as 'a change in times'. While the Basic Education of individuals were minimal or nonexistent, participants were not completely oblivious to the existence of the LGBTQIA+ community, whether it was because of social media, the internet, or new spaces that they entered into.

Bhana and Buccus (2016) in a study located contextually in an Indian South African area navigate how some fixed ideals can become contested through a change in ways of thinking and acting. Bhana and Buccus concluded –

> "…following Massey (1994), spaces are seen as socially contested relations. They are not fixed but permeable and contested. Thus, for the purposes of this study, whilst the space of Blue Lagoon has been historically associated with Indians, these spaces are not fixed. They are open to change, contested and changing. This conceptualisation allows us to see spaces as being produced by the people who inhabit them." (Bhana & Buccus, 2016, p. 323)

If spaces are not fixed, but rather impacted by those who inhabit them, it is understandable why many of the research participants of this study were not passive in their learning of gender and sexuality diversity. Parker, Michael and Priyal became aware when representation increased on Facebook and as a result, some people they knew or heard about, felt safe enough to come out. Most of Michael's knowledge production was based on information he received through technological means – which was shared by Leighton.

Leighton and Michael, while in two different focus groups, have had experiences that relate to each other – growing up Christian and leaning quite a bit on technology and social media. Leighton and Michael explain how when growing up in a Christian family some spaces are not open to gender and sexuality diversity, and as a result, they grew up not entirely surrounded, but surrounded by cisheteronormativity, nonetheless.

Michael, when tasked with explaining why he had some people who would not be on his list of people to talk about gender and sexuality diversity, says that,

> "It depends on the person you are speaking to about it, not everyone would be comfortable speaking about it. For example, like in the Christian religion, if you talk to someone who is super religious, they might take offence to that." (Michael, 24 years old)

Michael explains how some individuals would refuse to have any conversation with him and may react offensively to the topic on the basis that according to the Christian ideologies they follow, gender and sexuality diversity is not allowed. Nevertheless, Leighton and Michael both attribute much of their perceptions to technology like television series and social networks, Leighton even claims that "I think the community grew, as technology grew…that's how I learnt about the community" (Leighton, 33 years old).

While Michael explains that he grew up around gender spaces that may reject gender and sexuality diversity, when it came to discussing any terms related to it, he displayed an informed basis of knowledge. Michael explains that when word associating with 'non-binary', what came to mind was, "someone who does not have one gender specifically" (Michael, 24 years old). Michael said that it was through social media that he learnt this – it was through people relaying their experiences online, that he began to understand that there are different identities.

Michael states his schools did not teach the diversity of marginalised identities well:

> "If you look at it, the books that we read have been written so many years ago, like a female main character was not that important, it was always a male character. I think if that can change, other things can change from there." (Michael, 24 years old)

Therefore, Michael had to rely on what he discovered online to assist with his understanding of any identity that was not his own. Michael's reliance on technology and social media to develop his information, led him to believe that schools can cultivate a space of change if they incorporate and normalise marginalised identities in their syllabi, the way these discussions have been normalised in some technological spaces.

Leighton, being nine years older than Michael, experienced a different form of education before democracy, where while she did not go into much detail, explains that her school would not have been a safe space to talk about gender and sexuality diversity. Yet, Leighton explains how Taylor is the first person she thinks of when hearing 'non-binary', a character from the television show *Billions*. She explained that to her, the learning never stops, even at the age of thirty-three, she has learnt new things about the LGBTQIA+ community from the television show *Sex Education*:

> "So, I don't think sex education stops or started with age, I think you are constantly learning. Especially as we become more open to education and sexuality." (Leighton, 33 years old)

Leighton's experiences, growing up in a space that was religious and cisheteronormative, placed her in a position where her biggest source of knowledge was from the internet. Her curiosity to question taken-for-granted 'givens' was part of her personality – exemplified again, by how she asked her mother when she was younger why she had to wear pink. While technology grew, so did Leighton.

However, this curiosity for change cannot always be ensured, especially when it tasks people with navigating their privilege. When asked what she thinks about the word 'femininity', she explains,

> "Because, like, South African women just, there is so much depth to us. There is our concern of safety, there is the problems we go through as women in South African, and then just women in the world. Basic problems that we have like toiletries and how expensive they are, just like dealing with lesbians, and how…there is a horrible thing 'corrective rape', where they rape lesbian women. That is why I always think, South African women, it is so much deeper than just soft, that people think of when think femininity. So, when I think femininity, I think South African women, because there is so much more layers and layers of it, and to sum it up for me, that would be South African women." (Leighton, 33 years old)

While Leighton does understand that she grew up in a world with cisheteronormativity, she explains how she sees society through an intersectional lens, where the experiences of women are made up of multiple layers and that not all privileged people are trying to bring about change. She explains her understanding about the lack of safety in the lives of South African women, including lesbians who are exposed to the oppressive idea of corrective rape – denoting how cisheteronormativity becomes a threat to the lives of LGBTQIA+ people. So, while we can rely on Michael and Leighton to further their

education on gender and sexuality diversity, we cannot ensure that all people are entering technological spaces as willingly.

While Michael and Leighton grew up in environments that attempted to normalise cisheteronormative ideals, their thoughts about gender and sexuality diversity display that they lean more towards diversity as a result of learning about these experiences through technology. The takeaway from Leighton and Michael is an interesting insight into the effect knowledge can have on what people think about gender and sexuality diversity, especially if taught from a young age. If Leighton and Michael can access information powerful enough to develop their perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity, whilst still respecting their religion, schools and education may do the same thing.

A change in time for Delta was a different experience compared to other participants. '*What types of questions do you think will come up in this focus group interview?*' was asked, devised to gain an understanding, before the interview directed us to any space or idea, of what thoughts participants had around the topic of gender and sexuality diversity. Delta's answer was:

> "Uhm, I think that you would ask us how we perceive 'queer', people who identify as queer like, uhm, I am not sure how to put that, but you understand what I am saying. Like, if we have any prejudices towards them, uhm, how we find them in our own lives, uhm, what are our personal opinions about sexuality and fluidity and I don't know, that's what I think." (Delta, 22 years old)

Delta's answer pointed out that she had some experience with gender and sexuality diversity, using descriptors like 'queer' and 'sexuality' comfortably. This was not the only time. During a word association activity, the first thing she said that came to mind when I brought up 'gender', was fluidity and social construct, and 'masculinity' was hegemonic, social construct and the way you want to express yourself. Delta also responds with the following when asked what came to mind when she hears the word, 'sexuality',

> "Mine is not the same as gender, but I think of it in the same way, uhm, I think of it as fluid. When I think about sexuality, I think of my own, and I think of others that I have known, and I see fluidity just as gender is. Gender doesn't have to be one thing, and neither does sexuality, it doesn't have to be heteronormative, you know?" (Delta, 22 years old)

When asked the question, 'when did you first know you were female?', Delta makes the following clarification:

> "When did we know that we were truly female? Or that it was an identity like pushed on us?" (Delta, 22 years old)

Delta's reasoning behind her existing knowledge of gender and sexuality diversity was because of her Humanities background from university and that she had met diverse people through her studies.

