

Queer Spiritualities: Experiences of black lesbian women in Bloemfontein

By

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DECLARATION

I, Nombulelo Towa, declare that I am the sole author of this mini-dissertation titled **Queer Spiritualities: Experiences of black lesbian women in Bloemfontein**. No part of this mini-dissertation has been previously submitted at the University of the Free State or any other Higher Education institution.

Any previous work, ideas, techniques or other material from other people are fully acknowledged as contributions to this mini-dissertation.

ABSTRACT

Research on lesbian women and their sexuality has increased since the adoption of a democratic constitution in South Africa. A large part of the research has focused on the prevalence of corrective rape committed on black lesbians in South African townships. Research has also been conducted on the lived experiences of homosexuals who identify as Christian, however this research focuses predominantly on Christian's attitudes toward homosexuals. The primary objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how black lesbian women construct meaning and define their lived experiences with reference to their sexual orientation and spirituality. This exploration involves an examination of how research participants manage to integrate their spiritual/religious identities with their homosexual identity. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with six participants who have previously or currently identify as Christian, and who self-identify as lesbian. Results from the interviews are analysed using a thematic, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach.

Keywords: Christianity, sexuality, spirituality, homosexuality, lesbian, identity, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Religious discourses are very powerful because they are governed by biblical laws that all Christians believe to be the word of God. Both women and men of faith believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God. Although the Bible has some positive messages that all human beings can live by, it is also through the Bible that gender inequality, racial segregation, and sexual discrimination are promoted. It is through patriarchal biblical interpretations that all women's lives are policed and shaped to their disadvantage. This study explores the relationship between the Christian doctrine and its treatment of women as the "othered" gender where this "othering" is extended to their sexuality. The study focuses on Christianity and ways in which it has previously, and continues to hold religious teachings that are harmful to women and their sexual expression. I trace the history of Christianity in South Africa and how it has divided people, and I further explore how lesbian women relate to Christian doctrine.

In South Africa, and in other parts of the world, homosexuality has gained greater acceptance. However, in highly traditional and religious communities homosexuality remains a taboo subject. Homosexuals are often only welcome in churches if they remain silent about their sexuality or if they agree to change their sexual orientation. In the past, it was easy for the church to reject all homosexual people but the onset of contemporary legislation that protects sexual minorities means that churches have had to rethink their stance on homosexual members of the church. The homosexual community is becoming more visible within our communities and they are no longer mute about their rights as members of the community, including their religious rights. Sexual minorities have become active in public and religious spaces which contributes to building a more inclusive South African society.

The South African constitution states that no one may be discriminated against based on race, gender, sex, culture, sexual orientation or religion among others. South Africa is the first country to include a sexual orientation clause in its constitution. This clause was the first step to the legal protection of homosexuals in South Africa. It provided homosexuals an opportunity to change from being secretive about their sexual orientation to being open about it. In the past homosexuals were treated as criminals if they acted on or disclosed their sexual orientation. In a democratic South Africa, homosexuals can now express who they are as indicated in the constitution. Despite

the country's liberal constitution, it is clear that homosexuals continue to be discriminated against. South Africa has one of the highest incidents of rape in the world, and corrective rape has emerged as a specific form of punishment for black lesbian women. Incidents of homophobic-driven attacks have increased in the post-apartheid dispensation with black lesbians being the victims of rape, violence and even murder.

Homosexuals are still not accepted as legitimate South African citizens. Although the legislation has brought about change, attitudes toward homosexuality are difficult to change. Negative attitudes toward homosexuals are strongly premised on Christian values that favour heterosexuality. South African pastors, religious leaders and members of Christian churches are openly homophobic, and base their prejudice on biblical principles. There are a few instances however where homosexuality has been accepted in the Christian church. For example, a prominent anti-apartheid leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has showed his support for the LGBTQ community and has spoken out against discrimination of sexual minorities in the Christian church.

This study argues that the Christian church has played a prominent role in discriminating against South African sexual minorities and that it needs to be challenged in its views toward women in general, and lesbians in particular. The Christian church has a central function in the everyday lives of South Africans and therefore its treatment of, and attitude toward sexual minorities needs to be foregrounded and critiqued. The church influences the way in which society perceives homosexuals and lesbian women and furthermore influences the way in which lesbians reconcile their spirituality and their sexuality. This constitutes the central focus and point of departure for this study.

1.1 Problem Statement

Nelson Mandela uttered the following words at the joint session of the United States' House of Congress in June 1990:

“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

More than twenty years later, South Africa is finally a free and a democratic country, and it is a very necessary time to reflect on our journey as South Africans. When most people reflect on the history of South Africa and on the words of Nelson Mandela, they reflect on the racial tensions that existed long before a democratic South Africa. They reflect on racial inequalities and ignore issues pertaining to sexual minorities who continue to experience unnecessary discrimination. The objective of this study is to reflect on the freedom of black lesbian women in our country: freedom in relation to the Church and God, and freedom within the context of South African society. Specifically, the study aims to examine how black lesbian Christian women manage to negotiate their sexuality with their religiosity/spirituality in contemporary South Africa.

In the modern world, homosexuality has evoked many conflicting debates and people from diverse disciplinary boundaries are engaging on this issue. African leaders have publicly expressed homophobic statements that describe homosexuality as “inhuman sordid behaviour” (Mail&Guardian, 1997, as cited in Reddy, 2001: 84). Despite the country's history of gender-based violence, South Africa has made an effort to eradicate any form of violence based on sexual orientation. Attempts to reduce gender-based violence have been sought by implementing The Equity Clause 9(3) in the South African Constitution, which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation (Gibson, 2010: 7) among other forms of discrimination, and promotes the practice of democracy.

Many organisations and social institutions have advocated for gay rights and supported movements surrounding gay issues, however, religious institutions have been rather reluctant and unsupportive (Besen & Zicklin, 2007: 250). Homosexual people have experienced different struggles resulting from the position of Christianity in relation to homosexuality (Subhi, 2011). Traditionally, mainstream Christian denominations still condemn homosexuality and view it as a sinful act (Montoya, 2000:

155). A recent incident that occurred in one of the South African churches (The Grace Bible Church in Soweto), resulted in a media furore over a homophobic sermon (TshisaLIVE¹, 2017). The incident involved a popular South African artist (television presenter, radio personality, choreographer, actor and singer) Somizi Mhlongo, who has been openly gay for years. Mhlongo walked out of a sermon held by a pastor who labelled homosexuality as “unnatural” and “a sin”. The incident demonstrates that homosexuals are still marginalised within the religious sphere and it highlights the possible struggle to reconcile religious beliefs and sexual identities. This conflict between Christianity and homosexuality has resulted in the assumption that gay and lesbian individuals would dissociate themselves from any form of spirituality (Tan, 2005: 135). The complexity of religion and its fundamentals has forced people with commonalities to develop their own spiritualities. As an example, queer spirituality is a common term amongst homosexuals, which refers to their own practices of spiritualities. However, research on queer practices has focused mainly on queer men, with women’s issues rarely explored or merely discussed alongside those of men (Varner, 2004: 79). Therefore, this study intends to examine queer spiritualities with a specific focus on black South African lesbian women who either affiliate or detach themselves from any Christian denomination.

Literature on the issues surrounding the LGBTQI community is mostly centered on the rife homophobia and unfair discrimination directed toward the community. Research has additionally been concerned with homophobic practices such as corrective rape against black lesbian women in South Africa. However, limited research has been conducted on how religion affects the lives of sexual minorities. In the South African context, where Christianity is the dominant denomination and perceived to promote homophobia, it is difficult to be both Christian and homosexual/bisexual/transgender or queer. Therefore, this study aims to examine how black lesbian women incorporate their sexual and religious/spiritual identities and how they currently identify in terms of their religiosity/spirituality. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is used as the methodological basis for the study.

¹ TshisaLive: South African online entertainment and celebrity news hub. You may follow the story on the following link: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2017-02-06-im-tired-of-the-church-using-the-bible-to-be-homophobic-says-somizi-mhlongo/>

1.2 Research Question

In relation to the background and previous research, the study is guided by the following main research question: How do homophobic Christian traditions and churches affect black lesbian women's experiences of spirituality?

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The aim of the study is to explore how black lesbian women construct meaning from their different subjective experiences in relation to their spirituality and sexual orientation.

1.3.1 Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Explore the spiritual identities of black lesbian women with reference to the tension experienced due to their sexual identity and their religious lives.
- Identify lived experiences of black lesbian women and their responses to traditional church environments.
- Ascertain how Christian lesbians reconcile their beliefs and sexual identities.
- Explore shared experiences if any, and identify intersectional markers (race, sexual orientation, class, gender and social location) that influences their spiritual life worlds.

1.4 Value of the study

There is a paucity of research in the area of homosexuality and religion in South Africa. The predominant research focus has been on gay men with less attention being paid to lesbian lives and sexualities (Visser, 2008: 1344). Thus, this study attempts to address the research gap and contribute to the body of knowledge on lesbian women and spirituality. This study will provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of black Christian lesbians in South Africa, and how they perceive and construct their reality. The research participants will have an opportunity to discuss experiences that might have been difficult to talk about previously. Furthermore, it aspires to empower

black lesbian women in the church community by providing them with an opportunity to articulate their experiences and identities.

1.5 Chapter Outline

The mini-dissertation is comprised of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the background, problem statement and previous research related to the study. The research question, aims and objectives, as well as the importance of the study are covered in the first chapter.

In the second chapter (the literature review), I examine previous literature on how the Christian faith and the pre-democratic government have historically collaborated to police and prohibit homosexuality in South Africa. The first democratic elections took place in 1994, and marked a change in the position of the government with respect to the treatment of all South Africans. The new constitution was negotiated on the basis of equality for all; this included a clause that specifically prohibited discrimination against sexual minorities. I then examine the negotiation of homosexual rights and explore how South Africans, including churches, responded in terms of accepting homosexuals, and I trace whether homosexuals still experience homophobia in a new democratic society.

In the third chapter (the theoretical framework), I discuss the theories that guide the current study. Theories that I have identified as a valuable lens for this study include Feminist Theory, Social Construction Theory, Queer Theory, Intersectionality and Lesbian Feminism.

In the fourth chapter (the research methodology), I outline the research methods and methodology used in the study. I describe research tools and data collection methods that are significant for the study. I describe the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and why it is a suitable approach for this study. Theoretical foundations of IPA are discussed and how this approach can be used to explore the meaning participants assign to their experiences. This is followed by a discussion on the sampling strategy used.

In the fifth chapter (analysis and discussion), I trace the early childhood experiences of participants with respect to Christianity and how they later recognised their homosexuality. This chapter includes the presentation of findings based on the themes

that emerged from the conducted interviews with lesbian research participants. The main themes of this research study are: Early development into Christianity; Becoming the Self; and Homophobia; and Separating one's relationship with God from the institutional Church.

In the sixth chapter, I briefly reflect on the aims and objectives of the study. I provide a summary of the findings and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the pervasive homophobia and homophobic principles that have emerged in the Christian church. The chapter furthermore explores how these attitudes and laws in South African society have affected homosexuals. Although South Africa adopted a democratic constitution in 1996, conservative Christian views and prescriptions continue to affect the lives of LGBTQ South Africans. It is important to highlight the way in which historical religious and government laws have contributed to discriminatory treatment of sexual minorities in South Africa.

The literature review will focus on the following important themes: A history of homosexuality in South Africa; the South African church's response to homosexuality; and homosexuality/lesbian identity and religion in a global and local context.

2.2 Homosexuality in South Africa

2.2.1 Sexuality during apartheid

According to Charles Leonard (2012), the relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the National Party (NP) began in the 1930s and 1940s where the pursuit for racial segregation was a mutual objective. In 1948, the National Party won the election and emerged as the ruling party in South Africa that supported separation of people based on colour (Gerber, 2000: 9). Tiffany Jones (2008: 398) adds that the Christian nationalist politics of that period supported heteropatriarchal views of sexuality and viewed homosexuality as a threat to Christianity and to the nation. The NP was not only determined to keep black people away from white people, but they were also obsessed with the concept of procreation among white people (Brown, 2014: 456). Therefore, the DRC was not only used to provide legitimation for racism but sexual acts that were not directed towards procreation were made illegal (Brown, 2014: 457). In its attempt to purify the population, Emily Craven explains that the NP monitored sexuality and race simultaneously, including homosexuality. However, there was no legislation against black homosexuality and women's sexuality was completely ignored, as it was not even mentioned in the Immorality Act (Craven, 2011:

2). In agreement, Cheryl Potgieter (2006: 6) adds that lesbianism was never criminalised in South Africa and attributes this to the marginalisation of women in South Africa. Evidently, homosexuality with support from the DRC, was regarded legally and religiously a deviant white male act (Mongie, 2013: 14).

During the 1950's, when the South African government was developing laws against sexual immorality, there were emerging international arguments within the medical and psychological fields on whether homosexuality was pathological or not. According to Theodore Brown and Elizabeth Fee (2003: 897), public debates started with the work of Alfred Kinsey in 1948, a zoologist who published two major works on sexuality. He was criticised for his methodology, and on reporting that a homosexual-heterosexual binary does not exist. He also maintained that sexuality is learned behaviour over time and that homosexuality is a natural variant of human sexuality (Brown & Fee, 2003: 898).

Following long conflicting debates, in 1973 the American Psychological Association (APA) eventually removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders (DSM-III-R) as a psychological disorder (De Block & Adriaens, 2013: 288). Despite the international consensus amongst psychiatrists and psychologists to define homosexuality as a normal part of human sexuality, the South African government remained firm on its discriminatory laws towards homosexual people during the apartheid years. These political events played a significant role in the history of sexuality in South Africa and had tremendous effects on the lived experiences of South African homosexuals during apartheid. Ultimately, the South African government was forced to abolish apartheid laws and the church was obliged to reconsider its position on racial policies and start negotiating its position on sexuality.

2.2.2 Homosexual rights

Literature on sexuality in South Africa informs us of the implementation of the Immorality Act (1969) which criminalised homosexuality as a deviant act (Craven, 2011). According to Sheila Croucher (2002: 317), it was not until the late 1980s that the gay rights struggle began to surface in South Africa. Movements that attempted to speak on these issues were limited, had little impact and were divided by race. The

system of apartheid ended in May 1994 and human rights issues became a priority (Gerber, 2000: 38). This year (1994) marked the beginning of democracy in South Africa, which followed lengthy negotiations regarding the adoption of the interim constitution (Maier, 1993). The new constitution was one of the resolutions against the previous apartheid system (Van der Vyver, 2000: 813).

During these political negotiations gay rights activists formed the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE), also known as “the Coalition”, to fight against anti-gay laws (Massoud, 2003: 301; Oswin, 2007: 649). The main theme was to ensure that gay and lesbian South Africans are protected before law; something they did not have under apartheid (Louw, 2005: 143). The constitution was finalised in 1996 and South Africa became a society that recognises sexual orientation as a human right (Potgieter, 2006: 5). The new constitution supported a radically different South Africa; it challenged old laws of apartheid and with the assistance of the courts created a society based on equal rights (Van der Vyver, 2000: 643).

The decision to decriminalise homosexuality was seen as an opportunity for South Africans to coexist in harmony, especially with the introduction of pro-gay legislation (De Vos & Barnard, 2007: 800). The process of legally protecting the LGBTQ community seemed to occur with ease, until the South African courts decided to extend the definition of marriage in common law to include same- sex marriage (Lekhuleni, 2016: 16). Suddenly religious institutions (including but not limited to Christian churches) began to challenge this act and claimed that it was an infringement on their doctrine (Staff reporter, Mail&Guardian: 2005).

The democratic state implemented structural secularisation, which resulted in a moderate religious influence over political decisions (Kruger & van der Merwe, 2017: 3). The decision to extend marriage rights to the LGBTQ community prompted churches to start discussions on homosexuality amongst leaders and their own congregants.

2.3 South African Churches’ responses to homosexuality

According to Marian Nell and Janet Shapiro (2011: 20), 80% of the South African population belong to a faith, the biggest being Christianity. The South African Demographic Profile of 2001 reported Christianity as the dominant religion in South

Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church with 6.7% members, Zion Christian churches (11.1%), Catholic Churches (7.1%), Methodist Churches (7.4%), Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (7.6%), Anglican churches (3.8%), Apostolic Faith Mission (0.5%), Lutheran churches (2.5%), Presbyterian churches (1.9%), iBanda lamaNazareth (0.6%), Baptist churches (1.5%), Congregational churches (1.1%), Orthodox churches (0.1%), other Apostolic churches (12.5%), and other Christian churches (7.1%). Only 2% of South Africans follow Islam, Hinduism and Judaism (Nell & Shapiro, 2011: 20). The implementation of South Africa's democratic constitution and the move towards secularisation forced different churches to review their policies regarding race and sexuality (Kruger & Van der Merwe, 2017: 6). Issues relating to the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) community became a source of conflict for the churches and faith-based communities of South Africa (Rickard, 2015).

2.3.1 The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa is known for the role it played in regulating sex and race relations. Johannes Vorster (2008: 323) asserts that an understanding of the DRC's position regarding LGBTQ individuals can be traced by referral to the following three main events: the General Synods ²of 1986, 2002 and 2007. In 1986, the General Synod was firm in the belief that homosexuality is a sin and according to scripture, against the word of God (Vorster, 2008: 324). In 2002, there seemed to be no change in the DRC's opinion regarding LGBTQ individuals and the General Synod presented biblical arguments against sexual promiscuity while asking for more time to conduct research on sexuality (Punt, 2006: 897, Van Loggerenberg, 2008: 96; Vorster, 2008: 325). The General Synod of 2007 presented a report that would be interpreted by some as contradictory and portraying possible conflicts regarding the decision. According to Vorster (2008: 328), the report (The 2007 Dutch Reformed Church Synod Resolution: Impact on gay ministries) stated that the DRC defined marriage as something based on heterosexual standards but new policies would be negotiated for gay people on the condition that they remain celibate

² The General Synod is the governing body of all the DRC's congregations and consists of different representatives from each regional synods. Their role is to discuss and decide on doctrinal matters brought before it (Pitikoe, 2016: 28).

[i.e. the church would accept homosexual identifying individuals on the condition that they do not engage in homosexual sex]. Therefore, the divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality remained very visible within the church.

From 2007 onwards, the DRC began conversations about homosexuality; new reports unfolded and there seemed to be a positive change within the DRC. In 2015, the media reported on the new position of the DRC to recognise same-sex marriage (Mitchley, 2018). For example, Stoyan Zaimov (2015) reported that the church voted to recognise LGBTQ marriages, and non-heterosexual members of the church would be ordained without the celibacy clause. The voting took place in 2015 and the decision to recognise same-sex marriages was acknowledged by 64 of its members. The church also explained that this decision is limited to DRCs in South Africa and does not extend to other African countries where discrimination against LGBTQ individuals remains prevalent (eNCA³, 2015).