Delta's experiences reminded me of Linda Alcoff's "interpretive horizon". Alcoff (2006) describes it as a,

> "substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves." (Alcoff, 2006, p. 95)

Moya (2011) says identity and experience are mutually constitutive, as they both work dependently on each other to produce knowledge, where knowledge production happens through the process of how we "conceptualise our shared world and whom we understand ourselves to be in that world" (Moya, 2011, pp. 80-81). Delta repeatedly indicated that how she viewed gender and sexuality, was through who she was personally, the knowledge she gained from her Humanities courses and the people she had met with diverse identities. This change in times indicates that there are some spaces where hegemonic Indian South African ideals may not be able to further reproduce rigid knowledges and perceptions of cisheteronormativity.

However, there are some spaces which indicated this strength of cisheteronormativity clashing with this 'change in times'. When finishing the sentence, 'if someone had to come out in my family, I would feel…', Avery states that she would be surprised because she assumes all of her family members are straight, especially because of the negative consequences of being a gender or sexually diverse person in her religion. However, how she would act is not to reject them like she believes some family members will, but rather to support them, because she is scared to think of how alone some people might make a gender and sexually diverse person feel.

Unfortunately, moving into new ways of thinking with a 'change in time', may not be as simple for her in real life as it was for her in this focus group – for reasons such as family disagreements and deeply internalized ideologies. However, what Avery does present is another example of "a change in times":

> "I mean, us younger, I mean younger generations we are getting more educated about this here, I am not so educated but I am getting there, and I would see things different compared to how the older people in my family would see it. Uhm, so, obviously for them, it wouldn't be like, they wouldn't accept it, so you would do whatever you can to support them. (Avery, 21 years old)

Avery discusses a change in times, where younger generations are open to learning because they are in spaces that allow for learning – such as Avery's space which was her university. Therefore, while she may not be in a family space that is safe for her to have these discussions, that does not mean she is not willing to discuss it with new friends or grow her children up differently.

However, this age gap where participants cannot disagree with those elder than them posed a new point of discussion, as participants indicated that to not have opinions that contrasted with those older than them can become an unquestionable manner of reproducing knowledge. This is shared by Teagan and Delta who state that there is an age gap between them and older generations who appear more ingrained

in cisheteronormative ideals, who may not even be willing to have conversations about gender and sexuality.

Mantell, et al. (2009) did a study on *Gender norms in South Africa: implications for HIV and pregnancy prevention among African and Indian women students at a South African tertiary institution*, that contributes to this conversation. These authors aimed to gain an understanding of how gender norms impact ways of thinking and acting in the lives of African and Indian South Africans. They came to multiple results, but this one stood out:

> "Although they may be more likely to adopt empowering gender norms, they may still be expected by parents and partners to subscribe to traditional gender-role hierarchies that characterized their parents' generation." (Mantell, et al., 2009, p. 142)

While many participants discussed how they have differing viewpoints to older generations, there are some situations where they are subconsciously following the gender and sexuality norms of their teachings. While it may appear as though the issue could end after older generations are out of powerful spaces in their lives, this is not always the case, especially considering the unquestionable nature of cisheteronormativity in some spaces. Leighton did not fully share the experience where she believed that younger generations can be open to gender and sexuality diversity. She explained that some of her cousins, some of whom are only four years older than her, are against any form of gender and sexuality diversity – she explains that some of them are even against getting tattoos.

These participants pointed to spaces that offered a freedom in learning which afforded them the freeing of experience to develop on their own perceptions without feeling a loss of belonging. The spaces that did not afford them a freedom of learning was attributed to many characteristics such as rigid gender roles, internalized and normalized cisheteronormativity, the apartheid education system and even religion which in itself are all topics that can have multiple books written about them and how they affect the LGBTQIA+ community on their own. This is the importance of having conversations to gain an understanding of when and how perceptions develop, because oftentimes they can be different for many individuals. While a change in times points towards a system of unlearning, the strength of cisheteronormativity could persevere if gender roles and expectations, and a lack of basic education schooling does not develop a knowledge basis of gender and sexuality diversity in the spaces described by these participants. While there are some people, spaces and situations which can permit discussions about gender and sexuality diversity, the strength of cisheteronormative ideals is still visible in the lives of many participants. This itself plays a role of an additional obstacle when they are navigating their socialisation and norms.

4.2.4 Navigating socialisation and norms

When navigating socialisation and norms, individuals displayed how their own experiences with gender and sexuality diversity have impacted the way they think. For some, diversity has become normalised while for others, they have had negative affective experiences.

Avery, when navigating her socialisation divided her perceptions into two different groups – "what we believe and how do we want to" – as if what she believes in, is something that she may not want to. Throughout her interview, Avery negotiated with her beliefs, explaining that this is the first conversation she has had where she has had the chance to. Avery's introductory answers indicated that she sometimes conflated gender and sexuality. When asked about why she does so, Avery asked if she could speak while she thought, and through doing so relayed the following:

> "Okay, let me try, I don't even know if it's going to sound right, it's why you would use it interchangeably. I don't know if I could really use it interchangeably, but like I told you, for me, gender is either a male or a female, okay. And then sexuality, is you personally, like you know, ohh, like as I said, its who you, it's your opposite, like, uhhhh. So really, it isn't so much the same." (Avery, 21 years old)

Avery was placed in a situation where she had to negotiate with her understanding of gender and sexuality diversity, something she did not have the opportunity to do before, and at this point, she came to different realisations where the knowledge she had learnt was not as 'binary' as it was taught to be. When asked why she sometimes thought of gender and sexuality as interchangeable, Avery negotiated with it and came to a different realization – indicating that providing a safe space for individuals to simply speak can assist with unlearning.

Avery constantly reverted back and forth between what she was taught to believe, and what she would do, feel, or think. When asked to complete the sentence, 'My gender identity is female, and if someone had to misgender me I would feel…', Avery said she would feel upset. She explains that if she physically appeared with things associated with femaleness such as a dress, makeup, and long hair, she would be upset because, "you can literally see you are a girl, and like your voice and your manners, and lots of other things, that portray that you are a girl, and they ask otherwise" (Avery, 21 years old). She says that she would not be upset if she wore masculine expressions because she assumed it would be understandable to be misgendered. Avery alludes to a very binary idea of gender.