2.3.2 The Anglican Church

The Anglican Church of South Africa is one of the largest churches. The governance of the church is guided by decisions taken at the Lambeth Conference ⁴of Anglican bishops, which takes place every ten years (Valentine, Vanderbeck, Andersson, Sadgrove & Ward, 2010: 928). According to Craig Brittain and Andrew McKinnon (2011: 2), homosexuality became a global crisis for the Anglican Church in which bishops debated the church's position over LGBTQ individuals. The belief of the church was that same-sex marriages are unnatural and therefore bishops should not bless them (Collison, 2016). The Lambeth Conference that was held in 1998 at the Canterbury Cathedral (England), clearly showed that the Anglican Church is in opposition to LGBTQ persons and that it identified homosexuality as a practice that conflicts with biblical scriptures (Brittain & McKinnon, 2011: 2).

³eNCA: A 24-hour news broadcaster that focuses on South African and African stories: the story is available online: <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/dutch-reformed-church-recognise-gay-marriage>

⁴ Lambeth Conference is attended by Anglican Bishops from all around the world. The conference is held with the purpose of passing resolutions on issues that affect the Anglican Church. The first Lambeth Conference was held in 1867.

Despite the Anglican Church's attitude towards LGBTQ individuals and marriages, Archbishop Desmond Tutu who is the former Archbishop of the Anglican church of South Africa, has been advocating for gay rights and has lead campaigns against homophobia. Archbishop Tutu is also the most prominent religious leader in South Africa. He believes in supporting homosexual individuals, and believes religious leaders should contribute to changing attitudes regarding homosexuality (Van Klinken & Gunda, 2012: 129). In February 2016, a local news channel known as "eNews", reported that the Anglican Church extended its welcome to LGBTQ members of the church. The church also agreed to baptise children of same-sex partners. However, the church made it clear that although LGBTQ individuals and married couples are welcomed, the church cannot marry the couple or allow its clergy to officiate such unions (eNCA⁵, 2016).

2.3.3 The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church stood against policies of racism during the apartheid era (Van der Vyver, 2000: 642). However, when it comes to sexuality, the church does not seem to regard homosexual marriage as deserving of blessings. According to Mark Yarhouse and Kaye Nowack (2007: 37), the Catholic Church proscribes marriage between a man and a woman because procreation plays an important role in the church's orthodoxy. In 1975, the Roman Catholic Church made its first announcement on their position regarding homosexuality (Yip, 1999: 52). In this announcement, the church made it clear that it is aware of homosexuality as a sexual orientation but does not support it as it considers it unnatural (Yarhouse & Nowack, 2007: 38). The Roman Catholic Church regards homosexuality as an "objective disorder" and sexual encounters between same-sex partners as "intrinsically disordered" (Yip, 1999: 52; Otto, 2003: 59). In 2015, the South African Catholic Church leaders criticised the DRC on their approval of homosexual unions. Catholic leaders saw the DRC's decision as a violation of biblical teachings and they made it clear that homosexual priests are not welcomed in the Roman Catholic Church (Mitchell, 2015).

⁵ eNCA: Available online on the following link <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/anglican-church-says-yes-homosexuals>

The church's position was again clarified when their leader, Pope Francis emphasised that an acceptable marriage is one between a man and woman. Pope Francis also suggested however that the church consider being more accepting of homosexual Catholics (Hale, 2015). These statements can be viewed as contradictory and confusing to the rest of the world. Pope Francis has not made any final and clear decision regarding same-sex marriage in the church; therefore, homosexuals might either be accepted in the church or not (Carroll, 2013). The Roman Catholic Church still holds the teachings of the Bible and believes that sex should be practiced with the sole purpose of procreating or its members should remain celibate (Kesavan, 2000: 32).

2.3.4 The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)

The Methodist Church has been recorded as one of the dominant denominations with the highest number of congregants (Foster, 2008: 1). The Methodist Church opposed apartheid laws from 1948 until 1994, arguing that government laws cannot be justified on biblical grounds (Foster, 2008: 6). The issue of homosexuality has been part of the church's debates for many years (Bentley, 2012: 1). The main events that can be highlighted within the church, in which the issue of homosexuality was mentioned, are the MCSA conferences that took place in 2001, 2005 and 2007 (Mtshiselwa, 2010: 15).

The outcomes of the 2001 and 2005 conferences are very similar. The Methodist Church focused mainly on community love and acceptance of different opinions on the issue of homosexuality. In the 2007 conference, the MCSA only made a commitment to diversity and re-affirmed decisions taken on the previous two conferences. They stated that there are diverse opinions within the clergy, some inclusive and some exclusive of homosexuals and same-sex marriage (Samodien, 2007). Therefore, the position of the church regarding homosexuality was still vague (Mtshiselwa, 2010: 15). However, ministers of the MCSA were very expressive and opposed same-sex marriages (Samodien, 2007). This was made clear when the church suspended one of the ministers who announced her intentions to marry her same-sex partner (De Vos, 2015). During the court proceedings, the constitutional court found that the denomination tolerates same-sex relationships, but does not extend its blessings towards marriage (Thayer, 2015). With regard to the position of the Methodist Church,

the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM⁶) submitted a position paper that stated the MCSA has not reached a decision regarding same-sex marriage. They also proposed that each congregation decide on how they treat homosexual congregants (Khuzwayo, 2011: 28).

2.3.5. Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches

The Pentecostal or Charismatic movement was first established in South Africa in 1908. The largest of these denominations include the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), the South African Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church of God (Anderson, 2005: 67). One of the largest newly found Pentecostal churches is the Christian Revival Church (CRC), which was established in 1994 in Bloemfontein. Newly formed Pentecostal movements include the Grace Bible Church (GBC) and the Rhema Church (Anderson, 2005: 77). The system of apartheid also had an effect on Pentecostal Churches, which led to the formation of African Independent Churches (AIC) (Anderson, 2005: 71). Some of the well-known leaders of Pentecostal Churches include Kenneth Meshoe, Mosa Sono and Reinhard Bonnke. Pentecostal churches emphasise the power of the holy spirit in the church. This means they see importance in healing, prophecy, exorcism and speaking in tongues (Anderson, 2005: 68). The church still adheres to biblical teachings and when confronted with issues such as human sexuality they turn to the Bible as their guidance. According to the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), Pentecostal churches regard amongst other sexual issues, homosexuality and same-sex marriage as wrong (CDE, 2008: 47).

In 2015, Bongani Qadi and Songezo Nyubuse, a homosexual couple, were expelled from the Rhema Bible Church because of their homosexual relationship (Raba, 2015). In 2017, one of the Charismatic Churches, The Grace Bible Church (GBC), was in the news for the wrong reasons. The church was accused of being homophobic by a South African choreographer (Somizi Mhlongo), when a pastor preached against homosexuality as a disgusting and sinful practice (Nemakonde, 2017). The GBC released a statement on the incident and emphasised its non-discriminatory position

⁶ DEWCOM is a recently adopted name in the Methodist church. It was previously known as the Doctrine, Ethics and Liturgy Committee. The committee is elected at the annual church conference and its role is to assist with issues that are presented before the church (Bentley, 2012).

regarding homosexuality. The statement also made it clear that the church is divided on the issue of homosexuality (GBC press release, 2017⁷).

2.3.5.1 African Independent Churches (AICs)

The African Independent, Indigenous or Initiated Churches (AICs) emerged during the twentieth century as a form of religious developments in Africa (Van Klinken, 2015: 2). They were formed as a breakaway from Western Pentecostal Churches during apartheid (Anderson, 2005: 71). The AICs represent a term for all the churches that rejected colonial and missionary Christianity, gaining independence from racial and economic exclusion by the historical or mission churches (Van Klinken, 2015: 2). According to Obed Kealotswe (2014: 228), the AICs were made popular by their inclusion of African culture and their identity as African Christianity. The AIC is often referred to as the spiritual or prophet-healing church. They focus on the spiritual power of Jesus Christ, the presence of the holy spirit, prayer and Bible reading (Van Klinken, 2015: 8). The AICs are also traditional in their approach and include African beliefs in their theology (Kealotswe, 2014: 238). The prophets are similar to what is known as a sangoma⁸ in the African context, and receive inspiration from ancestors⁹ before healing others.

The AICs believe in the Old Testament to develop their theology (Kealotswe, 2014: 232). Members of AICs believe there is one God who has ancestors as His intermediaries (Kealotswe, 2014: 235). The role of the ancestors or the living dead is to inform the people on God's wishes and communicate, through a spirit medium if there is anything contrary to what God has instructed. One of the important beliefs within AICs is the bearing of children. However, it is not required for members to have children within a marriage setting; the African God allows men to have concubines outside marriage (Kealotswe, 2014: 235). This belief and traditional outlook on reproduction demonstrates that the church is patriarchal in that it only permits men to have multiple partners outside their own families. According to Adriaan Van Klinken (2015: 19), the most controversial issue facing African Christianity in the 21st century

⁷ The press release statement can be found on the following online link: <http://gracebiblechurch.org.za/grace-bible-church-response/>

⁸ Sangoma: A traditional healer who performs different roles in the community

⁹ Ancestor: any person from whom one is descended

is the issue of homosexuality and sexual diversity. Although sexuality was previously not a priority for both the churches and African leaders, that has changed in recent years.

Globalisation has presented a number of challenges for African churches due to new societal developments. Homosexuality has become a problematic issue for African churches, especially as the world has shifted its values to accommodate individuals who identify as homosexual (Masango, 2002: 956). Although the AICs have not come out and spoken publicly about their position regarding homosexuality, African church leaders have been vocal against the acceptance of homosexuality and claim that homosexuality is unAfrican and unChristian (Van Klinken, 2015: 19). According to Masango, homosexuality in Africa is hardly spoken about and churches pretend it does not exist (2002: 956). When it is mentioned in churches, it is condemned and biblical scriptures are quoted in order to dismiss any discussions on homosexuality (Masango, 2002: 957). In a study conducted by Hennie Kotze and Reinet Loubser (2018), which focused on Christian ethics in South Africa and examined liberal values and attitudes amongst South Africans, it was found that members of the AICs have remained conservative in their views. When reviewing 2013 data on the acceptance of homosexual marriage, 55% of AIC members were against the idea. It was concluded that AICs appear to be conservative in their outlook on homosexuality (Kotze & Loubser, 2018: 9).

2.3.6 Metropolitan Community of Churches (MCC)

People who identify as homosexuals often argue that they were born that way; they believe choice is not part of their sexual identity (Balog, 2005: 558). In a study conducted by Donald Haider-Markel and Mark Joslyn (2008), it was found that Christians view homosexuality as a choice, and repentance from sin is believed to be a solution for homosexuality and the sin that is associated with it. A large part of the research on the relationship between homosexuality and religion focuses on churches that are anti-gay. However, there are churches in South Africa such as the Metropolitan Community of Churches in Johannesburg that are gay-friendly and create space for LGBTQ faith believers in South Africa. Other MCC¹⁰ churches in South Africa

¹⁰ MCC information may be accessed on the following link: <http://www.goodhopemcc.org/>

include The Hope and Unity Metropolitan Church (HUMCC) in Hillbrow, The Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein, Progressive Judaism in Hillbrow, and the Victory Ministries Church in Kwazulu-Natal. These churches are affiliated with the Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC), which is regarded as the oldest MCC Church and the 'main' church in South Africa.

GHMCC was established in 1983 and is affiliated with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC). The HUMCC locates itself within a broad framework of international human rights and regards itself as inclusive in terms of sexual diversity. They align themselves with social justice movements such as the international LGBTQ rights movements, the civil rights movement and the LGBTQ rights movements in South Africa.

While other traditional churches have been vocal around racial issues in South Africa, the GHMCC is focused on issues that affect the LGBTQ community. The church focuses on the constitutional rights of the LGBTQ community and promotes inclusivity and diversity. One of the issues that caused public turmoil, including within religious institutions was the question of same-sex marriage. The GHMCC made the following statement regarding same-sex marriages:

Same Sex ¹¹marriage is not and should not be a religious debate, it is a question of equality and human rights. In a democratic society, our judges and public servants are supposed to follow the law and do what is right, not what may be popular at the moment or bend to appease any one particular group at the expense of another. Discrimination was never and will never be right.

The GHMCC's stance on same-sex marriages challenges patriarchal, homophobic Christian churches and stands in opposition to the pervasive discrimination against the LGBTQ community. The GHMCC is aware of biblical scriptures used to condemn homosexuality and calls out religious homophobia that is promoted through the interpretation of these texts. The GHMCC defends LGBTQ identities and supports the rights of sexual minorities. The church has contributed to normalising LGBTQ identities and experiences within a church environment. It legitimises same-sex relations, same-sex desire and the naturalness of gender diversity. The church challenges gender binary norms and provides information on different gender identities and expressions.

¹¹ GHMCC statement may be found on the following link: (<http://www.goodhopemcc.org/resources/same-sex-marriage/246-ghmcc-statement-on-same-sex-marriages.html>)

This section thus highlights that although they are few, there are churches that have embraced homosexuality in South Africa.

3. Homosexuality and Christianity

The relationship between religion and sexuality has generally been represented as antagonistic (Young, Shipley & Trothen, 2015: 3). The conflicting aspects of religion and sexuality are not a recent phenomenon and the negative attitude towards homosexuality by Christian denominations has been documented (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker: 2001; Subhi & Geelan, 2012). In the South African context, Christianity has always had negative relations with groups regarded as the minority. Historically, Christianity as the dominant religion was used to promote racial segregation and to enforce oppressive laws on those who did not conform to Christian standards (including homosexuals). In other words, heterosexual marriages were regarded as supreme and the only acceptable union in South Africa (Amien, 2012).

The adoption of the new democratic constitution in 1996 afforded all individuals the right to freedom and human dignity. It promised the promotion of diversity and inclusivity regardless of race, background or sexual orientation (Maier, 1993; Van der Vyver, 2000: 813). Similarly, the 2006 Civil Union Act made changes to legally recognised same-sex marriages in South Africa (De Vos, 2008: 163). In response to this change, religious leaders and congregants were at the forefront of the opposition to same-sex marriage. For example, in 2006 the eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) reported on the refusal of the Anglican Church to bless same-sex marriages (eNCA¹², 2016). Reverend Kenneth Meshoe of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) publicly announced his disapproval of the Civil Union Act, and took further measures by signing a declaration that opposes homosexual marriages (Da Costa, 2006).

It cannot be denied that changes to laws and policies regarding sexuality have sparked some form of conflict and debate from both religious institutions and people who identify within the LGBTQ continuum. However, the biased nature of religion towards sexuality also creates a misrepresentation of individual opinion regarding

¹² eNCA: Anglican Church rejects prayers of blessing for same-sex union, available online: <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/anglican-church-rejects-prayers-of-blessing-for-same-sex-unions>

homosexuality. It is untrue that all religious leaders believe homosexual individuals should be treated as religious and societal outcasts (Young et. al., 2015: 4). The problem is that those who support sexual minorities are not as publicly vocal as those who disapprove.

Racial inequalities have been defined as the most important political issue in South Africa. The definition of liberation in South Africa is attributed to racial integration, neglecting other minorities who have experienced significant discrimination. This study aims to highlight how religious discourses have affected the lives of sexual minorities and how these discourses have limited the liberation of homosexual women legally, religiously, and socially. According to Nasrudin Subhi and David Geelan (2012: 1383), Christianity has always regarded homosexuality as morally wrong. The church views homosexuality as a sin and in contradiction to the word of God. Christianity values heterosexuality and procreation, therefore homosexuality becomes a threat to what is regarded as a normal and morally pure family according to Christianity (Cameron-Ellis, 1999: 17). Religious institutions often refer to specific Bible verses as evidence that homosexuality is wrong. In recent debates, people who are against homosexuality, and those who do not question their literal meaning have used these texts to defend heterosexuality.

4. Previous research on lesbian/homosexual identity and religion

This section focuses on previous research regarding lesbian/homosexual sexuality and how it has collided with religion. The research studies and contributions are presented from a global context and from the South African context.

4.1 Global discourses on lesbian/homosexual identity and religion

A study conducted by Dawne Moon (2014) reviews religious views of six different churches regarding homosexuality. The first view is one of homonegativity, in which many religious individuals believe that homosexuality is a sin and against biblical teachings. The second view is more tolerant towards homosexuals but the act itself is still regarded as a sin. The third view is moderate where individuals choose to remain silent about sexual orientation concerning those who identify as homosexual and heterosexual. The fourth view represents individuals who are more accepting of

homosexual individuals and do not condemn them. The last two views presented by Moon (2014) are more homopositive (accepting of homosexuals), as opposed to the former. In the fifth view, people believe that homosexual identities are a creation of God and they believe that condemning it is ungodly. The sixth and last view argues that gender, sexuality and marriage are flawed human constructs. According to this last view, gender, sexuality and marriage are social constructs that are developed to benefit a certain portion of society. These views can be used to understand how religious communities understand sexuality. Although many religious denominations are beginning to change their thoughts on homosexuality, Melinda Buchanan, Kristina Dzelme, Dale Harris and Lorna Hecker (2001: 435) argue that many religious denominations still associate homosexuality with disgrace. With reference to Moon's research, it is apparent that although not all churches and congregants are negative towards homosexuality, the church does have an influence on the general attitude towards homosexuality.

Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) provide an analysis on how religious and cultural factors shape attitudes about homosexuality. Using data from the fourth wave of the World Values Surveys (WVS¹³), Inglehart, Haerpfer, Moreno, Welzel, Kizilova, Diez-Medrano, Lagos, Norris, Ponarin and Puranen (2014) found that religion has a great influence on the attitude towards homosexuality in countries that are more liberal. Similarly, using the same method (Baylor Religion Survey), Andrew Whitehead (2010) reported that religious individuals display negative attitudes towards homosexuality as they attend more worship services. Results presented by Whitehead are similar to the argument presented by Yasemin Besen and Gilbert Zicklin (2007: 253) that Christian literal interpretation of the Bible contributes significantly to negative attitudes towards homosexual individuals. These findings are also evident in a study conducted by Lee Kirkpatrick (1993). Kirkpatrick makes a link between fundamentalism, Christian orthodoxy, and religious orientation as predictors of discrimination. The study explores the extent to which fundamentalism has influenced Christians and how people believe in the Bible as a representation of God's authority, and thus neglect that these texts

¹³ The World Values Survey is a network of social scientists who conduct research on changing values and how they influence social and political lives. See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>

discriminate against those considered “deviant”. Yasemin Besen and Gilbert Zicklin (2007) highlight the justification of biblical discrimination and prejudice used to suppress those who are regarded as deviating from what the bible says. Their study highlights how the Bible has been used to justify the suppression of minorities.

Some studies show that LGBTQ individuals are exposed to negative religious messages, and they perceive these messages as having a negative effect on their lives. A study conducted by Mark Henrickson (2007), which focused on religion, spirituality and identity of LGB (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual) in New Zealand suggests that there is a decline in the affiliation with Christianity. The vast majority (72.8%) of the sample chosen for study had abandoned their religious identity over their sexual identity, while a small minority (14.8%) chose to remain in their respective religious affiliation. Conflict between Christianity and homosexuality has had negative effects on the wellbeing of sexual minorities. A major source of conflict reported by Kelly Schuck and Becky Liddle (2001: 69) was religious teachings that portray homosexuality as a sinful sexual orientation and the constant message to convert those who engage in homosexual acts to Christianity. Consequences of such messages result in the emotional wellbeing of these individuals being compromised. They reported feelings of guilt and shame, depression and suicidal thoughts (Schuck & Liddle, 2001: 70).

In addition to the research presented on homosexuality and religion globally, the study will now focus on research conducted on lesbian/homosexual identity and religion in an African/South African context.

4.2 Local discourses on Lesbian/homosexual identity and religion

A large part of the research dedicated to lesbian studies in South Africa focuses on the relationship between sexual identity and sexual violence. The country has furthermore witnessed increased violence against lesbian women in the form of something known as corrective rape, i.e. rape perpetrated by heterosexual men against lesbian women in order to “correct” or “cure” their sexuality. When we start to narrow our focus to religion and sexuality, we cannot separate the treatment of the church towards women and its treatment toward lesbians. The patriarchal nature of Christianity has suppressed the visibility of women in general within the Church

(Mudimeli, 2011: 3). However, lesbian women have the additional burden of a different sexuality to bear. Feminist work in South Africa is predominately located in academic spaces and within Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that focus on women's empowerment (Hames, 2003: 1). Women's movements in South Africa such as the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) has committed itself to rebuilding a women's movement that addresses emerging forms of gender-based violence, but they have neglected the discrimination of lesbian women altogether (Hames, 2003: 2). Although more work needs to be done on women's sexuality, research is being conducted on the plight of lesbians in South Africa. Scholars such as Musa Dube (1997), Madipoane Masenya (1997), Gail Haddad (2000) and Gerald West (2010) have contributed to feminist theology and provide a critique of biblical interpretations that marginalise women. Their contributions have made a difference to how scholars and interpreters of texts analyse themes related to sexuality within theology.

There is a paucity of research on women's sexual pleasure in African countries. The major challenge of conducting research on black lesbian sexuality is the taboo nature that is attached to it and the bias to document experiences of white women (Potgieter, 2007: 10). Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (2005) challenge the thinking of women's lesbian sexuality as taboo. Their book titled "Tommy Boys, Lesbians Men and Ancestral Wives" documents the lived experiences of same-sex practices in Africa. Morgan and Wieringa foreground religion as one of the major challenges to understanding lesbian sexuality in Africa (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005: 38). Biblical teachings confuse same-sex individuals and make them feel unaccepted. One of the respondents in "Tommy Boys" comments: "It is tough. I just have to ignore it because nowhere in the Bible is it written that a woman-to-woman relationship is allowed. Sometimes I feel like a sinner. Sometimes I feel like I am doing the right thing. As I told you earlier I feel confused" (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005: 38). The perception of lesbian relationships as religiously unacceptable is also highlighted in a study conducted by Nadia Sanger and Lindsay Clowes (2006). Using an exploratory method, they found that Christians believe that lesbianism is a mental condition and that acceptance of God in one's life is the cure (Sanger & Clowes, 2006: 42).

Research on lesbian/homosexual identity in South Africa is furthermore centered on the constitution and sexual orientation rights in South Africa (Kuperus, 1996; Croucher,

2002; Thoreson, 2008; Massoud, 2010). Regardless of these rights, some political and traditional leaders believe that homosexuality is unAfrican (Wynchank, 2006: 69; Msibi, 2011: 62; Brown, 2012: 52). Religion and African traditions seem to be used as excuses for the disallowance of homosexuality and other identities that are located outside heteronormative standards. Patriarchal and heteronormative discourses delegitimise black homosexuality in South Africa and expose homosexuals to homophobia. Therefore, LGBTQ individuals are faced with the challenge of justifying their identities in the face of culture, religion and African tradition. All of these discourses have consequences for people who identify as homosexual.

In a study conducted by Jabulani Kheswa (2016), 21 black lesbians were interviewed regarding their psychological well-being due to discrimination. The participants reported feelings of alienation when it comes to the Church. They felt unaccepted and mocked by pastors who preached against homosexuality (Kheswa, 2016: 151). Some lesbians resort to changing their identity from 'lesbian' to 'gay' in the hope that society will be more welcoming as the term 'lesbian' is often regarded as a form of illness (Ochse, 2011: 17). By rejecting the term 'lesbian' these women believe they are detaching themselves from the stereotypes associated with lesbianism as deviant behaviour. However, Maheshvari Naidu (2013) argues that lesbians, who wish to remain in the Christian doctrine, will have to be silent about their sexuality if being fully accepted in the Church is important to them (Naidu, 2013: 5).

Two studies that have been identified as vital to the rationale of the present study (i.e. discrimination against lesbian women) include that of Tanya Graham and Sarah Kiguwa (2004) and a study by Mzikazi Nduna and Rachel Jewkes (2013). Nduna and Jewkes explored the challenges facing young black gender non-conforming females in the Eastern Cape. It was found that more security is needed for black lesbians in the townships and more education is needed to counter strong religious messages against non-conforming identities (Nduna & Jewkes, 2013: 56). Graham and Kiguwa investigate the main issues faced by the black LGBTQ community. One of the central themes identified was the harsh and violent treatment experienced by sexual minorities. Reports of gang rape towards bisexual and lesbian women were highlighted in the study. The findings were also similar to the ones presented by Kelly Schuck and Becky Liddle (2001) where participants reported psychological effects that included depression, substance abuse, and suicide.

Contributions by Amien (2012), Subhi and Geelan (2012), and Young, Shipley and Trothen (2015) provide a historical context regarding the relationship between religion and sexuality/homosexuality. Additionally, Ellis-Cameron (1999), Jones (2007) and Phillips (2016) demonstrate how religious discourses continue to infringe on the rights of sexual minorities. Arguments presented by Jones (2007) bring to the surface how homosexuality was constantly associated with abnormality. Jones's (2007) study helps to contextualise how before democracy, medical, legal and religious institutions shared similar, negative sentiments toward homosexuality. Homosexuality was seen as a threat to the status quo and the belief was that psychiatric treatment could be used to convert people from homosexuality to heterosexuality.

The South African government, together with their religious counterparts, continued to use the medical arguments and biblical references to condemn and suppress homosexual individuals. Contributions by Jones (2007) enlightens and adds to the existing Biblical interpretations by presenting different perspectives on how we read and interpret scriptures. A research study conducted by Ellis-Cameron (1999) is central to the present study. Ellis-Cameron's study specifically deals with the relationship between the church and homosexuality and establishes how religious discourses continue to define lesbian/homosexual women as unacceptable citizens in post-apartheid South Africa. Dominant themes addressed in the study include the nature of religious beliefs towards homosexuality, attitudes towards homosexuality and how heterosexual congregants relate to homosexuals congregants within the church. Recommendations proposed in the study include conducting research on religion and homosexuality within different churches in South Africa. The study also focused on both men and women, and one of the recommendations was to focus on women, which is addressed in the present study. In drawing from the above contributions, the present study problematises the relationship between Christianity and black lesbian identity.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the theoretical framework that guides the present research study. The study follows a Feminist paradigm as a framework for understanding different perspectives and experiences of black lesbian women within a religious structure. Theories such as Feminism, Social Construction Theory, Queer Theory, Intersectionality and Lesbian Feminism are discussed. According to Marlene Sinclair (2007: 39), a theoretical framework, also known as a conceptual framework, is a guiding plan that facilitates the whole research study. In other words, gathering theories enables the researcher to understand and structure the research study within the knowledge base of the phenomenon being studied (Sinclair, 2007: 39). According to Amanda Rockinson-Szapkiw (2013), a theoretical framework is the foundation of your research, which demonstrates how your study fits into and contributes to what is already known regarding your topic.

3.1.1 Feminism globally and within the African context

According to Elke Weik (2015: 2), Feminism is a theoretical framework that is difficult to define in one sentence or using one theoretical perspective. The reason for this is that Feminism has a long diverse history that dates back to the 18th century and has multi-faceted strands, which are sometimes contradictory in nature (Weik, 2015: 2). In her book titled "Feminist theory: From margin to center", bell hooks (2000: 17) highlights the difficulty in defining feminism and writes that, "[a] central problem within Feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what Feminism is or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification". Therefore, according to this definition, there are different views regarding what Feminism is and that depends on one's point of departure. Furthermore, for hooks (2000: 24): "Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression." Holly Sanchez Perry agrees and (2018: 141) states that Feminism attempts to do away with sexism within social, political and cultural institutions that are dominated by men. Robyn Wiegman (2008: 42) defines Feminism as a reactive force against political and social systems that subordinate women. Similarly, Owen Fiss (1994: 413) explains that Feminism is the belief that women deserve social and political equality.

According to Mary Becker (1999: 32), feminist theories challenge the maintenance and acceptance of patriarchy in the current structures of society. Feminism(s) have contributed to speaking out about women's issues and their marginalised status. Feminist perspectives problematise gender inequality and offer ways of balancing the inequality that exists within the current social construct. For Lorber, "[a]ll social structures (marriage, economy, politics, work, culture and religion) have protected and normalised gender inequality" (1997: 8). Therefore, it is important to challenge these structures and dismantle ideas that perpetuate male supremacy. Feminists believe that the nature of sex has been socially constructed to create unequal relations between men and women. To change women's secondary position requires a transformation in the way societies are structured. We need to build societies in which both women's and men's human experiences are not discriminated and are regarded as equally important (Ackermann, 2008: 40). Therefore, for Feminist theory, the priority is to write and highlight the situations and experiences of the world from women's point of view. Feminism becomes relevant in this study as it aims to voice the experiences of black women who have been and continue to be marginalised within the religious sphere. In this study, the participants' point of view will be foregrounded and thereby challenge "othering" practices inherent in "malestream" theorising and research.

However, hooks (2000: 25) provides cautionary advice and states that Feminism needs to consider "the diversity of women's social and political reality, it centralises the experiences of all women, especially the women whose conditions have been ignored or influenced by political movements". Feminism provides a guide for the participants to challenge uncomfortable thoughts within a space that rejects their sexual identity. John Hoffman (2001: 194) adds that Feminism must represent diversity and provide a space where all women are able to contribute to their liberation. Feminism should be represented as a dynamic movement, in which all forms of Feminism (e.g. radical, liberal, among others) are not viewed as conflicting forms of feminism but rather as differentiated forms of Feminism (Hoffman, 2001: 194). In other words, they all address inequality but they do so in different ways. Feminist principles are vital in a study of women who are diverse; it provides room to explore the political and religious significance of their lived realities.

Abena Busia, Leymah Gbowee, Minna Salammi, Nana Sekyiamah, Amina Mama, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are some of the prominent feminists

and African writers on the African continent. A self-proclaimed feminist and a Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes about gender roles in her book titled “We should all be feminists” (2014) Adichie’s text foregrounds the issue of patriarchy in Nigeria. She evokes a particular treatment of women in Nigeria in which men can easily reduce them to sexual objects (Adichie, 2014: 14). In her non-fiction work, she writes about the way in which society has accepted men as beings with no self-control in situations of rape and that women are always thought of as inherently guilty (Adichie, 2014: 32). Adichie’s work is not representative of all African countries, but it provides readers with some insight into the patriarchal nature that is embedded in African cultures. Intersectional feminist work is needed in African countries to disturb patriarchal and colonial discourses, to make gender noticeable, and to challenge racist, sexist and classist discursive practices on the continent.

Although there have been significant contributions by African feminist writers on women’s subordinated status on the continent, Naomi Nkealah (2006: 133) argues that the use of Feminism has been problematic for African women. Feminism was initially portrayed as an emancipatory movement for all women, however it faced resistance from African women for failing to consider the struggles experienced by black women and men (Ebunoluwa, 2009: 228). According to Naomi Nkealah (2016: 62), African women questioned Western Feminism on its position regarding gender. They opposed the idea that men be portrayed as the enemy by the Western Feminist movement as African men were regarded as allies in the fight against colonialism and racism. Furthermore, African women argued that the raced experiences of black women are completely ignored by the Western feminist movement.

Feminism is often defined as hostile toward males, culture and religion in its theoretical conceptualisation (Nkealah, 2006). Common attributes associated with Western Feminism include women trying to be like men, women assuming masculine roles and favouritism toward lesbian relationships (Alkali, Talif, Roselezam, Yahya & Jan, 2013: 239). Therefore, it is difficult for African female writers who do not share the same sentiments as those mentioned above to identify as feminists (Nkealah, 2006: 133). Due to the critique by African women, Womanism was coined as a resolution to the failures and concerns highlighted within Western Feminism. Womanism is defined as a movement that focuses on the lived experiences of black African women (Ebunoluwa, 2009: 229). Womanism, as part of African Feminisms, is founded on

three principles: Resisting Western Feminism, building African views on culture, and collaborating with men in improving the conditions of women (Nkealah, 2016: 63).

Similar to other African countries, the concept Feminism was not openly accepted in South Africa. The belief that Feminism is a Western import, contributed to the reluctance of black South African women accepting it, regardless of their Feminist beliefs (Gouws, 2010: 14). The focus on women's issues was also disturbed by the political struggles of the country, which focused mainly on racial segregation. Shireen Hassim (1991: 68) explains that the South African political climate of the 1980s was mainly focused on mobilising women specifically for national liberation as opposed to women's liberation. Due to the history of South Africa being shaped intensively by the division of race, racism featured strongly in the formulation of South African Feminism (Nitasha, 2008: 2). It was only in 1987 that a Feminist academic project known as Agenda was formed and it has become the most influential project documenting research on gender and women's issues. Agenda played an influential role in reshaping the notion of Feminist thought. During the 1990's, a renewed political agenda based on democratic principles emerged in South Africa with the aim to provide women with positions of authority in government (Gouws, 2010: 14).

In an attempt to understand Feminism or gender discourses within the South African context, Amanda Gouws (2010: 14) explains that instead of adopting Feminism as it was presented in the global West, South African scholarship on Feminism shifted its focus to African Feminism/s. This approach focused on understanding motherhood, women's bodies and how sexuality is controlled through culture and custom. Even so, Ronit Frenkel (2008: 1) draws attention to the unsettling position of women in post-apartheid South Africa. She argues that women are both included and excluded in terms of gender politics where the increased number of women in politics has often been accompanied with victimisation (Frenkel, 2008: 2). Racial politics have affected the women's movement in South Africa and weakened Feminist work. Gouws argues that when Feminists infiltrated the political sphere and had access to parliament, Feminism lost its direction and became a gender discourse (Gouws, 2010: 16). Policies around gender within patriarchal institutions completely defeated the Feminist agenda as they were implemented by people who do not understand Feminist activism (Gouws, 2010: 17).

3.1.2 Social Construction Theory

Social Construction Theory asserts that people never know what is universally true or false, if something is good or bad, but we know the stories about all these uncertainties (Galbin, 2014: 82). Social constructionism can be viewed as a perspective that believes that human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences (Owen, 1994: 413). It is a perspective that focuses on social influences on communal and individual life (Galbin, 2014: 82). Therefore, the insights of Kenneth Gergen (2002) will be utilised in this study, to demonstrate the relevance of this theory.

Kenneth Gergen (2002: 6-12) describes five premises of Social Construction Theory and two of them were found to be relevant to this study as they deal with religious discourses. The first premise is as follows:

The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are socially derived products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people (Gergen, 2002: 7).

Gergen's argument is useful for this study as discourses that govern individual lives are socially constructed and can be deconstructed. What this means for this study is that the perceptions that people have about lesbian sexuality and what it means to be a black women, are socially constructed. Socialisation, specifically being socialised into a specific religion, influences people's knowledge about certain subjects and how they react toward what they know. Christina Landman (2007) conducted a study on the effects of religious discourses on the mental health of believers. Using case studies of black women, the study indicated that people's thinking and doing is controlled by socio-religious discourses. One of the emergent themes includes "Religious identity discourses" where participants experienced tension, stress, and rejection because they could not adhere to the religious identities prescribed for them (Landman, 2007: 253). Landman's finding is also relevant for the present study in that black lesbian women's sexual identity stands in direct contrast with the Christian ideal of heterosexuality. By conducting interviews with lesbian identified research participants I seek to establish the types of tensions that emerge in the conflict between sexual identity and religious beliefs. The second premise that is found to be relevant to the study as described by Gergen is as follows:

Language derives its major significance from the way in which it is embedded within patterns of relationships (Gergen, 2002: 9).

This premise is important in understanding that religious discourses can be deconstructed. Gergen argues that with Social Construction Theory, meaning is generated in disrupted ways and enclosed in discourses (2002: 12). Gergen argues that words shape our thoughts. In other words, how we describe things to ourselves affects how we think and act. Christina Landman (2007: 32) defines discourse as stories constructed by those who have power in society as knowledge and truth. However, discourse is not only constructed by those who are powerful in society. There are also subaltern discourses that disrupt hegemonic understandings of the world. This study is interested in those discourses. Therefore, Social Construction occurs through language, believed by the majority of people, which influences their behaviour. Following Gergen's argument on the use of language, one can deduce that everyday language and the perceptions that people have are socially constructed. In black South African communities, the social construction of a "woman" is based on a woman's willingness to live up to the standards set for her by society. The refusal to do so may result in her being labelled as inauthentic to true womanhood, or as far as lesbians are concerned, as unAfrican.

This study argues that religious cultures create a certain perception about what a woman ought to be. It is only through sharing narratives on women's dignity, sexualities and spiritualities that all women can construct new and positive meanings for themselves where they can legitimate their identities as both lesbian and Christian or as lesbian and spiritual. With reference to this study, Social Construction Theory will facilitate a firm theoretical framework for the researcher to identify religious discourses as discourses of power that can affect black lesbian Christian women either negatively or positively. Informed by Social Construction Theory, the study describes discourses that hold black women captive by means of church dogmas and interpretation of scriptures that have marginalised the lives of black lesbian Christian women. The study will furthermore seek to identify first-person narratives and discourses that have been used to define a unique, and yet unexplored identity for black lesbians.