However, when asked when she first knew she was female, Avery told a story of less freedom as a female. Avery states that she did not figure out being a female by herself, but rather, in comparison to her brother, she was told what she cannot do:

> "Like your family members, you notice that a boy is different. Obviously in my house, they have more freedom than a girl, so it's like, little, little things that start reminding you that you are different from your brother or your father. For instance, my brother can go out late at night, and I can't go, and sometimes he goes without even saying where he is going, and with who. So, obviously me I can't do such things like that now, I have to ask permission, and there are certain times that I can go out." (Avery, 21 years old)

While Avery initially explained a binary way of thinking about gender in terms of physical appearance, when tasked with explaining how gender roles affected her, Avery negotiated with her gender roles, noting how there was a level of unfairness. This speaks to a study done by Parry and Segalo (2017) on

"*The Lived Experiences of Female Breadwinners in South Africa*". An Indian female participant, who spoke on behalf of her understanding of female breadwinners in Indian families, indicated that,

> "Indian men, like my ex-husband, they are very dominating, and they will dominate a woman wherever they can, you know, whenever they can. And, uh, yes – from like my perspective, Indian women are somewhat finding their way out of it now and they are looking at the other races and saying "Oh, why can't we also be free" (Parry & Segalo, 2017, p. 189)

Avery's idea of freedom was one where she had "freedom from cultural restrictions" (Parry & Segalo, 2017, p. 189), such as being allowed to go out with her friends the way her brother can.

Allie speaks about this freedom too. Allie grew up in spaces with gender roles, including not having many other Indian South Africans in her life who would be able to talk about gender and sexuality diversity. However, she displayed a much bigger ease when it came to talking and thinking about any diversity. This she attributed to her father. Allie states that in her home, it was her mother who reproduced gendered roles, expecting her to act a certain way and perform the domestic duties allocated to females such as cooking and cleaning. This is remnant of many communities, not just Indian South African ones, where women are expected to play a role handed to her, and then hand it down to their daughters, reproducing the very ideologies that have oppressed them.

However, Allie explains that her father grew her and her brothers up differently:

> "…my father was the biggest believer in equality…if you have to clean up for yourself, your brothers have to do the same thing, or if you want a snack and you go to make a snack, your brothers have to make their own snacks as well. So, my father was a very big believer in equality, up until today he always says it's not about whether you need to cook, it's that you need to cook so you don't starve and die, so you need to cook for yourself. And like, my brother got into cooking and stuff also, which is traditionally not a masculine role in an Indian household, but he cooks, like he is downstairs right now cooking." (Allie, 23 years old)

Allie and her brother's freedom and autonomy in expressing their gender identity were attributed to her father's ways of teaching and how he created his own practices in their home. This relates to Steyn's (2015) fifth skill when looking critically at society – "an understanding that social identities are learned and are an outcome of social practice" (Steyn, 2015, p. 385). While Steyn points out how it negatively affects society, it was important to note that being taught how to act against these norms places Allie in a position to develop a personality defined by her experiences, rather than by the reproduced knowledge being taught to her. Allie's experience with her father displays how being socialised against essentialised natures can impact how a person begins to negotiate with norms. When you are not forced into believing the very stereotypes that have been used to define who you are historically, you may be able to begin unpacking and negotiating with the stereotypes of other people as well if you wish to. This is what Allie explains when providing the answers, "non-conforming", "conversations about equality" and a "Trevor Noah video – You strike a woman, you strike a rock/'Wathint' Abafazai, Wathint' Imbokodo", for what she associates with gender, masculinity and femininity.

What also appears to allow individuals to navigate their socialisation is that of exposure and experiences. Ellis explains how she seeks knowledge when she hears a new LGBTQIA+ term at university but says it was only when she was directly exposed to gender and sexuality diversity that she sought further knowledge. When asked if Ellis looked for information knowing people in school were hiding their LGBQTIA+ identity, Ellis responded with,

> "Okay, number one, when you enter university, we all have a mind that we are going to meet different people, and I agree with that. But until you meet different people, then you are interested in learning more about people. But like Avery said, we weren't all that exposed. If I think about it, in my class, I met maybe one or two people, but they weren't my close friends, so it wasn't like 'let me see what I can learn'. And I love doing research and googling things that interests me, but it is about exposure." (Ellis, 24 years old)

Ellis explains how she was aware that she was privileged, only getting further information when she was directly exposed to it. What Ellis elaborates on was that during her school years, she knew what it was like to be 'different' which altered the way she looked at difference. Ellis moved from schools across different countries, and in doing so, became the 'new' person that needed to adapt to a group of people that thought she was different. This gave Ellis the critical awareness that being marked did not mean unacceptable and when she arrived at university, she was excited to get more information about the new identities she would meet.

Each of these situations depicted how individuals negotiated with socialisations and norms. At times, it almost appeared simple enough to do, and at other times it became a challenge. However, if a sense of belonging is attached to a person's identity, the emotions attached to their negotiating with learned ideals can be the direct opposite of simple. It is not always easy to unlearn the things you have been taught, especially if these things are normalized by the people you love – like families and friends. What South Africa as a country does offer is the constitutional equality of all of individuals and that allows different spaces to change into LGBTQIA+ friendly spaces. This allows individuals like the participants in this section to experience non-harmful developments on their perceptions in spaces of comfort like their universities and even their homes. It also, importantly, allows them to become a safe space for LGBTQIA+ people they may meet.

4.2.4.1 Affective Attachments – 'if someone in my family had to come out to me, I would feel…'

Most, if not all participants claimed that in their family and spaces, an additional layer of support would be necessary from them if one of their family members had to come out, as described in an above section by Delta, Avery, Leighton, and Teagan. This was shared by Michael who states that if a family member had to come out, he would support them because they are still the same person to him, still part of his family. Leighton explains that anytime a person has to come out to her, she feels sad that they need to – she understands that it can be empowering for some, but the emotional experiences building up to coming out can place an individual in a space with a lot of pressure, and she is sad that this is the case.

Ellis explains that half of the people in her life would not accept any LGBTQIA+ person because of ingrained religious practices and generational gaps but that with some of her family members, she experiences unconditional love. Ellis explains that while she was aware that she was taught to think in a binary way, she was also surrounded by love from her family members that went beyond identity. Ellis's experiences of gender and sexuality diversity may have been riddled with cisheteronormative ideals at times, but it is pushed aside when it comes to love for a family member being unconditional – this reinforces how intersectional experiences are truly multifaceted. These are all affective experiences, described by Ahmed (2004) as *Affective Economies*, where individuals respond to other identities based on their interactions with the surfaces of their identities – all becoming emotional when historical emotions expected of them play a role in excluding someone close to them.