3.1.3 Queer theory

Queer theory is hard to clearly define as it is an evolving body of work that draws and builds on the existing theories of identity and power (Watson, 2005: 69). This theory

has its origins in lesbian and gay studies and Teresa de Lauretis first promoted it during the 1990's (Jagose, 2009: 157). According to Katherine Harris (2005: 1), although Queer Theory emerged from gay and lesbian studies the two are not synonymous. Queer theory goes beyond exploring aspects of gay and lesbian studies, it touches on those ignored assumptions of gender, sexual orientation and relationships (Meyer, 2007: 15). The theory does not restrict itself to individuals who identify as homosexual but accommodates everyone in a marginalised position (Giffney, 2004: 73).

There are differences between sex, gender assignment, gender identity and gender role. Sex is defined as a person's biological sex, being male or female (Lips, 2017: 5). Gender assignment occurs at birth and it is the determination of sex based on physical characteristics (Reiner, 1997: 1044). According to Milton Diamond (2002: 323), gender identity is a person's own recognition of their gender, whether male or female or neither. Gender role refers to how society expects individuals to behave or be treated based on their assigned gender (Diamond, 2002: 323). These definitions and concepts help us understand how individual behaviour involves an enactment of their gender roles within various social contexts, which is mostly associated with femininity and masculinity. For example, to be feminine has historically been understood as being submissive, passive and supportive. All these characteristics are the roles associated with being a woman (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003: 1013). Masculinity or maleness is then associated with dominance, aggression, and being the breadwinner of the family. Transgressing these dichotomies (femininity and masculinity) can be regarded as problematic. Black lesbian Christian women clearly do not conform to stereotypical femininity. Their masculine appearance (in some instances), their sexual preference for other women, and their refusal to be with men are factors that define them as socially and religiously unacceptable. These transgressions are regarded as deviant within Christian spaces where there are clear prescripts for what a woman is and where female presentation is supposed to be non-threatening to males.

Queer theory challenges the notion of defined identity categories; it refutes norms that create gender binaries of acceptable and non-acceptable sexualities (Meyer, 2007: 15). Queer theorists therefore reject the "idea of sexuality as an essentialist category determined by biology or any standards of morality and truth" (Harris, 2005, 1). In Queer Theory, there is no standardised set of norms but rather a preference for flexible

and developing norms that different people may fit into (Harris, 2005: 1). Therefore, Queer Theory aims to disrupt binaries created to construct society in a certain way, with the hope of destroying differences and dismantling any inequality (Schippert, 2005: 90). The constant differentiation of masculinity and femininity also indicates the performative aspects of gender, which then makes the work on gender performativity by Judith Butler (1990) an important contribution to this study.

Judith Butler (1993: 21) argues that gender is performative and that it is constructed through a repetition of acts. By using the concept of drag, Butler views sexuality as something that is acted out, something which is not essentially true but expressed as a reality. For Butler, “[g]ender performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted” (1993: 22). What is meant by this is that gender is not just given, we have to perform it. I therefore argue that Christianity reinforces femininity with their set standards on female presentation (for example, acting pious and submissive and wearing dresses). Lesbians do not necessarily conform to these standards and therefore become outsiders and susceptible to discrimination by those who regard them as sinners or rebels. They clearly do not conform to heteronormative standards therefore their experience of the church/religion can impact negatively on both their spiritual and sexual identity which seems to be incompatible. The refusal of gender and sexuality as fluid makes heterosexuality a “constant” and acceptable sexual attraction because of the binary that is created of feminine and masculine (Butler, 1993: 22). Butler’s work challenges the rigid binaries that are socially constructed and this is what makes her contributions to this study relevant and valuable.

3.1.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality has become one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for feminist work. It explores the dynamic or vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality (Nash, 2008: 2). The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and it rejects the idea that social identities are exclusive but rather that they are grounded in symbolic domains, which are historically and contextually situated (Nash, 2008: 2; Few-Demo, 2014: 170). Intersectionality theories acquaint us with different identities that interlock with each other and that are defined by power and privilege. It is a perspective that argues for multiple identities as constructing the lived experiences of

those in marginalised positions (Parent, DeBlaere & Moradi, 2013: 640). Therefore, Intersectionality has conceptual relevance for this study, which will explore ways in which race, sexuality, spirituality, class and gender combine to marginalise and shape individual identities.

The focus of Intersectionality is on the position of black women as the most marginalised group, and it recognises the differences among women rather than searching for differences between men and women (Pelak, 2007: 2395). Through the concept of Intersectionality, Crenshaw explores how black women experience multiple oppressions that intersect with race and gender and she argues that these interwoven oppressions are often overlooked, misrepresented or silenced (Perry, 2017: 141).

In South Africa, black lesbians often come from poor social backgrounds, high crime areas, patriarchal environments, and are mostly exposed to violence and discrimination. Although South Africa has declared its commitment to human rights, most black lesbians continue to be defined as outsiders and are alienated from the rights enshrined in the constitution. They are constantly living in fear of violence and are exposed to discourses that frame homosexuality as unAfrican (Moreau, 2015: 496). Lesbian sexuality is thus positioned as a deviation from an authentic African identity. The following extract taken from a report in the Mail&Guardian newspaper foregrounds the marginalisation of black lesbians in South Africa:

Most people, including those in government, follow religious and traditional beliefs that condemn homosexuality as an aberration and unAfrican (Mayema, 2013).

While black lesbians keep fighting for their human rights and oppose the pervasive violence, they also have to defend their African identity in the face of religion and culture. In her work with black lesbians in Soweto, Amanda Lock Swarr (2012: 963) argues that masculine lesbians pose a 'tripartite threat' to norms of heterosexuality, gender, and sex which expose them to discrimination. When we look at research within the South African context, the focus has predominately been on the prevalence of corrective on black lesbian bodies (Zway, 2015: 17). This study aims to explore multiple intersectional identity markers that simultaneously affect the lives of black lesbians. It is a trend for black butch lesbians to be targeted as sexual violence victims, however it is important to highlight that lesbians also experience less visible forms of oppression. For example, femme lesbians might feel invisible in a society that assumes they are heterosexual and can be violated because they invert their feminine

attraction to women, not men (Matabeni, 2013). Femme lesbians might equally feel invisible within LGBTQ communities as they are assumed to be heterosexual due to their appearance where their sexual orientation is questioned by other lesbians (Kelly, 2007: 879).

Intersectionality is also important in examining what Antonio Pastrana defines as “secondary marginalisation” which is a view on multiple layers of oppression that manifest within marginalised groups (Pastrana, 2006: 223). This can be related to the example of femme lesbians and how they are regarded as invisible within LGBTQ communities. Due to their feminine appearance, they are assumed heterosexual, an assumption that is also common within our societies where “real” women are expected to dress and express themselves in a certain way. This marginalisation within the LGBTQ community is referred to as the “within group marginalisation” and contributes to stereotypes that exist in our society about marginalised groups (Blair & Hoskin, 2015: 236). This study aims to highlight the importance of deconstructing all forms of oppression that produce inequalities. Intersectionality helps in identifying these multiple forms of oppression and explains the exclusion of black lesbians within Christianity. As black Christian lesbians in South Africa, participants in this study have to face multiple facets that define who they are as lesbian women in society. Black lesbian women struggle to negotiate their sexuality with prescribed traditions, religion, culture and societal norms. These struggles are not merely ideological but are experienced in their everyday lives. Therefore, for each of these women to be fully embraced and equally treated, Intersectionality becomes an important theoretical lens. Intersectionality helps to understand the different layered, dynamic struggles of some women compared to others.

3.1.5 Lesbian Feminism

Lesbian Feminism is one of the most important theoretical frameworks for this study. Lesbian Feminism emerged from Radical Feminism in the early 1970’s due to the conflict between lesbians, feminists, and the gay liberation movement (Tremblay & Paternotte, 2015: 2). Lesbian Feminism refutes compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity, which created conflict with heterosexual feminists as they advocated for gender equality within heterosexual relationships. Lesbians viewed themselves as invisible within the gay movement and argued that issues faced by

homosexual men are politically different from the issues faced by lesbians because lesbians are members of the political class of women (Jeffreys, 1994: 459). Lesbian Feminists strive for the destruction of men's power over women. As a result, the lesbian liberation movement was formed in order to allow free expression of lesbianism (Tremblay & Paternotte, 2015: 2). The most influential contributors to Lesbian Feminism of the 1970's and 1980's include Charlotte Bunch, Gayle Rubin, Audre Lorde and Monique Wittig (Calhoun, 1994: 559). Lesbian feminists and lesbian women emerged from the broader feminist movement and this brand of Feminism aims to centralise lesbianism as a political identity outside the framework of illness or personal preference (Stein, 1992: 33). As stated by Sheila Jeffreys (1993: xii), Lesbian Feminism agitates against heterosexuality as a natural sexual orientation and seeks to end male dominance in the interests of women's freedom (Jeffreys, xii). During the 1980's, it was difficult to provide a clear definition of lesbianism. Sexologists defined it as "a strange sexual behaviour that is different from the sexual norm or missionary-position heterosexual intercourse"; a definition that is clearly heteropatriarchal in nature (Jeffreys, 1993: 1).

Lesbian Feminism draws from Radical Feminism because it aims to dismantle all forms of male dominance (Ehiakhamen, 2011: 104). However, it extends from Radical Feminism in that for lesbian feminists, heterosexual marriage is the primary institution for women's oppression. For lesbian feminists, marriage reduces a woman's role to forced motherhood and sexual slavery and the only way to liberate women is to escape the patriarchal institution of marriage (Ehiakhamen, 2011: 104). This theory is relevant for this study as it highlights the difference between heterosexual women's and lesbian women's religious/spiritual experiences. Heterosexual women are protected by the support that accompanies heterosexuality and not exposed to the challenges faced by lesbian women within Christianity. The lesbian identity is regarded as unnatural within the Christian space. The participants in this study may therefore be deemed as illegitimate because they choose to have intimate relationships with women and not men. Participants in this study do not conform to the heterosexual norm and they oppose the Christian prescription of heterosexual procreation. In South Africa, lesbian and gay challenges are marginalised within movements that claim to focus on human dignity and equality because they are regarded as "unAfrican" and unnatural (Hames, 2003: 2). Lesbian Feminism views patriarchy and heterosexual hegemony as cultural

discourses that are as significant as colonisation and capitalism (Tremblay & Paternotte, 2015: 3). These cultural discourses normalise heterosexuality and create homosexual oppression by reproducing rigid gender roles. Lesbian women in this study may be viewed as unnatural by all heterosexual members of their churches and they are vulnerable to criticism that straight women do not face within heteropatriarchal spaces.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the spiritual/religious experiences of black lesbian women in Bloemfontein, and to uncover how their sexuality has affected their reality as believers of the Christian faith in a country that is known to be hostile towards homosexual people. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design, methodology and methods that will be utilised to explore and understand the spirituality/religiosity and sexuality of these women.

The study explores the lived spiritual experiences of black lesbian women and it furthermore aims to understand how the women in this study reconcile their intersectional identities (for example, being black, lesbian, and women) with their spiritual identities. The study follows a qualitative research approach. Phenomenology was selected as best suited to address the research questions. My intent is to understand the lived spiritual/religious experiences of black lesbian women who reside in a country that is highly influenced by Christianity, by providing an opportunity for them to voice and speak about their realities. The study is aligned with the following research aims and objectives:

Research aims and objectives

The aim of the study is to explore how black lesbian women construct meaning from their different subjective experiences in relation to their spirituality and sexual orientation.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Explore the spiritual identities of black lesbian women in relation to the tension experienced due to their sexual identity and their religious lives.
- Identify lived experiences of black lesbian women and their responses to traditional church environments.
- Ascertain how Christian lesbians reconcile their beliefs and sexual identities.

- Explore shared experiences if any, and identify intersectional markers (race, sexual orientation, class, gender and social location) that can influence their spiritual life worlds.

According to Tassanee Tongprateep (2000: 197), spirituality is part of the human experience that cannot be scientifically proven and therefore can easily be deemed an unimportant aspect of life. Conversely, Lydia Manning (2012: 2) argues that spirituality is the ability to find meaning in life, responding to that meaning and establishing a relationship with God/other. Phenomenology in relation to this study was selected because it is used by researchers to discover a phenomenon that is meaningfully experienced by individuals, in this case spirituality. Spirituality would be understood to be an experience that will be narrated by the black lesbian women under study and the meaning attached to those experiences will be interpreted. The phenomenon under investigation furthermore includes an exploration of black lesbian's experience of spirituality in a homophobic society.

This study will also incorporate some Feminist guidelines since it focuses mainly on the spirituality of black lesbian women. Feminism challenges the traditional Christian discourse in that it opposes the idea of women being subservient to family and church. Lesbian Feminism also rejects the idea of heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable union. Feminism rejects male privilege, which remains a fundamental Christian principle where men dominate women in both the private and public sphere (Wiegman, 2008: 42). An important part of this study is the multifaceted identities of the research participants. An intersectional feminist approach aims to investigate how race, sexual orientation, class and spirituality contribute to these women's social location and their experience of everyday life. The data collection method will also be discussed as part of this chapter. The data collected will be analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to better understand how these women make sense of their sexual identity and their spiritual world. In the following sections, I will discuss my research design and methodology in detail.

4.2 Qualitative Research

Religion and spirituality play an important part in most peoples' lives, including those who identify as homosexual (Garcia, Gray-Stanley and Ramirez-Valley, 2008: 412).

Although religion and spirituality have come to assume different meanings for different people, research indicates that both influence individuals' sense of meaning and provide a source of social support (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson & Zinnbauer, 2000: 52). Religion is understood to be a system of organised practices, beliefs and rituals and spirituality is about personal connection to the sacred (Schlehofer, Omoto & Adelman, 2008: 412). Religion is also viewed as hierarchical, as supportive of male supremacy, heteronormative and as a gender-normative institution. Even though religion and spirituality are sometimes separated, the spiritual experiences that people have are mostly encountered within religious spaces and practices (Schlehofer et. al., 2008: 412). These experiences do not only manifest through an interaction with God or religion, but may be experienced through worship or other forms of interactions within or outside the church (Pretorius, 2008: 148). The current study is interested in these spiritual experiences and it furthermore aims to explore other forms of spiritualities that participants practice outside their Christian denominations.

People have reported positive outcomes from participating in religious activities and being part of a religious doctrine. However, qualitative studies (e.g. Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Murr, 2013) suggest that most LGBTQ individuals have reported negative feelings and experiences (shame, guilt, isolation and rejection) from being part of a religious doctrine. Due to this negative feedback, the spiritual experiences of LGBTQ individuals may be restricted and they may seek other ways of engaging in spiritual activities. For example, in the South African context, LGBTQ individuals may also resort to other forms of spiritualities, which include but are not limited to spiritual worship of ancestors (Stobie, 2011: 159). The current study is concerned with these other forms of spiritualities that are not religiously bound. This study suggests that LGBTQ individuals might have gone through a process of transition from being part of religious denominations to being more spiritual individuals involved in spiritual practices outside Christianity. Christianity often excludes lesbians based on their queer identities, and it is for this reason that the current study finds importance in exploring the spiritual experiences of black lesbian women. It aims to explore how they experienced Christianity and how this experience has affected their current spiritual identity.

A qualitative research approach will be utilised for this study. This study is explorative in nature and will attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, reasons, and opinions of the research participants. Research participants for the current study are a group of women who have previously or currently identify as Christians and have possibly encountered a form of discrimination based on their sexual orientation within a Christian denomination. They may have experienced some form of discrimination that combines all their identities (race, gender, class and sexuality). Therefore, a qualitative approach will help uncover trends and thoughts; it will delve deeper into the meaning attached to different experiences encountered. Qualitative research is an approach that is interpretive and naturalistic to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 1). Research is regarded as naturalistic when the researcher enables the research experiences to be part of the participants' everyday environment (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007: 5).

According to John Creswell and Dana Miller (2000: 125), qualitative research assumes that reality is socially constructed and it is what participants perceive it to be. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008: 1) comment that a researcher who follows a qualitative approach studies things in their natural settings, and attempts to make sense of, or interpret the phenomena, in terms of the meanings people bring to them. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 1) “[q]ualitative research includes a variety of empirical material, case-studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories and interviews that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.”

Qualitative research focuses on analysing the content and experience of social action rather than subject it to mathematical transformation. The data that is collected takes the form of words and not numbers (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007: 6). This study does not focus on developing a statistically valid sample but aims to understand the spirituality of black lesbian women and explain that from the participants' point of view by applying the best methods to obtain that information (Hofstee, 2010: 107). According to Beverley Hancock, Elizabeth Ockleford and Kate Windridge (1998: 2), qualitative research focuses on explaining social phenomena. It aims to understand the natural settings we live in and attempts to understand why things are the way they are. In relation to the current study, I will attempt to uncover the spiritual identity of black lesbian women and why they chose a certain form of spirituality. Sonia Ospina

(2004: 2) adds that qualitative research is a “form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning”. In agreement, Carla Justine Dukas (2014: 36) contends that qualitative research can be applied in an attempt to understand complex psychological processes, and to describe meaning and the lived experiences of research participants. Therefore, in an attempt to understand black lesbian women’s journey, whether they still identify as Christian or not, the study will explore that psychological process and unearth the current spiritual identity/affiliation as narrated by these women. Next, I discuss the Feminist nature of this study and why this study should be regarded as qualitative Feminist research.

4.3 Feminist approach

In chapter two of this study, the literature presented arguments, which highlight the patriarchal nature of Christianity. Throughout the history of the church the majority of leaders have been male, while women are presented as wives, mothers, and companions (Hampson, 1985: 341). God is presented in patriarchal terms: King, Lord or Father, which are terms that refer to males within every society (Schneiders, 1986: 5). Women’s identity is defined in relation to men and they have separate roles, which are solely based on their gender. These gender inequalities and imbalances that deem women secondary and subservient to men are what Feminism challenges. Feminists believe in the equality of both women and men (Hampson, 1985: 341). Feminists challenge the idea that women should be the second sex and that men should be regarded as superior to women. This presents a challenge to Christianity which promotes male dominance, heteronormativity and perpetuates male dominance (Mudimeli, 2011: 3). Feminists believe that any women should not be discriminated against within any social institution based on race, gender, class, or sexual orientation. Christianity on the other hand, has been historically oppressive to any sexual identity outside heterosexuality. Therefore, the current study becomes Feminist in that it focuses on a group of women who have/are part of Christianity and have challenged the status quo of the church by assuming a sexual identity that is not supported by the church. It is a study concerned with a group of women who face challenges within patriarchal Christianity, who have faced cultural/religious discrimination as black lesbian women and who have endured much discrimination within Christianity due to their sexuality (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015: 97). Therefore, a Feminist theoretical lens

becomes an important contribution as it aims to give women a voice and it redefines male oriented perspectives (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005: 7). Limited research on women's sexuality and the relationship between their sexual orientation and religious/spiritual identity in African countries, and the bias to document white women's experiences, are some of the reasons that the current study becomes an important contribution to Feminist research.