Parker had an affective experience as well, however very different to all of the other participants. Parker is in a privileged position because he aligns with both straightness and cisgenderism, which at first, appeared to lead him to an indifferent space when it came to the LGBTQIA+ community. This was exemplified when answering what types of questions, he thought would come up in this focus group, where he stated that he does not even think about gender and sexuality diversity.

However, Parker states that his indifference is because he has a female cousin who identifies, has already come out and been embraced with her girlfriend by his family as a lesbian. Parker states that even if it were a male family member coming out as a non-heteronormative sexuality, his family would treat them as equally as they are treating his female family member. Both Parker's answers to, 'if someone had to come out to me at work, I would feel…' and 'if someone in my family had to come out to me, I would feel…', was "I would feel unphased like it would not bother me" (Parker, 24 years old). Parker's experiences, while initially appearing indifferent, reflected a normalisation of gender and sexuality diversity. In his understanding of how normal a non-heteronormative person and relationship can be, he does not think he needs to think differently because it has become an everyday experience for his family.

This experience of adapting to diverse sexuality has become normalised and influences his daily life and how he treats other gender and sexually diverse people. Parker states that if someone had to misgender him, he would not be upset, he would let them know he is male and move on. If someone had to assume he was not straight, he would do the same. He narrates a story where he was approached romantically by someone who identified as gay, and his reaction was that of "I didn't actually have a reaction" (Parker, 24 years old). So, what initially appeared to have been Parker being indifferent, was explained by him as a normalised experience where he did not need to look beyond what he already knew was the similarity in experiences of sexuality between straight and non-straight people.

While realizations like Parker's can be a healthy, constructive experience with the LGBTQIA+ community, some realizations are not always this way – as narrated by Teagan. Teagan's most standout

quality were her emotions when negotiating the conflicting knowledge, she learnt about gender and sexuality. Teagan, much like many of her fellow participants, did not get exposed to gender and sexuality until after school and disclosed that she does have people in her life who would not be able to have a conversation about gender and sexuality. She states that she was sad that she started to have these conversations late in her life – that it was with sadness that she realized how few years she has been having differing thoughts from her upbringing. Teagan became exposed to gender and sexuality diversity through social media and friends at university, where now as a twenty-four-year-old, she feels sad that she has started to unlearn so late in her life.

Steyn (2012) explains that using ignorance as a power move achieves the action of, "protecting the emotional well-being of the subject is necessary for a context that, if responded to honestly and accurately, would produce a great deal of personal anguish, guilt and shame" (Steyn, 2012, p. 16). This personal anguish, guilt and shame Teagan describes, is really what Steyn alludes to when she states that when those who are privileged benefit from societal systems and hierarchies acknowledge this privilege, they are placed in an emotional position where they have to reckon with the power they have been provided, simply for existing.

When finishing the sentence, 'if someone in my family had to come out, I would feel…', Teagan concludes her answer with,

> "…so, I think (paused) I think I would be sad because it's going to be such a difficult thing and it shouldn't have to be. It's something that is normal." (Teagan, 24 years old)

However, Teagan firmly states that she will be supportive of her family member. This is what Nigel Thrift (2004) describes as the affective feelings you experience when you are conflicting with the ideologies you were socialised into. Thrift (2004) references Norris when stating that,

> "Conventional indicators may blind us to the fact that critical citizens may be becoming less loyalist and deferential in orientation toward mass branch parties…at the same time that they are becoming more actively engaged via alternative means of expression" (Norris in Thrift, 2004, pp. 65)

Norris in Thrift (2004) points out that affect in social interactions has this conflicting power when negotiating with socialisation if the way you have been taught to think is harmful to another individual. As a result, individuals use their agency to act in opposition to the reproduced ideology, in this case, cisheteronormativity, with Teagan's action being to support an LGBTQIA+ family member who will be rejected by some family members.

Teagan also describes 'sexuality' differently from other participants, who explain it in terms of definitions and sex education. Teagan simply states that the word she associated it with was "connection". She explains that "I think, when it comes to sexuality, yes, there is education that needs to be involved, but I think ultimately, it's just determined by the connection that you have with people" (Teagan, 24 years old). Teagan negotiated with sexuality. She negotiated with many questions and tasks

throughout this interview, through her emotional understanding of how humans interact with each other. This was shared by Avery, who states that what she associated 'sexuality' with was, "your partner, someone really close to your heart" (Avery, 21 years old).

Steyn (2015) explains the role of emotions in being critically aware of one's privilege, and how human beings are part of a flow of emotions that determine the way we act in social spaces. Steyn relies on Ahmed's *Affective Economies* to describe that,

> "We are, literally, incorporated into this flow of feelings, into a sense of how we matter in relation to all other mattering objects: how and to what to give recognition and value; what lacks worth and deserves to be held in contempt; what should evoke our compassion or cause us outrage; what is lovable, desirable, joyful or repulsive; what gives us safety, what threatens us." (Steyn, 2015, p. 387)

While Teagan's emotions can be difficult to feel, it places her in a space of discomfort that allows her to unlearn the ideologies she was socialised into. This opens her up to a space to negotiate with what she was taught to think about gender and sexuality diversity, and places her in a space where she can now negotiate this through her own experiences and research. This is what Zembylas and Boler (2002) seek – a pedagogy of discomfort that tasks individuals with getting out of the comfort zone their privilege has awarded them, and socialization has maintained.

Teagan surprised Allie and moved me and Leighton by explaining the reason why she associated diversity with the Biology term "biodiversity" and not of people the way other participants had:

> "Uh, like of course there's people, but I mean that people are beautiful, but we appreciate flowers more than people sometimes and that's why it comes to my head. There are so many types of flowers, and things like that and yet each one is appreciated…" (Teagan, 24 years old)

Teagan hesitated multiple times, her tone shifting to a softer one when she explained how humans have come to appreciate all flowers, and yet we cannot appreciate humans in the same way. Teagan's negotiation with her socialisation was an emotional one, where she could not reckon with the idea that people looked at another person and deemed them less acceptable.

These affective emotions that occur along the surfaces of identities are not always as simple to navigate, especially in homes that are firmly cisheteronormative based. Delta, whom I pointed out as having a Humanities background on LGBTQIA+ information, relayed how she grew up with strict gender roles in her family. When I presented the task for participants to simply think of, not relay, a list of people who would be comfortable talking about gender and sexuality diversity – Delta sounded sad. She stated that "…majority of the people [in my life] are not present on my list. Actually, I can count the people who are present on my fingers" (Delta, 22 years old). Delta explains how those who would not be comfortable are narrowminded and with prejudices based on "groupthink".

She elaborates that groupthink is,

> "Uhm, it's where if someone thinks this way and say they think this way, it's just the same way throughout. I think it stems from the way they grew up, and a lot of them are older than me, but also a lot of them that are my age, they get their views from people they live with, their parents and so it ties into what I was saying about groupthink and the way you were raised." (Delta, 22 years old)

Delta explains that having gender and diversity conversations were forbidden. Miranda Fricker (2007) explains power in terms of structural power, where people within structures are "vehicles of power" (Fricker, 2007, p. 11), not necessarily given their own agency Fricker explains that to be part of structures, you have to 'align' yourself with the structure's social powers. Fricker states that testimonial injustice is brought on to someone who does not mindlessly adhere to this social power, where "someone is wrong specifically in her capacity as a knower" (Fricker, 2007. p. 20). As a result, identity prejudice is used, where "one party or parties effectively controlling what another party does – preventing them, for instance, from conveying knowledge" (Fricker, 2007, p. 28). Delta grew up with a family that adhered to strict roles and a generational gap where, as someone younger, she was not allowed to think differently. Delta was expected to enact a different role, experiencing an identity prejudice blocking her from talking about the knowledge she learnt at university.

While Delta does appear to still live life at campus different to the one she lives at home, she expresses that it was safer for her that way. This speaks to Carrim and Nkomo's (2016) point again, of "hybrid identities", where their results, while in different spaces, spoke to Delta's experiences of splitting her identity. Carrim and Nkomo (2016) state that,

> "…during their early lives the women had to achieve a delicate balance between resistance and obedience in their communities as the former may have resulted in isolation from the family" (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016, p. 272)

Delta appears to live with this hybrid identity, where to avoid essentialisation into ways of thinking, she acted differently, but not too different to avoid the loss of a sense of belonging to her family space. A privileged position, being able to 'pass' as acceptable. Delta's conscious interactions with her two different spaces were based on her affective attachments to said spaces – where her identity was altered according to how she was expected to act at home versus how she was allowed the freedom to act, at university. This was shared by Avery who narrates that her family members have a precarious privilege, where if they come out as gender or sexually diverse, they can lose their privilege. Avery explains that she is eager to discuss this topic with her family, but she assumes it can turn into an argument in their discomfort, and so she does not have this discussion.

When it comes to what Delta and Avery shared, according to them, was religious backgrounds enforcing cisheteronormativity – in specific, they come from Muslim backgrounds where they believe that cisheteronormativity has become normalised. This is something I cannot speak for, from a point of view of, as I do not identify as a Muslim Indian, but rather a Hindu Indian. What was noticeable though, was

that conflicting with one's religious upbringing can be an emotional experience. This is explained through Allie below.

When talking about what came to mind when the word 'gender' was brought up, Allie discusses that she thought of it as non-conforming because "when someone asks me gender, okay, yes due to my religion there is supposed to be two genders, but at the same time, people are free to do whatever it is they are comfortable with" (Allie, 23 years old). Allie comes from a Muslim background where gender is defined by the two medicalised sexes – male and female – and yet when dealing with the conflicting ideologies of cisheteronormativity and gender and sexuality diversity, she brought up doing what made you comfortable. This was not the only time she had to discuss how her religion conflicted with her thoughts of gender and sexuality diversity. Allie indicates that her foremost thoughts when it comes to the LGBTQIA+ community are one where she has to deal with her Islamic teachings and the LGBTQIA+ community as separate entities, before coming to a final conclusive perspective.

Teagan asked Allie about the intersection of LGBTQIA+ Muslim people who are advocating for equality, asking Allie what she thought about individuals who have to exist in what can be described as two conflicting groups. Allie responds with,

> "So, it's not allowed its, we term it as 'haram', which means it's not permissible in Islam, so you are not allowed to be part of the LGBTQI+ community and be Muslim at the same time. But at the same time, we also know that in Islam, we are not supposed to go around making fun of people and go around telling people how to live their lives because our religion is about peace and accepting everyone for who they are. So, if you feel like you want to be part of the LGBTQI+ community, you go right ahead and do that, but it's not my place to come and fight with you and say, "you are Muslim, you are not supposed to do this", right… it's just like 'that's you, and your relationship with your God and this is me, and my relationship with my God'.

Neither of us, myself, Allie, or any participant in these focus groups, can claim that we know what it may be like for an LGBTQIA+ Muslim person, but from Allie's answer, it is evident that there is a possibility of negativity and rejection. This was supported by Allie not being able to finish the sentence 'if a family member had to come out, I would…', stating that this type of situation has never come up, and nor does she think it will because of the rigid religious expectations of straightness and cisgender identities. When asked to participate in a power flower activity changing either her gender or sexual identity, Allie stated that if she had to change either of the two to a non-cisheteronormative one, the backlash from a religious perspective would be the same, from both friends and family.

However, Allie believes that much like many of the participants, our identities are personal to us, and they do not belong in a public space for interpretation. Allie stated that her father taught her about independence, compassion, and empathy and this impacted the way she interacts with all and any people, more so than the ideologies she lived around. In Allie's world, her thoughts on gender and sexuality diversity are always conflicting – this experience of diversity is something she knows she is forbidden from experiencing. She understands that this places her in a privileged position because she

is comfortable with her straight, cisgender identity and expressions, but her conflict with her socialization is not with how she believes her gender and sexuality should be, but rather with how non-cisheteronormative people should be treated – in a compassionate and empathic manner. Allie's thoughts of gender and sexuality diversity, rather than conflicting with her religious community, is based on the understanding that people are people and not anything more or less than that. As a result, Allie takes a role in society where she is open to conversations and dealing with the pedagogy of discomfort that Zembylas and Boler (2002) discuss.

Some of my own life experiences have included the stage of unlearning. While that happens simply sometimes, other times it can have adverse reactions, like denial about contributing to marginalization, denial of privilege, heartbreak realizing your privilege or even a wall placed between you and some individuals in your life. These all cause emotional and affective feelings – as it should because becoming aware of how one contributes to marginalization is not an easy task, especially considering the effect marginalization has on marginalized people, their experiences and how they view and express themselves. However, what these participants show is that unlearning is a healthy, almost freeing action. Sometimes it comes easy because the alternative is losing a family member who identifies with the LGBTQIA+ community and other times it is a challenge because it means there is a new barrier placed between you and people in your life. Nonetheless, while not I or any of these participants can speak for every Indian South African community, what was unanimous was the necessity to have LGBTQIA+ conversations, awareness, and education. As displayed below, participants attested that while not all people will agree, LGBTQIA+ equality and rights are of importance and unlearning is not a challenge bigger than it. This does not speak for all Indian South African communities considering how big the population is, and that some individuals were not keen to be a part of this study for a range of reasons including, but not limited to, feeling too uncomfortable, it being considered a 'taboo' topic to them, or them not agreeing entirely. While this ends on a less hopeful note, it is something of importance to consider and also an incentive to continue building on this research.