Sara Wilkinson and Pat Morton (2007: 408) provide some clarity on what constitutes Feminist research. In defining Feminist research, Wilkinson and Morton argue that Feminist research is done for women by women. Furthermore, Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco (2000: 778) argue that for research to be regarded as Feminist, its epistemology and methodology must be considered. They state that the epistemology followed should accept women's narratives of their lives as an important source of knowledge, while the methodology itself embodies a process of sharing these stories (Campbell & Wasco, 2000: 778). Feminist researchers reject the traditional ways of conducting research, they disrupt ways of knowing by taking different standpoints, and they become both the insider and outsider and negotiate these identities simultaneously (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 3).

Hesse-Biber (2011: 3) locates Feminist epistemology and methodology within feminist empiricism, standpoints theories, post-modernism and transnational perspectives. These are Feminist approaches to social science that prioritise the lived experiences of women, and make an important contribution because women's experiences have historically been marginalised. Ardovini-Brooker (2002) provides a clear distinction between Feminist epistemology and traditional epistemology. Epistemology is defined as the exploration of knowledge, and the processes through which people acquire that knowledge (Ardovini-Brooker, 2002: 1). In addition, epistemology is a "theory of knowing". Methodology however is a theory on the processes of conducting research and a method is a technique for gathering evidence (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007: 5). Therefore, Feminist methodology should not be confused with feminist methods. Feminist epistemology focuses on intersectional identities and experiences that are narrated through the multiple voices of women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000: 781). Something that differentiates feminist epistemology from traditional epistemology is foregrounding women's knowledge and experience in the investigative approach (Ardovini-Brooker, 2002: 3). Feminist methodology concerns itself with women's

experiences and focuses on women's identities and voices as a rich source of insight for Feminist research (Ardovini-Brooker, 2002: 7).

Feminist research does not follow a singular approach but it is multifaceted in nature and considers all the complexities that come with doing research on gender. It is vital to think of the best method that will effectively answer the research questions and which is relevant to the broad Feminist goals and ideology (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007: 200). The current study focuses on the spirituality of women with intersectional identities (gender, race, sexuality and spirituality) that have shaped their lived experiences.

4.4 Research Design

The current study will employ a qualitative research design based on the phenomenological approach. According to Kate Russell (1994: 6), a qualitative research approach using phenomenology investigates experiences of participants as they occur in everyday life. Phenomenology was chosen as being the most appropriate method as it would give the participants, in this case black lesbian women, an opportunity to tell their stories from their individual experiences.

4.4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a type of a qualitative method that has been identified as important in conducting research on the lived experiences of human participants. Edmund Husserl developed phenomenology and his work was continued by one of his students, Martin Heidegger (Connelly, 2010: 127). As a research method, phenomenology has been applied in psychology, education and in health sciences. Susann Lavery (2003: 22) defines phenomenology as the "study of lived experiences or the life world". Phenomenology identifies phenomena by engaging the actor's perception of a particular situation. It focuses on defining the individuals' experience of a phenomenon (Lester, 1999: 1). In this study, the phenomenon being explored is black lesbian women's experience of Christianity/spirituality. In this research study, spirituality refers to embracing something beyond the self, something that does not tie individuals to religious doctrine. It could also relate to traditional spirituality in which individuals embrace the presence and role of ancestors in their lives. According to

Christian principles however believers should only worship and follow one God (a Christian God) and therefore ancestral beliefs are condemned within the Christian faith. Although these differences exist, many African people continue to affiliate themselves with Christianity and incorporate their ancestral beliefs into their daily lives.

This study aims to uncover the participants' lived experiences in relation to Christianity. It aims to uncover if Christianity affected their spirituality in any way and whether those experiences have affected their current spiritual identity.

Phenomenology examines embodied experiences; it explores the root of a phenomenon and locates the structure of the experience (Kennedy & Markula, 2011: 4). In this case, the root of a phenomenon can be understood by asking the following: How has Christianity affected your spiritual journey and how have you attempted to negotiate the tension between identifying as lesbian and being Christian? Eugina Mthembu (2013: 35) describes a phenomenological study as a rich description of experiences in the lives of research participants. The phenomenological approach will enable the research participants to reflect and narrate their spiritual experience as part of who they are as black lesbian women residing in a country that is predominantly known for its homophobia and heteropatriarchal Christian practices (Sterley, 2014: 13). The study will investigate black lesbian women who are forced to authenticate their African identity merely because their sexuality is regarded as unAfrican. These women are rejected within Christianity as they are deemed "sexually immoral" due to their preference for other women.

Phenomenology delves into the meaning and essence of a particular experience. When using Phenomenology, the experiences of different people are analysed in order to identify the similarities and meaning attached to a phenomenon experienced by various individuals (Merriam, 2002: 7). According to Max Van Manen (1944: 38), phenomenology explores the nature of a phenomenon. It will help uncover the essence of what makes the spiritual experiences of these black lesbian women what they are and is less interested in the prevalence of the experience itself. In this study, the essence of being a spiritual black lesbian woman will be explored. In other words, it will explore what it means to be spiritual for each of the participants under study. Using phenomenology in the current study will help discover the meaning attached to being a spiritual black lesbian woman. For Max Van Manen (1944: 38),

phenomenology aims to discover what it means to be human, taking into account the historical traditions that shape our way of living in the world. In the current study, to understand queer spirituality would require an understanding of what it means to be a black lesbian woman in a democratic South Africa. There must be an understanding of the meaning attached to social structures, specifically religious/spiritual structures, which have come to restrict or question the nature of being a black lesbian woman of faith in South Africa.

Although phenomenology has been identified as one of the best qualitative designs in exploring personal lived experiences, researchers may also encounter challenges when using phenomenology. Zihan Shi (2011: 7) argues that researchers may find it difficult to suspend their own knowledge of the phenomenon before exploring it, which may influence the essence and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, Sharan Merriam (2002: 7) argues that “bracketing”, which is defined as putting aside personal attitudes and beliefs, becomes vital for a researcher using phenomenology to study a certain phenomenon. Being a black lesbian woman myself, I have to ensure that bracketing will be well applied to avoid my own personal experiences from influencing the participants’ own narrative. Zenobia Chan, Yuen-Ling Fung and Wai-tong Chien (2013: 1) explain that bracketing is a process of holding off what the researcher already knows about the subject throughout the phenomenological investigation. From personal experience, I have had some problems within my own Christian denomination, which have affected my religious/spiritual experiences. The church has questioned my gender expression and I have had to negotiate my participation in church activities and involvement. Although I was never physically harmed, or publicly humiliated, I had to fight for my own belonging in a religious space. With that being said, it will be my responsibility not to let my own experiences, which may or may not be similar to those of the participants’ experiences, affect the data collection process. This will be achieved by “bracketing” everything that I know from personal experiences. For example, I will avoid asking participants leading questions, or asking them questions based on what I personally experienced.

4.5 Research Method

According to Nicholas Walliman (2011: 7), the techniques or tools used to conduct research are the research methods and they are used to collect, organise and analyse data in ways that help the researcher to answer the research questions. In the following section, I will discuss the tools that will be utilised in the study. The discussion includes sampling techniques, data collection and data analysis.

4.5.1 Sampling Techniques

Sampling is a technique used by researchers to select items for the sample (Kothari, 2004: 55). It is impossible for researchers to conduct research on the entire population they wish to study; there is a need to apply an appropriate sampling technique in order to reduce the number to a researchable sample (Taherdoorst, 2016: 18). The current study will follow a non-probability snowball sampling. Non-probability sampling tends to focus on a smaller sample, and is less interested in making statistical inferences but aims to examine a real-life phenomenon (Taherdoorst, 2016: 22). The phenomenon being explored in this study is the spirituality of black lesbian women, specifically how their spiritual identity has been affected by their sexual orientation as individuals who have been part of a religious institution. The study will not be limited to any particular church or denomination, nor will it be restricted to research participants who still self-identify as Christians. Therefore, snowball sampling was seen as the best non-probability technique for the study. This type of sampling is used in studies with participants that are rare to find. Black lesbians are often exposed to discrimination and hate crimes in South Africa, therefore they might be reluctant to participate in research studies due to the fear of exposure or being identified. Therefore, snowball sampling will allow the already known research participant to refer me to other potential participants. This approach will also make it easy for potential participants to participate if the referral is from a trusted source. Black lesbian women, mostly from townships, have endured violent sexual abuse in South Africa. They have been subjected to the threat of corrective rape and are often rejected and labelled as unAfrican, unChristian and unnatural within their communities. For these reasons, the nature of the study becomes sensitive and it is not easy to acquire research participants. Kath Browne (2005: 47) states that when a researcher focuses on conducting research on sensitive and vulnerable groups within a society, recruitment can be difficult. Vulnerable groups are often discriminated against by society and are

often invisible due to their lifestyle and the discrimination inflicted by those who are regarded as “normal” members of society.

Snowball sampling is commonly used in qualitative research where the researcher repetitively accesses participants through other participants (Noy, 2008: 330). Kath Browne (2005: 48) defines snowball sampling as a series of chain referrals that are made within a circle of participants who are known to each other. It depends on the common trait that participants share with each other. It is also known as “contact tracing” where one participant is identified by the researcher, and that particular individual refers the researcher to other individuals. In this study, I already know a few black lesbian women who self-identify as Christian and will therefore contact them to be part of the study. The already known participants will refer me to other interested individuals who meet the criteria for the study. The individual (the source) identified by the researcher must be a black lesbian woman who is/was part of a Christian denomination and must provide a network of individuals with similar characteristics (Sander, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010: 370). By using snowball sampling, Mohsin Alvi (2016: 33) explains that a researcher is able to gain access to a population that is not readily available. Furthermore, the researcher is able to access individuals who live outside the boundaries of normative heterosexuality (Brown, 2005: 49). I aim to recruit six to eight women to be part of the research study.

4.5.2 Data Collection

Much of the research in South Africa has focused on the intersection between lesbian identity and sexual violence (Brown, 2012). These negative representations of black lesbian sexualities contribute to the further marginalisation and secrecy surrounding their sexualities and identities. This study therefore makes an important contribution by exposing the lived realities of a group of women that is largely under-researched and underrepresented. To collect data, the study will make use of semi-structured interviews¹⁴.

An interview is commonly used in feminist research to gain a better understanding of the participant’s worldview. The researcher must aim to empower participants by encouraging them to orally narrate their realities during the interview process (Charity,

¹⁴ Interview questions are attached at the end of this dissertation as Appendix B

2018: 22). Semi-structured interviews will allow participants in the current study to present their own viewpoints regarding their spiritual experiences. The interview method involves collecting data from respondents by using an oral presentation of questions and getting responses from respondents in the same way (Kothari; 1990: 100). The researcher will conduct the study by means of personal interviews where information will be collected through face-to-face contact with respondents.

In relation to the current study, the interviews will be held at a time and location that is convenient for the participants. The interviews will address previous or current challenges experienced within Christianity and how their Christian identity has affected their current spiritual identity. Therefore, participants will answer questions relating to their previous encounters or current encounter with any Christian denomination they affiliate with. They will explain how that has affected their meaning of spirituality (e.g. if spirituality means worshipping God, ancestors, or other forms of spiritualities). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to gather a description of the individuals' lived experiences. The participants are given an opportunity to interpret the experienced phenomenon under study (Charity, 2018: 24). Therefore, with regard to the interview process, the following requirements will play an important role:

- Participants must have the will to be involved in a lengthy interview (one hour) with a possible follow-up.
- Participants must be willing to give permission to be audio taped,
- Participants must agree to the data being published in a mini-dissertation and to the information being accessed through the University's library database.

4.5.3 Data Analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach

In the third chapter (literature review), I explored the role of Christian patriarchy in the discrimination of women and the influence it has on society's attitudes towards homosexuality. I cited Gareth Moore (1992) to further explain the negative attitudes displayed in the Bible against homosexual relationships. Gareth Moore (1992: 40) believes that hostility towards gay relationships in the Bible stem from socially constructed patriarchy. The maintenance of patriarchy within Christianity evidently proves that lesbian relationships are rejected by most traditional churches that believe heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexual identity. In examining one of the key

reasons behind women's sexualities being under-researched, Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (2005), and Nadia Sanger and Lindsay Clowes (2006) point to Christianity as one of the fundamental challenges in accepting same-sex sexualities. Therefore, this study proposes to challenge a heteronormative, Christian worldview which preferences heterosexuality and condemns lesbian relationships. Lesbian women's spirituality has been under-researched in South Africa and is often considered taboo in black African communities. In line with the research questions stated in the first chapter, the current study will make use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to interpret the lived spiritual experiences of black lesbian women.

Barbara Kawulich (2004: 97) defines data analysis as the reduction of data by the researcher in order to start the process of interpretation. In qualitative research, data analysis requires the researcher to organise data in the form of transcripts. The process also involves familiarising oneself with the data, coding it and then identifying themes in order to develop more categories (Lacey & Luff, 2001: 20-24). The current study will target a small sample that will be selected through a snowball sampling technique; the aim is to deeply explore the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, the method of analysis chosen has to be carefully considered and will be consistent with the aims and objectives of this study.

IPA is a qualitative approach that has its theoretical underpinnings in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, 2017: 303). The following authors have contributed to studies using IPA as a form of data analysis: Smith and Osborn (2007), Nunn (2010), Cope (2011), and Vicary (2017). In these research studies, researchers wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied and grasp the different meaning attached to the experienced phenomenon, hence IPA was chosen as the best form of data analysis. For example, in a study by Smith and Osborn (2007) IPA was utilised to discover how back pain might have an impact on the sufferer's sense of self. Nunn (2010) explored the lived experiences of women in order to understand experiences of the self and eating disorders. Cope (2011) used IPA to better understand the process and content dimensions of learning from venture failure. Lastly, Vicary (2017) focused on an Interpretative Analysis of the impact of professional background on role fulfilment. Researchers who aim to gain participant's sense of personal experience use interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). It

concerns itself with an individual's point of view regarding a personal account of a particular experience (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 53). IPA includes a two-stage process called double hermeneutics in which research participants make sense of their own meaning and then the researcher decodes and makes sense of the meaning attached by participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014: 8). In the current study, I belong to the same group as the participants (black lesbian women), which means it might be difficult for me as a researcher, to exclude any personal knowledge about lesbian spirituality and its challenges. To avoid this challenge, IPA will be used effectively as it allows research participants to be experts of information regarding the phenomenon under study (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006: 144).

In order to allow participants to be in control of their own narrative and not let personal knowledge become a challenge, IPA requires the researcher to go through certain stages in order to get rich data for research purposes. In the interview stage (first stage), the researcher has to transcribe the interview of each participant including questions asked in order to understand the participants' experiences of spirituality. This can be achieved by reading the transcripts several times to fully familiarise oneself with the text (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006: 146). The next part would be to compile themes from the transcripts, identify similar themes and begin coding them. By going through these processes, the researcher is able to reflect on the commonalities presented by research participants but the researcher also has to be aware of individual differences that exist in each participant's account of the phenomena (Charity, 2018: 28).

Although IPA has been mostly used in health psychology studies, it has been identified as a useful approach in the current study. Kate Hefferon and Stewart Ollis (2006: 145) explain that IPA has expanded to research studies that aim to explore people's experiences of culture, identity, adoption, and spirituality. IPA is both phenomenological and hermeneutic in that it describes how a phenomenon is experienced and then interprets it from the perspective of an individual who experienced the phenomenon. IPA is also idiographic in that it avoids producing general statements and focuses on examining individual accounts of participants in relation to the phenomenon under study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014: 8). Therefore, IPA will help to understand the meaning/s attached by black lesbian women to their spiritual experience/s. It will also help explain how Christian patriarchy, the

maintenance of heteronormativity within Christianity and the belief of lesbian sexuality as unChristian and sinful have all presented some form of challenge in the area of their own spirituality. These previous or current narratives will help to interpret how these lesbian women spiritually identify presently.

The study will also employ thematic analysis as a form of data analysis to provide a nuanced analysis of themes that emerged out of the data. Thematic analysis can be referred to as a method that identifies patterns of enabling behaviour (Boyatzis, 1998: vi). A thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify important themes and meanings present in the dataset (Joffe, 2012: 210). According to Jodi Aronson (1995), there are three steps that researchers need to follow when utilising thematic analysis.

The first step is the collection of data where researchers may record their interviews, transcribe the data and list patterns of experiences from the collected data. The second step is to identify all data that relate to each other (Aronson, 1995: 2). The third step involves combining all the related patterns into sub-themes. The last step is to develop a valid argument for choosing the themes by referring to the relevant literature (Aronson, 1995: 3). In summary, thematic analysis will enable me to compile my results into themes that will provide reliable answers to research questions.

Another advantage of using thematic analysis is that it is a flexible method that provides rich and detailed accounts of data (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017: 2). Thematic analysis does not require detailed theoretical knowledge, it is easy to grasp especially for researchers who are in the early stages of their career. Therefore, thematic analysis will be useful in the study for its ability to examine different perspectives, highlight similarities and differences, and generate insights from all the research participants.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The University of the Free State research policy requires a researcher to follow proper ethical guidelines when conducting studies of this nature. The study was reviewed and approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities before the onset of any interviews (see Appendix A). The granting of ethical clearance meant that this study adheres to all policies for studies involving human research participants.

4.5.1 Informed consent

In the beginning of the interview phase, I contacted participants already known to me to access other research participants who meet the research criteria. I explained what the research is about, what the criteria are and provided information regarding the research study. All the participants were required to sign a consent form (a copy of the consent form is attached as Appendix C).

4.5.2 Confidentiality

During the interview process, I explained what risks and processes are involved in the analysis and publication of data. I informed participants that their identities would be kept anonymous and that I intended on altering their personal details when publishing results.