4.3 'Do you think it is necessary to have these conversations of gender and sexuality diversity?'

What was unanimous between all nine participants, was that there is an importance in having conversations about gender and sexuality diversity. While this painted a positive image of Indian South African communities, as abovementioned, it is important to consider that not all contacted individuals agreed to have this conversation. Therefore, while each participant did agree it was necessary, there were underlying conditions to some of their 'yeses' attached to having these conversations and why, which added to the intricacies of the Indian South African community.

The first opinion, although without a condition, for the unanimous 'yes', was treating people as humans, discussed by Ellis, Allie and Avery. Ellis states that what is most important is aiming to teach how to

respect people. This itself is an ideal utopia, where humans are treated respectfully as a result of them being human. Ellis states that,

> "…you do need to expose people; you need to let people know what everyone is going to be exposed to. That's where respect comes in because you can't disrespect someone because you don't know their identity or something like that. Whereas, if you learnt about it, you would respect everyone. Everyone is human." (Ellis, 23 years old)

Allie, in a different focus group, supported this sentiment by stating that it is important to teach people about compassion, where she believes, this will lead to the creation of safe spaces, not just for gender and sexually diverse people but for all people who are different from who you are. Allie states that regardless of your religious background, or if your home environment does not permit these conversations, it is of importance to teach people to have a fundamental kindness and compassion for all human beings, including those who are different from you.

Allie explains that,

> "So, yes I think it is very necessary to have these conversations because you are teaching them, it's the world that we live in, and you have to teach them about compassion or kindness, no matter who it is, no matter what they identify as, you need to be able to be okay around them. If someone has to sit next to you, you don't shy away from them, just because they are not like you, just because they are different." (Allie, 24 years old)

Avery agreed with Ellis's proposal of teaching people about respect but brought up one of the first instances of an attached conditions – having conversations that are conducive to learning about differences in a way that promotes equality. Avery, who above states that her family space was not entirely conducive for a talk of gender and sexuality diversity explains that,

> "It depends on how the conversation is going to lead also, like if you are, like, if the conversation you have is not positive, it's a negative conversation with your grandparents and your parents about this topic, then, unfortunately, you are not going to show respect to the people that you meet." (Avery, 21 years old)

Avery's condition for having this conversation is that only if the conversation is open to a variety of informative ideas, experiences, and opinions, can it provide a helpful and mindful negotiation of cisheteronormativity as a standard to uphold. Teagan responded to this willingness to have conversations, stating that if you have conversations with people who are unwilling and do not care, they will be had in vain. If it is a negative space with narrowminded people, it can continue the cycle of reproducing stereotypes, biases, and inequalities.

This was supported by Leighton, in a different focus group, who states that "just having these conversations, is indirectly asking to "tell people your stance' on the topic" (Leighton, 33 years old). Leighton elaborates that having these conversations is not always as easy as willingly being in a focus group interview. She narrates a story of how some of her cousins were vehemently disapproving when she joked with their sons, asking them if they had a boyfriend after they denied having a girlfriend. This refers to Fricker's (2007) testimonial injustice, where being a part of certain structures, in this case, the

family structure, is to align oneself with the values enforced by said structure – here, it is heteronormativity. Leighton experiences identity prejudice, even being a privileged individual, where she is prevented from conveying knowledge to her nieces and nephews. In doing so, heteronormativity stands strong and unquestionable, taking away the agency of individuals part of its structure. While Leighton states that these conversations are of utmost importance, she believes that right now what she can do, is continuously keep safe spaces open for her nieces and nephews, where if they experience gender and sexuality diversly, and do not receive support from their family, they know they can come to her.

Teagan's introduces the next condition when considering any change in education systems to accommodate conversations on gender and sexuality diversity. Teagan explains how these conversations were not had in her school, even in democratic South Africa, so she posed a problem where changing a system will not matter if schools refuse to have conversations. Michael, Parker and Priyal all share the opinion that if conversations happened at school, the possibility for a more open-minded nature could have been attributed to their personality, with Michael even going as far as to state that if they had this conversation during school years, chances are that they might not have been as comfortable. His point is that the necessity of having this conversation may not be comfortably discussed if people are not even introduced to the basic information necessary for this talk.

However, Zembylas and Boler (2002), when discussing the politics of discomfort, bring to light how the pedagogy of discomfort can be a useful stepping-stone to conversations that bring about change. They explain that "a pedagogy of discomfort invites students to leave behind learned beliefs and habits and enter the risky areas of contradictory and ambiguous ethical and moral differences" (Zembylas & Boler, 2002, p. 2). These authors, rather than attempting to alter discussions for comfort, provide the suggestion that discomfort can be used, because "a pedagogy of discomfort requires that individuals step outside of their comfort zones and recognize what and how one has been taught to see (or not to see)" (Zembylas & Boler, 2002, p. 5). Cisheteronormativity and the enforced normality of it, play the role of being a comfort zone for those in privileged positions, and so, becoming uncomfortable with having these conversations can open them up to experiences and exposures that might change their stance on the rightness of cisheteronormativity.

An example of this discussion is from Priyal, who states that she is not always comfortable talking about the way she has grown up because she has been grown up to think that there are males and females exclusively, aligned with specific body parts – males have male body parts and females have female body parts. She explains that,

> "That's why, when it comes to that I am a bit reluctant to say anything because it is an iffy topic to be having because you don't actually know who you are going to trigger off and who is going to get upset by what you say." (Priyal, 24 years old)

Priyal addresses the same thing when stating that she did not know what kinds of questions I would ask and that she did not think of anything when hearing the word 'sexuality' or 'non-binary'. Priyal is reluctant to participate in conversations where what she says could offend a person because of the way she was brought up to think. However, as the conversation went along and privileges, experiences and ideas were discussed, Priyal became more open to talk about gender and sexuality diversity – surrounded by participants who discussed their own experiences, giving her a space of safety not to be judged for the way she was grown up.