4.5.3 Risks involved

I explained the possible psychological risks to the participants, as the nature of the study is sensitive and might trigger some distress and affect their emotional wellbeing. I explained that they may need to talk about topics or answer questions that might be difficult for them. During the interviews, I made sure participants were comfortable and created a space where they could be free to share their experiences. The participants were asked to contact me or UFS psychological services should they feel the need for therapy as a result of the interview. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they experienced any distress. The participants were comfortable in sharing their story.

4.5.4 Researcher subjectivity

The study made use of IPA, which is an approach that affects both the participants and the researcher. During the interviews, I had to consider the effect that the study might have on my own understanding and interpretation of the data. I had to examine my own biases before the interviews.

I was raised in a family in which Christianity had a big role in my upbringing and I was expected to attend church every Sunday. I was part of the Uniting Reformed Church

from the early years of my life until now. In recent years, I have become uncomfortable with the church and experienced some difficulties due to my sexual orientation. In this research, I hope to explore the experiences of others and confront the internal debates I have regarding Christianity and how it treats “outside” groups.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the spiritual/religious experiences of black lesbian women in Bloemfontein. To be specific, the research investigates how black lesbians reconcile their intersectional identities (for example, to be black, lesbian, and women) with their spiritual/religious identities. In the fourth chapter, I described Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as the most appropriate method for this study. In this chapter, I will briefly restate the research processes used to attain the objectives of the study and will report the findings of the data analysis.

A qualitative research approach has been used to address the research questions, and I identified phenomenology as the best approach to explore and understand the participants' lived experiences. The study is also Feminist in nature; it focuses on investigating women's experiences of their spirituality/religiosity. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews in order to provide a better understanding of the experiences narrated by each of the six lesbian women. The interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to explore in detail individual lived experiences and to examine how these six women make sense of their personal and social worlds.

The same questions were posed to each participant and sometimes it was necessary to ask follow-up questions on themes that started to emerge from the interviews. I considered it important for the participants to express themselves in an uninhibited way to allow relevant and sensitive data to emerge. I started the interviews with standard biographic questions. Additional questions that were posed included how individuals identified in relation to their sexuality, which Christian church they had belonged or do belong to, and if they are regular churchgoers. These questions provided insight into which labels they feel comfortable with and helped to establish what kind of treatment or experience they had within the Christian denomination they grew up in.

As a point of departure, I will give a brief overview of the methods that were deemed appropriate for the study and the participants' profiles will be provided (all participants have been given pseudonyms for their protection). This will be followed by a

presentation and discussion of themes that emerged in the study. In this chapter, I reference quotes to support the themes.

5.2 Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach has been utilised for this study as it aims to understand the world from the participants' perspective and to gain a deeper understanding into the meaning attached to different experiences encountered by the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 1). According to Denzin and Lincoln, "[q]ualitative research includes a variety of empirical material, case-studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories and interviews that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (2008: 1). For Creswell (2013), the aim of a qualitative research approach is to learn about the phenomena under study and to apply best practices to gather that information. Beverley Hancock, Elizabeth Ockleford and Kate Windridge (1998: 2) add that qualitative research focuses on explaining social phenomena. It aims to understand the natural settings we live in and attempts to understand why things are the way they are.

This study aims to uncover the spiritual/religious identity of black lesbian women and why they choose a certain form of spirituality or how their religious identification has been influenced by their lesbian sexuality. The relationship between sexuality and religion/spirituality has been represented as antagonistic since the beginning of the apartheid era (Young, Shipley & Trothen, 2015: 3). Tiffany Jones (2008: 398) explains that Christian churches in South Africa supported heterosexuality during the apartheid era and these heteropatriarchal views were furthermore reinforced by the government of that time. With this historical background, I consider it important to explore the relationship between participants' sexuality and spirituality in the post-apartheid dispensation. I want to explore how Christianity has affected their spiritual identities during a time where everyone is said to be protected by the constitution. Spiritual identities will be explored considering how Christian values still play a huge role in a country that is homophobic with alarming numbers of corrective rapes. Thus, in an attempt to understand black lesbian women's journey and whether they continue to identify as Christian or not, the study intends to explore the cognitive processes associated with lesbian identity and spirituality in modern day South Africa.

5.3 A Feminist Approach

The study focuses specifically on the experiences of black lesbian women. The aim of the study is to uncover the stories of black lesbians who have some form of background or a story to relate about their experiences in a predominately-male dominated society. Feminist research concerns itself with women in such positions. Feminist research is informed by an understanding of the multiple forms of oppression that women face and it recognises the need for research to dismantle patriarchal or male-centred views of the world. Therefore, this study follows Feminist principles by giving a voice to a group of women who have been historically marginalised because of their race, sexuality, class, social location, and gender. Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco (2000: 778) highlight an important contribution regarding Feminist research when they state that Feminist epistemology should accept women's narratives of their lives as an important source of knowledge. These authors believe that Feminist research must foreground the stories of those who have historically been marginalised. Feminist epistemology focuses on intersectional identities and experiences that are narrated through the multiple voices of women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000: 781). Something that differentiates Feminist epistemology from traditional epistemology is foregrounding women's knowledge and experience in the investigative approach (Ardivini-Brooker, 2002: 3). Therefore, a Feminist approach constitutes an important theoretical lens in exploring the experiences of these black lesbian women. A Feminist approach will support the process of describing, explaining and interpreting the stories of black lesbians. It will furthermore assist in identifying the patriarchal foundation and bias inherent to orthodox Christian churches.

5.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA was chosen as the best method for the study because it focuses on providing insights into how individuals make sense of a given phenomenon. The study is phenomenological in nature as it aims to offer a deeper meaning of how individuals relate to a phenomenon by relaying their own personal experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Brocki & Wearden, 2006: 88). IPA is also connected to hermeneutics which is defined as the theory and science of interpretation. This means that research participants narrate their own experiences, make sense of the

meaning attached to these experiences and then the researcher decodes and makes sense of the meaning attached by participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014: 8).

According to Joann Brocki and Alison Wearden (2006: 88), IPA is a form of analysis that prioritises individuals with an understanding of their world and their unique interpretation of events. IPA links participant's thoughts and feelings to their verbal statements. Therefore, interpretation of experiences is affected by the ability of participants and the researcher to articulate their thoughts adequately (Blore, 2011: 110). IPA is useful in that it allows for an exploration of subjective experiences and helps to understand the participant's account of events (Brocki & Wearden, 2006: 88).

5.5 Data Collection Process

5.5.1. Interview location

According to Sarah Elwood and Deborah Martin (2000: 650), an interview location is a site where the exchange of information between the researcher and research participants takes place. The interview location for this study was the University of the Free State, specifically the seminar room located in the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies. Participants were given the opportunity to choose a preferred location and all participants preferred the suggested location. I suggested this location because I thought it would be a comfortable and private space for the participants.

The reason for selecting the University of the Free State as the location for the interviews is that it is a familiar place for the research participants. They are more comfortable within this space and it is a space that is open to diversity in terms of sexuality and how individuals choose to identify. It was also convenient for research participants as most of them study at the university and live in areas nearby.

5.5.2 Sampling Strategy

The starting point of the sampling strategy was to set specific criteria for the study. Participants of the study had to be black and self-identify as lesbian. Second, all of the participants had to self-identify as being Christian or having been Christian at some point in their lives. Another requirement was for the participants to be between the ages of 20-35, reside in Bloemfontein, and have access to a phone or email. The study was not limited to a particular Christian denomination and it was not necessary for the

participants to still self-identify as Christian at the time of the study. The reason for the ages selected was to acquire participants who are mature enough to reflect on their Christian experience and how it has affected their sexuality.

As discussed in the fourth chapter, snowball sampling was used to recruit research participants for the study. Snowball sampling is best for recruiting participants who might have experienced a sensitive phenomenon and are difficult to reach (Berg, 2001: 33). I knew two of the participants and therefore, the snowball approach was used to identify other participants for the study. A sample size of six participants was used for the study. In IPA research, the sample size is mostly small to allow for a detailed analysis of the selected participant's interviews (Rodriguez & Smith, 2014).

5.5.3 Research Participants

Six black lesbian women were interviewed for the study. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 27 and they all identified as Christian at some point in their lives. Four of the participants were students, and the other two have already acquired tertiary qualifications.

5.5.4 Data Collection Method

The study made use of semi-structured interviews to collect data. Questions were not long and were designed to allow open discussion. The semi-structured interview questions can be found in the appendix section at the end of the mini-dissertation. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to gather a description of the individuals' lived experiences (Charity, 2018: 24). Participants were encouraged to talk freely and particular concerns were probed as important themes emerged.

The interviews were completed in one setting, and the questions were divided into two sections. The first section dealt with biographical information while the second section focused more on specific questions related to the topic. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and 30 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and participants gave their consent for the information to be recorded.

5.6 Data Analysis Process

Barbara Kawulich (2004: 97) defines data analysis as the reduction of data by the researcher in order to start the process of interpretation. In qualitative research, data analysis requires the researcher to organise data in the form of transcripts. The process also involves familiarising oneself with the data, coding it and then identifying themes in order to develop more categories (Lacey & Luff, 2001: 20-24).

The study utilised IPA as the selected method of analysis. In order for the analysis process to begin, I had to transcribe the interviews of each participant including questions asked in order to understand the participant's experiences of spirituality and how their sexuality affected those experiences. This can be achieved by reading the transcripts several times to fully familiarise oneself with the text (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006: 146). The next part would be to compile themes from the transcripts, identify similar themes and begin coding them. By going through these processes, the researcher is able to reflect on the commonalities presented by research participants but the researcher also has to be aware of individual differences that exist in each participant's account of the phenomena (Charity, 2018: 28). This process was repeated for each interview transcript.

5.6.1 Management of interview data

Once the interviews were completed, interview data was downloaded from my cellphone recorder and transferred to my personal computer where it was stored in a protected electronic file. The interview data was then transformed from audio recording to digital text by a process of transcription. The transcribed data was then uploaded into a computer program (ATLAS.ti) that assists in the organising of interview data. ATLAS.ti is a computer software programme that assists researchers in qualitative research. The software can be used to assist researchers during the different stages of data analysis. One of the advantages of using ATLAS.ti is that it has few limitations when it comes to the number and size of transcripts that can be uploaded on the programme (John & Johnson, 2000: 394). Not only does it assist in the manual processes in qualitative analysis, but it also improves analysis by using word processors to avoid the traditional "cut and paste" method of coding and retrieving information (Ahmad & Newman, 2010: 2).

ATLAS.ti has many advantages for researchers. In this study, the software was used specifically as an organisational tool that assisted in storing interview transcripts, organising and writing new information during the analysis process. The reason for selecting ATLAS.ti from a number of programmes available in South Africa is that I was previously exposed to the software, it was easy for me to get it uploaded, and I found it user friendly. ATLAS.ti was not used for the whole analysis process because I only worked with six interviews and it was not difficult to manage the small amount of data without the computer programme. In using the software, I found it easy to access my information and it helped with storing updated, edited transcripts when new themes emerged in each of the interview transcripts. The first step was to upload my interview transcripts into ATLAS.ti. When all the transcripts were uploaded into the software, I read each one of them multiple times and was able to edit, comment and organise themes according to their different categories. The group function in ATLAS.ti assisted in organising my data and it was easy for me to link certain information to a particular interview transcript. When all the documents were edited in ATLAS.ti, I was able to export them into word files.

According to Joseph Maxwell (2013: 105), data analysis begins with reading your interview transcripts or documents that are going to be analysed. Therefore, I started with careful inspection of the edited transcripts and memos downloaded from ATLAS.ti. The transcripts contained edited texts, quotes and memos that helped me recall categories in their different groups. I identified more themes during this stage that helped me to understand participant's experiences of Christianity in relation to their sexuality. The categories were generated by reading the participants' responses again and were grouped to formulate a list of codes.

Thus, data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within your data (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). Furthermore, stages involved in thematic analysis are similar to other stages of qualitative methods. The researcher must be familiar with the data, codes must be generated, themes are developed, defined and named, and lastly, the researcher must produce a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87). The main goal of thematic analysis is to identify important themes in order to address the research questions (Maguere & Delahunt, 2017: 3353). The following are the main themes that started to emerge:

- Early development into Christianity
- Becoming the self
- Homophobia
- Separating one's relationship with God from the institutional Church

6. Analysis and Discussion

In this section, I report on the findings of the analysis. I will begin with a brief description of the participants. This is done to give readers a clear background on the participants and how their contributions are important in achieving the objectives of the study. I will then proceed to discuss the themes that emerged during the analysis. Extracts (participants' sense of understanding of their experiences) from the interviews will be used as part of the discussion together with interpretations by the researcher. This represents what is called a "double hermeneutic" in IPA research and it is important during the analysis stage. All the information was gathered through interviews. The research questions included questions on how the participants identify in terms of sexuality, their Christian background, when they first became aware of their lesbian sexuality, the challenges they experienced within the Christian Church, how they resolved any conflict related to both their sexuality and their Christianity, and lastly if they practice any other form of spirituality outside Christianity.

6.1 Meeting the participants

The section below provides some background on the research participants. I will provide the ages of the participants, how they identify as lesbian (butch/masculine/femme or queer), and the Christian denomination they were raised in.

Mpho

Mpho is a 27-year-old female who grew up in Kwazulu-Natal. She is a student at the University of the Free State and is involved in activist work on campus. She states that she grew up in a Christian family as part of the Roman Catholic Church. She identifies as a woman who loves other women. Mpho is open about her sexuality among friends

but not completely open to family, and she has experienced some discomfort within her church due to her sexuality. This is part of her story:

I first became aware of my sexuality when I was 14 years old, I was in grade 9 or 10 and that was in 2005. It was difficult for me, as I did not know what it meant to be attracted to a person of the same-sex. I believe in religion, which is a sense of knowing that there is a God¹⁵ up there, who is God of gods. Religion you pray with the Bible and do all the religious stuff like being committed to a Church. Having gone to a Christian school I was mostly bombarded with the Bible and how you should actually follow the Bible and do everything that the Bible prescribes.

Kimberly

Kimberly is 27 years old and identifies as queer. She grew up as a very reserved person. Kimberly seemed comfortable in expressing views regarding women's issues, but showed less confidence when speaking about sexuality. She also spoke strongly against the Anglican Church and it appeared as if she does not take religion seriously. She has not come out publicly or to her family as a queer woman. This is part of her story:

When it comes to when I started being aware of my sexuality, I would say it was about four years ago, 2014. That is when I started questioning my sexuality but at that time, I was in a relationship with a guy so I did not pay much attention to it. I did not really label myself as anything until two years ago when I started dating a woman. That is when I labelled myself queer. When I was younger, we used to go to church every day because I was in confirmation class, so it was part of the household activities that were constant. Some of the challenges include a disconnect between my sexuality and religion. Also just talking openly about sexuality.

Anele

A friend referred Anele to me. She is a 20 year old who identifies as a butch lesbian. She is a student at the University of the Free State and she is not comfortable talking about her sexuality in general but she has accepted who she is as a person. This is part of her story:

I first became aware of my sexuality when I was in grade 8. In grade 7, I would say I am lesbian but I was not certain. I grew up in a Catholic family and grew up religiously. This other time I went to Church wearing pants, at Church I am responsible for collecting money from the congregants. I took the money to the priest and he was like "if you still want to do this, wear dresses or skirts".

Gift

¹⁵ God: Refers to a Christian God

I met Gift through Anele and she is a 21-year-old lesbian butch who is studying Law at the University of the Free State. She has dedicated her life to Jesus Christ. She grew up attending the Apostolic Church but then became Catholic when she was attending a Catholic school. Gift does not like talking about her sexuality and during the interviews she kept her answers short.

I started accepting my sexuality when I was in high school, in grade 9. I knew since I was a kid that I was different in everything, when I heard that girls should be with boys, though it was not directly told to me, I did not entertain it. The first time I heard of the word lesbian, was in grade five, but I did not embrace it or accept it until high school. Nobody knew because we were not even allowed to date, so nobody knew. I was even a spiritual leader and I feel if I had come out, that was not going to be possible.

Thato

Thato is 20 years of age and identifies as a lesbian. She is from Limpopo and enjoys art. She does not deem it necessary to identify as anything but prefers being with women. Thato was comfortable in answering questions about both her religion and sexuality. This is part of her story:

So in 2014, I had my first real crush on a girl, I was 15 years old. I come from a Christian family. My mother was a treasurer in church and we always had to go to church. I think religion can be anything as long as you connect to something beyond you, to keep sane. I spent my high school years being Catholic. I do not think people really come out, you just start off saying you just [a] tomboy and you like wearing pants. However, I just told people that I do not mind being with a girl. Eventually they became aware of my sexuality because I got a girlfriend. So it was obvious.

Puleng

Puleng is 20 years old and identifies as lesbian. Puleng grew up in the township and has not experienced direct exclusion or discrimination in her church but has experienced discriminatory comments about homosexuality in church. This is part of her story:

When I was 13, I actually decided to accept who I am, "I am lesbian and that's it". I grew up in the township and in such area[s], people look at you and assume that you are just a tomboy and secretly hope that you will one day date boys. There was a time when I was involved in spiritual fellowship and doing all the church activities. However, it became a problem at some point, I guess they were fine with me dressing like a man while in the background and not in the stage where everyone sees me. That became a problem for me.

During the interviews, participants seemed willing to take part in the study. Based on the interviews, I got the impression that they were never given an opportunity to talk about their experiences within the religious context and truly express their views. In fact, one of the participants, Mpho mentioned that the study unlocked a lot of things within her as she stated “I have been battling with many things especially when it comes to spirituality and religion, it made me see things in a different light and it has created an opportunity for me to actually think about tackling things in a different manner”. In addition, it became clear that participants became aware of certain discriminatory habits within Christianity due to their sexuality. While historical conflict between religion and homosexuality was evident, other concerns were raised regarding the lived reality of the research participants. The following section will therefore discuss some of the themes that emerged during the interviews.

7. Themes

This section of the study provides themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis. These themes will be supported by existing literature on the subject. The analysis is divided into four parts. The first theme “Early development into Christianity” traces the early development of the participants’ Christian identity. The second theme “Becoming the Self” focuses on the early awareness of the participants’ sexual orientation. The third theme “Homophobia” deals with different homophobia-related challenges faced by the participants. The last theme “Separating one’s relationship with God from the institutional Church” presents different ways participants choose to deal with any negativity they have experienced. The following are the sub-themes that emerged: Parental and family role; negative religious attitudes about sexuality; homophobic church practices and homophobic sermons; isolation within the church; a threat to masculinity; and a threat to the nuclear family.