Priyal explains that for her, sexuality was not something she thought about until she reached puberty, where she attended a high school that did not teach her anything about gender and sexuality diversity. What she learnt and how she became more understanding of how her ideas fit in with the rest of the world, was through social media and her experiences at university. Unfortunately, while she did say some people in her life would be willing to have conversations like these, she believes that many will not. She explains that,

> "I think because a lot of people have rules and thoughts that have been embedded in them for a very long time. They don't think differently, it does depend on the person like we can have this conversation, but other people I guess it has just been with them a long time, they probably would not be able to see any other side of it" (Priyal, 24 years old)

Priyal explains that the process of discussing perceptions with people who have been embedded in systems for a very long time may not be able to happen, because they may never be able to discuss anything different to what they believe in. She elaborates that, "I think Indians tend to stick together, which means they attract people that are exactly the same as them, which makes it really difficult to break away from that" (Priyal, 24 years old). This is why Priyal believes that sometimes it can be a challenge to have conversations that differ from your own, when (1) you are too deeply embedded in systems and (2) you have the support of those around you, who are too, embedded in this system.

Steyn (2015) explains how social identities are a result of social practice and knowledge that have been reproduced over time serving particular powers. Steyn believes that the way we act, "is reflected in the important processes of internalized domination and oppression and in our sense of how various intersectionalities 'land' within our sense of being" (Steyn, 2015, p. 385). That is why Steyn, Dennis Francis, Deevia Bhana, and many other authors referenced in this research recommend a space of conversation, where intersectional experiences are discussed in a manner that is open to listening to differing identities. What Priyal fears is not learning; she believes learning at a younger age may produce open-minded thinkers, but rather, what she fears is offending individuals because she was never in a mediated space when growing up to talk about what she has been socialized into believing. Her privilege as a straight, cisgender individual can allow her to continue not addressing the discrimination that happens in society if she is not conversed with, in a manner that is not confrontational but rather in a space of learning – placing an expectation on education systems to create these spaces of discussion.

Allie states that while she agreed with the proposal that education systems and syllabi need to change, she believes that a condition is that teachers need to as well, not just students. Allie elaborates that she actively noticed the difference between her two female teachers because one engaged with questions in a multitude of ways, whereas the other just ignored the section of different types of bodies completely. Avery explained how she remembered reading about the LGBTQIA+ community in school, and so did Delta, but they both explain how it was glossed over and not elaborated on by their teachers.

This brings up Steyn's (2012) *Ignorance Contract*. Steyn describes this state of ignoring information and knowledge, claiming ignorance, as a powerful manoeuvre. Steyn explains, "it shows how ignorance functions as social regulation through forming subjectivities that are appropriate performers of ignorance", when individuals, rather than conversing about difference, learn how to move around it in a way that it remains unquestionable (Steyn, 2012, p. 9). As a result of systemic ignorance, Steyn claims that there is a maintenance of unequal power relations within society, in which case you can actively witness how cisheteronormativity pervades society as a result of the reproduction of socialised ways of thinking and acting as if differences are not necessary to discuss. Indian South African communities, amongst many other communities in South Africa, faces a challenge when it comes to gender and sexuality education. Teagan asked – if teachers are not trained or cannot handle the knowledge that they are being paid to teach, will syllabi changes in favour of LGBTQIA+ education be taught correctly?

It may certainly be an advantage if it does, but by looking at a point by Delta, we may be living in a time where change may come to people's doorsteps even if they do not want it. Delta explains that the world is becoming more progressive, and more diverse gender and sexuality identities are visibly existing and being represented, regardless of the oppression continuously being spread and enforced. This reminded me of James Baldwin's (1963) *A Talk to Teachers*, where he states that "people who treat other people as less than human must not be surprised when the bread they have cast on the waters comes floating back to them, poisoned." What Delta labels a 'progressive era' presents a threat to the very cisheteronormativity that pervades Indian South African communities.

Steyn references Vervotec (2015) when explaining that,

> "Under the changing social imaginary of our times described by Vervotec (2012), a more rights-based ethos has taken hold and some oppressed groups now claim the right to be visible, affirmed and included in how we think about ourselves as social collectivities" (Steyn, 2015, p. 380)

In a time and space where Delta experiences these changing times and multiple social identities, she laments that she wishes she had grown up differently to the way she was so that she would not have to reckon with unlearning the prejudices that were engrained in her, that would harm the very people she associates with.

However, what Delta states that what she can do now that she has begun unlearning, is have conversations with privileged people who are willing, where she is hoping to contribute to a future with

people who are comfortable with gender and sexuality being talked more about. Avery agreed with this sentiment, stating that it is about "doing more research on your own and listening to different people's opinions, it's all about yourself gathering information, not necessarily listening to one particular person" (Avery, 21 years old). Teagan through learning for herself through the internet and Leighton and Parker creating a safe space for their family, display that in a space where prejudices are held on too tightly, what many of these participants suggest while waiting for education systems to change, is 'personal action' from privileged individuals.

Baldwin (1963) in the previously mentioned address to teachers, states that "precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society." This, for many of these participants, is getting an education that their society does not want them to. What they can offer towards gender and sexuality diversity is developing their thoughts about it, unlearning their prejudices, and talking to as many people who are willing to or leaning towards listening as they can. This displays the divide in what Indian South African communities thinks about gender and sexuality diversity.

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION

For me, a fundamental takeaway from this research was the ability to witness, truly, how people are made up of a multitude of experiences that they are exposed to. Each participant of this study revealed knowledge about gender and sexuality diversity spanning across the vast exposures or non-exposures to this topic that they have, from the time they were younger, to now when they are between the ages of twenty and thirty-five. Many stories truly encompass the experiences of snippets of conversation, emotional experiences, and conversations with people, which was discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. What was evident was that experiences are truly made up of layers upon layers of knowledge all stratified together to create the perceptions Indian South Africans have of gender and sexuality diversity.

What this dissertation can contribute to is the development of knowledge that has been produced about gender and sexuality diversity, in a space that has dominantly considered gender nonconformity and non-heteronormativity as taboo or unacceptable. This socialisation into ways of thinking plays a role in developing how a person thinks about their own gender and sexuality, as well as those of 'others'. Ahmed's (2004) *Affective Economies* does play a role in understanding how Indian South Africans are taught to become attached to their gender and sexuality identity, where they are expected to express cisheteronormativity or else face a possible loss of a sense of belonging. It also plays a role, as explained by Ahmed (2004), in influencing how cisgender and heterosexual people react to the LGBTQIA+ community – whether it was in support, complacency, misunderstanding or hostility.

While each participant of this study contributed in some way to the idea that they are willing to have these discussions, what they also pointed towards was that there are systems in Indian South African spaces which continues to reproduce cisheteronormativity – lessening the opportunities to encounter difference in the community and number of people who would be willing to have any conversation about gender and sexuality diversity. Many of these participants, aware of their privilege, still understand that the expectations placed on them are to perform their assigned sex role and then partake in having a nuclear family. While their close family and friends are not always the ones enforcing these roles, it is clear that some Indian South African spaces do have an impact on the expectations placed on them. Participants divulged how any of them coming out as any LGBTQIA+ identity may result in them facing discrimination and exclusion in their respective Indian South African experiences, spaces, homes and communities.