7.1 Early development into Christianity

In this part of the analysis, I discuss the early childhood development of participant’s Christian identity. I focus on how they developed this identity and made a commitment to the Christian faith. In the literature review, I explained that Christianity has and still plays a huge role in South Africa. This means that it is more likely that Christian rituals, habits and principles are taught early in childhood. This thus indicates that parents

have a role to play in the development of a child's faith. In this section, it becomes clear that many of the participants did not choose a Christian lifestyle but that they were born into it.

7.1.1 Parental and family role

In the second chapter, I indicated that eighty percent (80%) of the South African population belongs to the Christian faith, which makes it the most dominant religion in South Africa (Nell & Shapiro, 2011: 20). According to Willem Schoeman (2017: 3), the percentage of Christians in South Africa increased in 2013 to 84.2%. Reasons for the commitment to Christianity could be the historical relationship between Christian Churches and the South African government. However, parents also play a role in how children are socialised and religion has a part to play in that process. Some of the participants indicated that Christianity was taught from a young age. The following examples are indicative of this:

Kimberly: Every Sunday we would go to church when I was younger; we used to go to church every day because I was in confirmation class, so it was part of the household activities that were constant.

Similar to Kimberly, it becomes clear that Puleng is also from a highly religious family and that being a Christian has always been a part of her life.

Puleng: I come from a very religious family. We have this church. It is a community church, but if other people were to stop coming to church, we as a family we would be the only ones left [the majority of the church members, as suggested by Puleng, are her immediate family and relatives]. Members of the church consist mainly of my family. We grew up very religiously, did Bible studies as a family.

The role of family and parents in the development of children's faith is clearly highlighted by Marsulize van Niekerk and Gert Breed (2018) where they trace the development process from the age of seven. In this article, Van Niekerk and Breed state that parent to child interaction forms the basis on which the infant will build their developing faith (Van Niekerk & Breed, 2018: 1). In a study conducted by Jacob Marthinus Van Staden, as cited in Van Niekerk and Breed (2018: 2), 65% of the participants indicated that parents, grandmothers and other family members play a huge role in the faith development of children. According to Johannes Van der Walt (2016: 2), the Christian Church community supports parents in training children in the faith. Furthermore, Johannes Van der Walt (2016: 2) suggests that parents have a

responsibility to educate children about the Christian faith in order to develop their personal, moral and religious identity. In South Africa, Christian values translated into family values during 20th century apartheid (Philo, 2015: 14). This was done to promote heterosexual norms, protect the traditional nuclear family and promote Christianity as the main religion in South Africa (Philo, 2015). It is evident in this study that the participant's Christian identity was developed at an early stage of their lives. They were taught mostly about heterosexuality while other forms of sexual identities were silenced to protect Christian family norms. This is illustrated in the example below:

Mpho: In Christian school, they taught us about men and women, Adam and Eve and not homosexual stuff. Therefore, when I realised my attraction to women, it was a challenge.

With reference to Mpho's comment, it is clear that children are given limited information on sexuality and that information on other forms of sexuality is withheld. Mpho stated that she knew nothing about homosexuality as she was only exposed to heterosexuality. This could be a challenge for individuals who identify as homosexual later in their lives. Therefore, homosexual individuals who are raised by parents who promote and support heterosexuality might find it difficult to fully express their sexuality with the fear that they are deviating from what their parents have always taught them. The struggle to reject heterosexuality may lead to one's difficulty to accept who they are.

7.2 Becoming the Self

There have been numerous arguments presented on whether homosexuality is inborn or learned behaviour (Greenberg & Bailey, 1993; Haldeman, 2002). Homosexuality has been described as a mental illness, disease, a disorder, demonic possession and a degeneration (Burton, 2015). In an article titled "Adolescent Homosexuality" by Susanne Stronski Huwiler and Gary Remafedi (1999: 155), the essentialist/constructionist argument is presented. The essentialist view argues that fixed biological phenomena determine sexual orientation while the constructionist argument emphasises that homosexuality is a social construction. Christian communities view homosexuality as a choice to commit sin and as a sexual orientation that can be changed (Cameron-Ellis, 1999:17). Regardless of these different views,

participants in this study state that their sexual identity can be traced from an early stage of their development and that they cannot change who they are. In this regard, the following comments by Thato and Puleng are particularly relevant.

Thato: I think it has always been there, but I do not know. I remember I had this thing when growing up, I kissed my cousin. Therefore, I asked myself why I went for my female cousin and not male cousin. It got worse when I was in high school; I thought, “So this [is] how boys feel about girls”. So in 2014, I had my first real crush on a girl, I was 15 years old.

Puleng: I became aware of my attraction for women at a young age... When I was 13, I actually decided to accept who I am, “I am lesbian and that’s it”.

Thato reveals that she thinks she has always been homosexual although she was not certain. According to Lee Beaty (1999: 599), homosexual individuals who are raised with traditional values find it difficult to accept or acknowledge homosexual feelings even though they are aware of these feelings. Traditional families emphasise values associated with religion, marriage and procreation. Furthermore, the stage of being “aware” is referred to as “sensitization or identity awareness” (Beaty, 1999: 598). The process begins before puberty where individuals experience homosexual feelings without understanding what it means in terms of self-identity. The identity formation model presented by Janna Horowitz and Michael Newcomb (2002: 6) suggests that individuals could have been born homosexual or heterosexual, but they can only exhibit certain sexual behaviour when they reach a certain age. With reference to Beaty’s comments on traditional family values and homosexuality, both Thato and Puleng were able to affirm their sexuality identity from a young age, regardless of their Christian family values. Puleng’s comment holds relevance in this regard: “When I was 13, I actually decided to accept who I am, I am lesbian and that’s it”. Thato and Puleng were able to reach the “commitment stage” which entails adopting a homosexual lifestyle (Beaty, 1999: 598). Acceptance of homosexuality might lead one to the dilemma of choosing between their sexual and spiritual/religious identity (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris & Hecker, 2001: 440).

7.3 Homophobia

The post-apartheid South African constitution took a more liberal stance towards non-heterosexual individuals as opposed to the previous government. This decision forced religious denominations to rethink their positions regarding homosexuality. While most

of the churches are making progress, there seem to be more negative attitudes from religious individuals (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006: 23). The following subthemes highlight participant's views on the reasons that churches and the community exhibit homophobic behaviour. The following section deals specifically with the challenges participants experienced in the Christian Church.

7.3.1 Negative religious attitudes about sexuality

During the interviews, some of the participants revealed that they feel that lesbian women struggle with acceptance because of how the Christian Church treats lesbians and women. These negative attitudes towards homosexuality stem from Christian patriarchal beliefs that women must submit to men and that homosexuality is a sin (Lindsey, 1995: 27; Ruether, 2003: 191). Because of these homophobic attitudes, it can be argued that lesbian women suffer in the Christian Church due to patriarchy and their sexual orientation further adds to their experience of oppression. Religious communities tend to perceive homosexuality as sinful as demonstrated by the following extract:

Mpho: I consulted someone who was Christian from my own church and funny enough; I was told it was not normal... somewhere along the line the pastor would just make comments about sexuality [homosexuality] as a thing or something disgusting and those around me made it more uncomfortable.

Mpho indicates that because the church views homosexuality as abnormal behaviour, she is treated like an outsider. Due to religious beliefs regarding patriarchy and heterosexuality, black lesbians in South Africa are exposed to homophobia. They are isolated and discriminated against by the church community they come from. For instance, a homophobic statement was made by a Ghanaian pastor, Heward-Mills in South Africa who said “[y]ou don’t find two male dogs or two male lions or two male impalas... two male cats, even lizards, two male elephants. There is nothing like that in nature. It’s unnatural” (Davis, 2017). These statements are widespread with the former South African president Jacob Zuma stating “[w]hen I was growing up, unqingili (a gay person) would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out” (Breed, Lynch, Nel & Matthews, 2016: 128). Preaching against homosexuality marginalises individuals who identify as such. It promotes negative, patriarchal attitudes about homosexuality. Below is an illustration of this point:

Thato: I think in high school it was not that bad because it was a boarding school, girls school. So there were other lesbians. However, when you get home, you meet other people from different background[s] who would tell you in church that a woman should be with a man, [a] woman should be submissive to a man and that is not what you want.

The view that religious slurs can lead to homophobia is also evident in a study conducted by Jabulani Kheswa (2016). The study investigated how lesbian students at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa, deal with discrimination. One of the themes that emerged was “alienation” in which 3 of the 21 respondents felt alienated by the church. One respondent reported the following: “The church doesn’t accept me and sometimes Pastors make sarcastic remarks when preaching as a result I don’t go to church” (Kheswa, 2016: 151).

The three participants in the afore-mentioned study felt unaccepted and mocked by pastors who preached against homosexuality (Kheswa, 2016: 151). These types of attitudes contribute to the persistent harsh treatment towards sexual minorities that could lead to negative psychological effects.

7.3.2 Homophobic church practices and homophobic sermons

South Africa is one of the first African countries to be applauded for prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation (Gibson & Macleod, 2010: 7). The country amended its constitution and deemed it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on his or her sexual identity. This caused conflict in South African churches as most of them had to rethink their positions regarding homosexuality and those who identify as such. Although some churches seem to focus on the human aspect of homosexuals and not their sexual identity, a number of churches and pastors support the notion of homosexuality as a sin and regard homosexuals as standing in conflict with the word of God (Subhi & Geelan, 2012: 1383). As a result, pastors often refer to biblical texts to preach against homosexuality. For example, when two American pastors were asked to provide their opinions on Bible verses about homosexuality, Pastor Caleb Kaltenbach interpreted Leviticus 18: 22 as follows:

God’s prohibition always has positive intentions. While no longer under the Law, Christians see the Law as a moral compass with principles for holy living. The Bible doesn’t have middle ground on same-sex relationships, monogamous or not. God reserves sex for marriage between a man and woman, because sex is a unique foundation of intimacy. Imagine all the evils, struggles and pain that could be

avoided in relationships if we really followed God's principles. When sex is only seen as a benefit for individuals rather than a foundation of social structures, it becomes selfish and manipulative (Goodstein, 2015).

In South Africa, a Christian minister, Christopher Peppler (2006), wrote an article examining the biblical stance on homosexuality. Peppler agrees with the moral virtues of heterosexuality by referring to Genesis 2 and states that God created a woman for a man (2006: 42). Peppler further expresses his preference for heterosexual marriage by stating that two distinct genders (male and female) were created as a way to preserve humanity (Peppler, 2006: 43). In support of his argument, Peppler argues that reproductive physiology is one argument that makes heterosexual unions intended and acceptable unions (Peppler, 2006: 43). It is such messages and attitudes that expose homosexual individuals to violence, harsh treatments and may possibly lead to the high number of attacks based on hate and prejudice. These homophobic sentiments are prominent in church with one of the research participants, Mpho, referencing this homophobic behaviour.

Mpho: Sometimes I sat next to people and I could feel that I am being excluded in church; the way they looked at me was unwelcoming. This affected my relationship with God negatively. When I went to Church I did not receive the message I went to church for, because somewhere along the line the pastor would just make comments about sexuality [homosexuality] as a thing or something disgusting and those around me made it more uncomfortable.

Literature on the issue of homosexuality and religion proves that biblical texts have been the main reason for the reluctance of Christian churches to accept individuals identifying as homosexuals (Koranteng-Pipim, 2005; Dreyer, 2006; Punt, 2006 & Jones, 2007). To support his homophobic sentiments, Christopher Peppler references a verse from Leviticus 18: 22 which reads as follows, "a man must not lie with a man as one lies with a woman" to invalidate homosexuality (Peppler, 2006: 44). Such biblical verses are often used to persuade homosexuals to change their sexual orientation. Christians assert that people were naturally created as male and female and promote heterosexuality for the sake of procreation (Cameron-Ellis, 1999:17). The Christian community regards same-sex relationships as unnatural. Although the LGBTQ community has been granted protection in the constitution, it has been rather difficult for the church community to accept and view homosexuals as equal members of the church. Therefore, for the participants in this study this might result in certain psychological and emotional consequences.

7.3.3 Isolation within the Church environment

The new democratic constitution assures every South African citizen that they will not be discriminated against based on their sexual orientation (De Ru, 2013: 243). These new developments have caused internal turmoil in various Christian denominations. On a personal level, some church members may accept homosexual individuals based on their personal knowledge of the individual. Although people's attitudes have started to change it is clear that institutions continue to reinforce homophobic practices and display homophobic attitudes. Therefore, LGBTQ individuals may feel unwelcome or insecure within the majority of Christian churches (Browning, 2007: 6). In this regard, Mpho's statement serves as an important contribution.

Mpho: Sometimes I sat next to people and I could feel that I am being excluded in church; the way they looked at me was unwelcoming.

The perception of lesbian relationships as religiously unacceptable is also highlighted in a study conducted by Nadia Sanger and Lindsay Clowes (2006). Using an exploratory method, they found that Christians believe that lesbianism is a mental condition and acceptance of God in one's life is the solution (Sanger & Clowes, 2006: 42). Similar sentiments to the ones shared in the above study are evident in the following response by Mpho: "I consulted someone who was Christian from my own church and funny enough; I was told it was not normal". Mpho makes it clear here that she consulted a Christian regarding her doubts, who clearly regards her sexuality as abnormal. Negative attitudes towards female sexual identities may also be associated with limited research on women's sexuality in African countries (Potgieter, 2007: 10). Religious institutions rely mainly on the Bible to serve as guidance on how people should behave, how gender roles should be assigned and how family structures should be constituted. According to Daniela Prado-Castro and Tanya Graham (2017: 96), sexual identity and gender identity are often regarded as synonymous due to the expectations of how males and females should behave. Gender identity is therefore used to control how men and women behave and exclude any identity that is seen as "other" (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017: 97).

7.3.4 A threat to masculinity

Sex differences create gender roles in which women become subjected to norms that suppress them (Frenkel, 2008: 1; Covington, 2003: 2). These predetermined roles confine women to feminine roles and any display of masculinity is regarded as unnatural. Although in South Africa there is a constitution that protects everyone and seems progressive in terms of empowering women, sexual and gendered violence still occurs and consequently maintains the heteropatriarchal order. Christianity is patriarchal and every woman is expected to resemble being a woman in thought, dress code and behaviour. Lesbian women can therefore be seen as a threat to the order of the church and may be subjected to discriminatory behaviour. The following comment from Kimberly indicates that women can be a threat to Christian patriarchy and a challenge to hegemonic masculinity:

Kimberly: When it comes to the Church, I had a problem with how the Church treats women. For example, if you go to church you can't wear pants as a woman, and that was made a compulsory law for women and that raises a lot of questions for me, that they are trying to remind you that this is your position, you wearing pants is like you are trying to be a man.

Kimberly mentions that when women appear or resemble some form of masculinity by the way they dress, that becomes a problem for the church. The church considers women's masculine expression as misrepresenting the sex you were born with. Issues of masculine dominance are important in understanding gendered discrimination, exclusion, and violence against women. The extract above references the concomitant link between one's sex and traditional gender roles. Queer theory becomes an important theoretical lens through which we can understand identity construction and the expression of sexual identity. Queer theory explores the difference between gender identity, biological sex and sexual desire (Piantato, 2016: 3). This theory is concerned with sexualities that are regarded as unacceptable and resists hegemonic heterosexuality (Piantato, 2016: 3).

According to Judith Butler (1999: 140), gender cannot be a stable identity but it is rather a constructed performance in which repetitive acts have become normalised over time. That which is problematic for Queer theorists is the idea of fixed gender and sexual identities, which marginalise sexualities that do not fit into the traditional discourse about gender and sexuality (Piantato, 2016: 3). However, it is apparent that these constructed genders have privileged heterosexuality over other sexual identities. According to Amanda Lock Swarr (2012: 962), "lesbians often challenge

gender expectations through their expressions of masculinities and sexualities, leading to increased visibility in their communities". This means that masculine lesbians are more prone to victimisation and isolation because they express who they are. The following extract by Puleng illustrates how the visibility of lesbians presents a threat to men:

Puleng: There was a time when I was involved in spiritual fellowship and doing all the church activities. However, it became a problem at some point, I guess they were fine with me dressing like a man while in the background and not in the stage where everyone sees me.

Puleng mentions that her visible masculine appearance became a problem for the church because she did not seem to be dressed "appropriately" for a woman. Butch lesbians become more visible in the way they dress and act, and therefore are more at risk of being discriminated against (Morrissey, 2013: 81). In an argument presented by Swarr (2012: 963), butch lesbians threaten masculinity in three ways: First, as a threat to heterosexuality (due to their relationships with women); second, to gender norms (the expression of masculinity); and last, to sex (challenging expectations of men as the correct gender to identify as masculine). The following extract further illustrates a man being bothered by female displaying masculinity:

Anele: This other time I went to Church wearing pants, at Church I am responsible for collecting money from the congregants. I took the money to the priest and he was like "if you still want to do this, wear dresses or skirts".

The contributions made by Kimberly, Puleng, and Anele indicate that masculine lesbians are a threat to men because their appearance and behaviour are regarded as divergent from a normative understanding of gender and sexual orientation. Furthermore, Swarr (2012: 962) argues that lesbians expose the vulnerability of male masculinity, as successful manhood means controlling women and forcing them to follow heterosexual norms. The oppression of black Christian woman is clearly highlighted by Joyce Masenya (1994) who indicates that black Christian women are subjected to patriarchal discrimination because of their sex (Masenya, 1994: 38). She highlights race, gender and class as intertwined to maintain patriarchy in many societies. However, Masenya fails to include sexual orientation in her argument; a problem that caused conflicting debates within the wider Feminist movement. The Feminist movement received a backlash from lesbian women for its failure to recognise the oppression of women based on their sexual orientation. This

furthermore demonstrates the importance of applying an intersectional lens to this study which takes matters of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality and spirituality into account. According to Cheshire Calhoun (1994: 554), Feminists developed a women's movement that specifically highlighted issues focused on relations between men and women, suggesting heterosexuality as the dominant mode of relationship.

In South Africa, not only were black women discriminated against based on their race but female sexuality was completely ignored (Jones, 2008: 398; Brown, 2014: 456). During the 1980's, the gay rights movements surfaced in South Africa but even then, the focus was mainly on white male homosexuality (Mongie, 2013: 14). South African black lesbians exist in a society that has a history of apartheid and gender inequality within cultural, political, and religious institutions (Brown, 2012: 48). These systems of subjugation are what make black lesbians vulnerable to discrimination. When we shift our focus to the wider women's movement in South Africa, black lesbian women are marginalised within these spaces. Apart from the reasoning that lesbianism is unAfrican, the women's movement such as the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) remains silent about lesbian sexual orientation (Hames, 2003). The current study becomes an important contribution in that it sheds light on how black lesbian women experience multiple forms of oppression that intersect with race, gender, sexual identity, and Christian identity. Participants have challenged the status quo of the Christian doctrine by not conforming to the gender expression expected from women by the church. They are seen as undermining the belief in heterosexuality, and perceived as sexually unavailable to the men in their communities (Swarr, 2012: 962). Therefore, Intersectionality becomes an important theoretical perspective that can assist to describe the interplay of various social constructs. The theory highlights the complexities that black lesbian Christian women may face when negotiating their identities.