What was also clear was that the schooling system in South Africa does not unanimously include the equality of LGBTQIA+ people the way the Constitution envisions. Many participants discussed how the first time they heard of the LGBTQIA+ community was through social media or during their university years. This can be problematic as privileged individuals are placed in a system where their complacence is ensured. It also plays a role in defining how LGBTQIA+ people come to know themselves – where their existence is one that actually, does not exist in certain spaces of education.

This starts the discriminatory practice of erasure and validation at a very early stage in an LGBTQIA+ person's life and impacts what individuals think about gender and sexuality diversity.

Indian South African communities are multiple, intricate, constantly growing groups of individuals within South Africa. What will come with their continued growth in population is a further reproduction of ideas, and an even further increase in intersectional experiences. What becomes necessary is the need for further research to be done, on both straight cisgender Indian South Africans and LGBTQIA+ South Africans, including how they navigate their paths in non-Indian South African spaces. While there is existing, and extremely useful research already done on LGBTQIA+ Indian South African communities, there is not an abundance, nor a frequent amount of research being done. This serves the purpose of continuing the silencing and erasure of a group of LGBTQIA+ Indian South Africans, not presenting them their rights, dignity and respect addressed in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. This research could not accommodate the elaborations of many spaces of cisheteronormativity in detail, for example, but not limited to – rigid gender roles, internalized and normalized cisheteronormativity, the apartheid education system and even religion. These are all topics that can have multiple books written about them on how they affect the LGBTQIA+ community. This research, however, can stand as a foundational block, continuously growing into a system by the continual research of other spaces, participants, interactions, and communities within the experiences of Indian South Africans. LGBTQIA+ academics in South Africa have already done research that was integral to this research study, and I hope more people continue towards a South Africa that is a reflection of the constitution for LGBTQIA+ people.

The above is not an easy task – but it is possible. The different format questions making up the focus groups being constructed around multimodality allowed a deeper understanding of the everyday experiences of Indian South Africans, and how it impacted how they view gender and sexuality diversity. It allowed me to understand how it is not just the direct cisheteronormative teachings that reproduce knowledges, but also the everyday experiences of cisheteronormativity such as encouraging a child to play with girls because she should not have the same interests as boys when she is younger, or simply changing the subject when the LGBTQIA+ community is brought up. Scott (1991) discusses how important it is to consider experience, as it plays a fundamental role in the way knowledge is (re)produced about different identities, people, and ideas. These are the experiences that informed my study, indicating how experiences may or may not be shared with the nine participants of this study – where some experiences are leading to the continuation of stereotypes, myths and biases that reproduce inequalities in the greater society and others, positive experiences that take into consideration the inequalities LGBTQIA+ people face.

However, what this study has also displayed, are the experiences that each person is exposed to from multiple spaces and with multiple people as they navigate their own intersectional identities and

differing personalities. Once again – with the dissolution of colonial and Apartheid laws that prohibited interracial, intercultural, and sexually diverse interactions, many Indians South Africans have established families, relationships, colleagues, and friendships that transgress the physical boundaries put in place during colonial apartheid. As a result, this study shows how many Indian South Africans do not have monolithic or homogenous perceptions, where their knowledges and experiences are solely based on what are considered to be Indian norms, families, or histories. Their experiences come from a variety of spaces, both in-person and online, from a variety of people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. It also feels unavoidable that a straight, cisgender Indian South African will come into contact with some form of gender and sexuality diversity knowledge or experience. Whether it is through television, popular social media platforms, the news, university spaces, work policies or family and friend experiences, gender and sexuality diversity has become more visible than it has ever been.

The fact that there is only a small sample of LGBTIQIA+ related research projects which include Indian South Africans, has excluded quite a few spaces, people, and organizations in which knowledge about gender and sexuality diversity is shared amongst Indian South Africans. What I hope I achieved with this research was to play a role in beginning a conversation about the experiences of straight, cisgender Indian South Africans with regards to LGBTQIA+ identifying people and/or people who are non-binary or gender fluid. It is an addition to the already helpful research projects put out there by hardworking LGBTQIA+ people and allies. These stories revealed how individuals navigate their privilege – where some of them do not even do so even after being exposed to the LGBTQIA+ community, but this placed them in a position where they came out of their comfort zone, like Zembylas and Boler (2002) intended. I hope that in some way or another, my research played a role in speaking 'with' LGBTQIA+ people, hoping to watch as their way to equality is paved through continued hard work and admirable dedication.

What this research has displayed is that there are spaces, and people open to having these conversations. Whether it was because of a reckoning with privilege, a memorable LGBTQIA+ character on a television show, a friend sharing their interests, a family member coming out, a study choice that introduced the topic or a personal experience with marginalization – there are Indian South Africans with perceptions that can further drive LGBTQIA+ advocation for rights and equality. Some already do, some are unlearning, some may be still indifferent, others may just not know how to, and others are simply not in a safe enough position to do so.

However, as a twenty-five-year-old Critical Diversity Studies student, living in-between the Millennial Generation and Generation Z, part of me understands exactly why perpetrators of historical cisheteronormative knowledge may be afraid of the youth. Many of these participants live lives where discrimination is unacceptable, or where the LGBTQIA+ community is normalized enough already, to

a point where discrimination to some appears unnecessary and bothersome. Indian South Africans, as people of colour face discrimination too, racially, or if they are females, lower classed, with a disability, or any other part of their identity that has been historically oppressed – reproducing knowledge that serves to oppress gender and sexually diverse people appears to be using the same method of control that harms many marginalized identities Indian South Africans.

What I have also learnt is that there is a way to navigate with your family, friends, and religion, without being disrespectful. Participants have displayed how they navigate non-cisheteronormative viewpoints without disrespecting their religion, where they believe in not judging another individual based on their identity. This research has displayed how there is no single, linear route to changing the way you think, but rather a multitude of ways to create safe spaces.

The research has revealed the importance of the work LGBTQIA+ people are doing in this world. If all nine individuals were able to be exposed to some sort of knowledge, representation, or experience, regardless of any hegemonic spaces during their upbringing, then LGBTQIA+ communities are truly working tirelessly to advocate for their rights, dignity, and respect. I hope I can contribute, through this dissertation, in some way, towards working 'with' LGBTQIA+ individuals who rightfully deserve dignity, equal rights and respect.

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