7.3.5 A threat to the nuclear family

In the second chapter, I presented an overview of different churches' responses to homosexuality. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) believes that homosexuality is a sin and according to scripture, against the word of God (Vorster, 2008: 324). The Anglican Church believes that same-sex marriages are unnatural and therefore bishops should not bless them (Collison, 2016). The Roman Catholic Church regards

homosexuality as an “objective disorder” and sexual encounters between same-sex partners as “intrinsically disordered” (Yip, 1999: 52; Otto, 2003: 59). Homosexuality is then viewed as a threat to what is regarded as normal and becomes a threat to the Christian nuclear family, which consists of a father, mother and children (Cameron-Ellis, 1999: 17; Subhi & Geelan, 2012: 1383). With reference to the concept of marriage, participants in this study highlighted how church members made them feel uncomfortable because of their so-called unconventional lifestyles.

Anele: According to the churches beliefs, we as lesbian people are just playing, for example, our pastors reminds us that they cannot marry homosexual couples. They keep telling us that it is against our church. Even this pastor that I know who is a friend of mine, we went out with him one time and then he asked me if I am lesbian and I told him yes I am and he asked me if I am going to change and I told him that I will not change and he reminded me that he cannot marry homosexual people. He said he knows about my sexuality and we are close but he cannot marry me if it comes to that point because it is against the church and it is an abomination.

Religious institutions define marriage in a heteronormative sense and prescribe that it is a union between one man and one woman (Reddy, 2005: 152). Although homosexual individuals have been awarded the legal right to marry in South Africa, discrimination persists when it comes to some Christian denominations, as indicated in the extract above. Christianity views marriage as a sacred arrangement between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation (Steyn & van Zyl, 2009: 348). Therefore, Anele’s sexuality becomes a threat to compulsory heterosexuality enforced by the Church through marriage. Lesbian members like Anele would thus be marginalised because they cannot conform to the belief that a marriage should be between a man and a woman. Furthermore, Gift’s statement becomes a relevant contribution when she states: “Laws such as homosexual[s] cannot be married, exclude me as a lesbian woman”.

In more conservative African contexts and communities, it is more likely that parents choose a husband for their daughter, subjecting her to the authority of her husband (Masenya, 1999: 39). Additionally, South Africans still consider the traditional family structure valuable where it is defined as a nuclear family that consists of a husband, wife, and children (Russell, 2003: 155). In Christianity, heterosexual unions are valued and marriage serves as assurance that the nuclear family structure is preserved. Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (2009: 348) provide some clarity on the preoccupation with heterosexual relationships by arguing that homosexual marriage invades a sacred

institution that is meant for heterosexual individuals and considered to be protected by God. Those in the faith community oppose homosexual marriage based on reproductive concerns and their traditional concept of a family (male and female union) often results in the further marginalisation of homosexuals. Although heterosexual women ignored the presence of lesbian women in the Feminist movement, Lesbian Feminism argues that there is a common issue for both groups (heterosexuals and homosexual women) and that is patriarchal oppression (Calhoun, 1994: 560). Participants in this study may not only face challenges of negotiating their identity within a heteropatriarchal space, but the people who belong in the same political class as them may also subjugate them. Within a religious setting, heterosexual women become more privileged than lesbian women do because they perceived to be “real women”. According to Charlotte Bunch (2000: 332), male society defines women in terms of who they engage in sexual acts with. Since lesbians defy this ideology, they are regarded as less of a woman. Black lesbian Christian women do not conform to the Christian definition of marriage and thus they become a fundamental threat to male supremacy and the heteropatriarchal Christian family unit.

8. Separating one’s relationship with God from the institutional Church

The binary sex and gender system (male/female) governs people’s experiences of life and affects the way they relate to each other (Markham, 2011: 317). These concrete dualities with limited fluidity marginalise individuals who identify outside the binary system, and exclude the lived experiences of these individuals. Within religious structures, these socially constructed categories are often used to define individuals according to binaries, for example, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, and sinners/innocent. Queer theorists challenge the notion of defined identity categories; it refutes norms that create gender binaries of acceptable and non-acceptable sexualities (Meyer, 2007: 15). Queer theory does not limit itself to sexual identity but accommodates everyone in marginalised positions. In the second chapter, I commented on how most Christian churches find it difficult to accept homosexuals and regard them as humans, and not as sinners. Through discriminatory biblical scriptures, Christians are able to justify their negative attitudes toward homosexuals (defining them as sinners), regardless of whether they are Christian or not. The Christian faith community regards the Bible as their guidance and believes it to be the literal word of

God (Dreyer, 2006: 156). However, for the Christian homosexual community, the Bible becomes what subjects them to Christian oppression. It contributes to the challenges they experience within the Church and the harsh treatment they receive within the Church. In dealing with the struggle to reconcile homosexual and religious identities, lesbian women employ different strategies that are deemed appropriate for the conflicts they face. The following extract provides one of the strategies used.

Anele: I went back to praying and told myself that these people have to accept me as I am. If they cannot accept me then they have to tolerate me because I am not going anywhere. Therefore, I made no changes at all. Now I don't go to church a lot.

It can be deduced from Anele's response that she regards her faith an important part of her life. According to Rebecca Hamblin and Alan Gross (2014: 71), apart from better physical and mental health, religious communities often provide social support and opportunities to be part of various social and community activities. The support that the churches provide to its congregants could have a positive effect on their lives, which may make it difficult for lesbian identified women to leave the church entirely even when discrimination occurs. This type of support is referenced in Anele's statement below.

Anele: There was a time when I thought to myself, I have been supported a lot by the church and the community. However, when I got to Bloemfontein I got to reflect on my own and felt like I am living two lives. When I am in Bloemfontein I feel like I am me the lesbian but when I go back to church I feel like I have to tolerate everything they tell me.

Anele indicates that she is aware that when she is at church she feels like she is not her real self, which suggests that she cannot fully express her identity. She only goes to church because the church has been a sense of support for her and maybe she feels she is part of that religious community. In a study conducted by Eric Rodriguez and Suzanne Ouellette (2000), rejecting religious identity was one of the strategies used by homosexuals. Sixty-two percent of the participants in Rodriguez and Ouellette's study felt religious identity is not a significant part of who they are and that they would rather live without religion or attend a non-Christian church that supports homosexuality (2000: 334). In the current study however, five of the six participants expressed their desire to remain in the church even though they felt that the church does not accept their sexuality. Some of the participants had to compromise fully

expressing their sexuality, because they did not want people to judge them. The following is a strategy employed by Mpho.

Mpho: It has been very difficult even though I knew deep down who I was, I still had to hide because of the fear of what people might say. With my mom being this well-known woman in church, it was hard because I had to think of her and what people might say. I had to wear feminine clothes sometimes.

Both Anele and Mpho expressed feeling hurt when they spoke about their experiences in church. It became clear to me that they were both from very religious families that emphasised the Christian, heterosexual notion of marriage. It must be noted that even though participants in this study remained in the church, their church attendance dropped significantly but the women still regard themselves as Christians. In a similar study by Kelly Schuck and Becky Liddle (2001), although it was common for respondents to stop attending church once they accept their sexual orientation, two of the research participants in that study returned to Christianity. In the current study, five participants stopped praying and attending church at some point, but they later went back with a decline in their attendance. The following are relevant examples:

Anele: I have not stopped going to church, I went back to praying and told myself that these people have to accept me as I am.

Gift: People told me that God is against it [homosexuality] that he does not like it and the scripture even said so, and the scripture is the word of God. So it affected my relationship with God, I would stop praying, and I feel like I am not the same spiritual person.

Both Anele and Gift are involved in church activities and had at some point taken certain roles in their church, as reported in the interviews. Anele reported that she was responsible for collecting money during church services and facilitating home cell sessions with other church members. Gift was a spiritual leader, meaning she acted as a mentor for the youth and she held home cell meetings for church members. Due to the discrimination they experienced, they were affected spiritually and experienced a lot of conflict because of their sexuality. They stopped praying and became less involved in church activities, which resulted in them leaving the church for some time.

A compromise between conflicting identities is regarded or termed “compartmentalization” in which the conflicting identities are kept separate (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000: 334). For this strategy to be successful, one needs to completely isolate the identities without any barriers. For the participants in this study, it was difficult to completely give up their religious identity as the majority went back to

Christianity. This could be due to the positive aspects associated with religion and the support they received. The participants rather tried to integrate the two identities by going back to church and separating their relationship with God from the institutional church. They did so with some assistance from helpful personal resources they applied (Schuck & Liddle: 2000: 72). During the interviews, I asked the participants if they made any changes regarding their church or faith. Gift describes it as follows:

Gift: No, I did not. I continued going to church but I just stopped going to some churches. I still go to church on Sundays and I attend church events on campus.

Taking into consideration Gift's highly religious nature, her response did not shock me. She comes from a religious background and has maintained that throughout her life. The response by Gift and her attitude towards the church, differ from the ones conducted in a study by Patrick Love, Marianne Bock, Annie Jannarone and Paul Richardson (2005) where some participants reported that their direct relationship with God is not mediated through a church or the Bible. Below is a statement by Thato, who continues to attend church but finds her alternative form of spirituality as more useful in her connection with God.

Thato: Yes, art. I take pictures, I write poems and that for me is spiritual. God gave these to me. God gives you talents, how you use them is how you maintain your relationship with God.

Similar to Gift and Thato, Puleng still associates herself with Christianity. As a reminder, Puleng comes from a family that strongly associates with the church. It can be assumed that church is some form of an obligation within her family and it would be difficult for her to abandon it completely, regardless of how she feels about religion. However, her church attendance has declined and as opposed to Gift and Thato, Puleng decided to separate her sexual orientation from her religious identity. She also has alternative forms of expressing her sexuality outside church. Below is an extract from Puleng who indicates that she has separated her sexuality from religion:

Puleng: I do not believe in religion anymore. I do not understand the concept of us separating God. I have accepted my sexuality and I cannot allow the church to change it. The relationship between my sexuality and religion, I have managed to separate them. I do not keep them together. The minute you combine them, that is when religious rules come in and that creates conflict. When you are told about hell, you become scared and you start questioning if what you are is truly real, so I separate them.

Nombulelo Towa: How do you maintain your spirituality?

Puleng: I listen to music, I am very spiritual when I am listening to church music. Because I do not pray, listening to music helps me spiritually.

Puleng managed to separate her sexuality from religion. By separating the two, it may be argued that Puleng manages to achieve some form of conflict resolution or identity consonance (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000: 334). It is clear that the Christian church has a history of heteropatriarchal beliefs and has responded negatively to the LGBTQ community. Despite this negativity, black lesbian women are adapting their spirituality in such a way as to accommodate their sexuality.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The history of South Africa indicates that there has always been a close relationship between Christianity and the government, in which both have previously promoted homophobia. This relationship has made it difficult for homosexual identifying individuals to incorporate their homosexual identity into an existing Christian identity. Since the beginning of democracy in South Africa, there have been public discussions around the role that religion plays in the negative attitudes towards homosexuality. There have also been media reports on the discrimination that Christian homosexual individuals experience within their various denominations due to their sexual orientation. Researchers have also reported on the implications for those who identify as both homosexual and Christian, specifically on the experiences of incorporating these identities. This study investigated the spiritual/religious experiences of black lesbian Christian women. To be specific, the research investigated how black lesbians reconcile their intersectional identities (for example, to be black, lesbian, and women) with their spiritual/religious identities. In this chapter, I revisit the research aims and objectives of the study. I will also provide the conclusion reached, the limitations of the study and lastly, recommendations for future research will be provided.

The study was motivated by the limited research on black lesbian Christian women and their religious/spiritual experiences. Studies on black lesbian women in South Africa focus specifically on corrective rape and ignore other social ills that could affect their experiences as black, lesbian, Christian, women. Due to the patriarchy within Christian denominations, women are subjugated because of their sexual orientation. This oppression could be worse for lesbian women as their oppression could be based on both their gender expression and sexual orientation. Therefore, this study considered it important to highlight the experiences of black lesbian women who consider themselves Christians; a group of women that has been under-researched and deemed invisible for the longest time. This study allowed an opportunity to explore the types of challenges that these women face.

The study aligned itself with the following objectives:

- Explore the spiritual identities of black lesbian women in relation to the tension experienced due to their sexual identity and their religious lives.
- Identify lived experiences of black lesbian women and their responses to traditional church environments.
- Ascertain how Christian lesbians reconcile their beliefs and sexual identities.
- Explore shared experiences if any, and identify intersectional markers (race, sexual orientation, class, gender and social location) that can influence their spiritual life worlds.

In the second chapter, I discussed how the collaboration between the government and the church was formed during apartheid and showed how the government formulated laws that policed sexualities. I highlighted the active participation of the government and church in racial segregation, silence around black homosexuality and complete ignorance pertaining to female sexual identity. The process of agitating for homosexual rights during the transition from apartheid to democracy was traced. This process included the adoption of the new constitution based on human rights, which included the protection of homosexuals from unfair discrimination. This discussion highlighted that homosexuals were considered criminals prior to 1994 but later deemed “equal” to heterosexuals after 1994. However, social and religious attitudes toward homosexuality have changed marginally in some areas of the country, and with other parts remaining strongly homophobic.

In the third chapter, I explored the different theories that are central to the research study. The discussion on Feminism analysed the theoretical background of different Feminisms as they relate to the focus of this research and how theories can be used to explain the oppression of lesbian women based on their gender and sexual orientation.

Theories such as Feminism, Social Construction Theory, Queer Theory, Intersectionality, and Lesbian Feminism formed part of the discussion as the most accommodating theories for the research focus of this study. Although these theories differ, they touch on diverse issues that have affected black lesbian women and speak to the multiple oppressions that black Christian women have been subjected to. Black lesbian women have been rejected by every institution one can think of. They have

been reduced to the “other” even within the feminist movement itself. These theories thus contribute to the understanding of black lesbian women’s social position and their lived experiences as vital to a study concerning the marginalised group.

In the method chapter, I discussed the methodological choices that were used in the study. A qualitative approach (phenomenology) was selected as best in addressing the research questions. The choice to use phenomenology was deemed appropriate, as the aim of the study is to explore and understand the lived spiritual experiences of black lesbian women. The data collection method was also discussed where semi-structured interviews were utilised, enabling the researcher to get rich data from each participant regarding their spiritual experiences. The collected data from the interviews was analysed using a thematic and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, which was also discussed in this chapter as a way to make sense of the participants’ personal account of spirituality.

I indicated that the majority of Christian churches in South Africa battled with the issue of homosexuality, with a significant number of them maintaining that homosexuality is a sin. Homosexuals from a Christian background continued to experience isolation from the church and society, although they are considered equal before the law. This study employed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the experiences of six participants trying to make sense of their sexual orientation in the face of their Christian identity. Four main themes emerged during the analysis and were grouped as follows: Early development into Christianity, Becoming the Self, Homophobia, and Separating one’s relationship with God from the institutional Church. The discussion of these themes led to the achievement of the research objectives.

6.2 Discussion on the findings and conclusions

In this section, I provide a summary of the findings of the study. First, the participants did not appear to have worked through all of the issues of being Christian and homosexual. It should be noted that their sexual orientation seems to be accepted, but the struggle to integrate their sexuality and Christianity was still evident. Amongst the six participants, only one rejected Christianity and she has not recommitted to any Christian denomination. Five participants remained Christian but only four have managed to integrate their homosexuality with Christianity. The four participants who

integrated their sexuality with Christianity, did so by re-negotiating their Christian identity rather than their sexuality. One participant has chosen to separate her sexuality from her Christian identity. Participants who still affiliate with Christianity reported a significant decline in the active participation of church activities and attendance in general. This could be associated with the belief that their relationship with God remains stable while the relationship with the church has been negatively affected because of the discrimination they experienced.

6.2.1 Early development into Christianity

All participants in the study explained that they were raised in Christian families which means that Christian habits and principles were taught early in their childhood. Therefore, their faith development was not a conscious choice but was established through parent to child interaction, as indicated by Marsulize van Niekerk and Gert Breed (2018). Participants in the study were taught about heterosexuality during the early years of their lives. This highlighted the family, church and community silence around sexuality in general as dominant features in the stories of many participants. However, regardless of the silence around homosexuality, participants seemed to have acknowledged their own homosexuality as an important aspect of who they are as they clearly remember its inception.

6.2.2 Becoming the Self

This part of the study dealt with participant's early awareness of homosexuality. I noted that there were strong reasons for participants to deny their sexual identity because of their religious background and the negative representation of homosexuality that dominates the South African public discourse. Factors such as family values that are associated with religion, marriage and procreation could have made it difficult for participants to accept their homosexuality. In the face of tradition and religion, all participants reported that they were aware of their sexual orientation from an early age, but they found it difficult to express who they are because of possible judgement from others and from God.

6.2.3 Homophobia

Although the South African government has become more inclusive towards non-heterosexual individuals, there seems to be some reluctance from religious individuals. This part of the analysis, dealt with the homophobia within Christian churches. It explored the negative attitudes displayed by church congregants, homophobic practices and sermons, isolation within the church environment, and the notion that lesbian women are a threat to masculinity and to the nuclear family.

Participants view the institutional church as biased towards homosexuals and as lacking understanding of homosexual/lesbian church members. Furthermore, participants feel that homosexual victimisation is reinforced by the church's focus on the sexual act of homosexuality, while sins by heterosexual members are ignored.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The study was qualitative in nature, meaning the research findings cannot be generalised to larger populations. Another limitation is the small number of participants. The study included six participants and their opinions cannot be used to represent the broader lesbian community. There may be black lesbians who either did or did not have a negative experience within Christianity and did not take part in the study. Finally, this study aspired to identify alternative forms of spirituality practiced by participants. Apart from the two examples of artistic expression and listening to music as an alternative means of embracing their spirituality, limited responses were offered. The study highlighted that lesbian women feel alienated by the church but it is clear that the participants have not been able to entirely break away from the church and the perceived support that it has to offer.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of black lesbian women in Bloemfontein who were raised in Christian families. Based on the research findings of the study, I make the following recommendations: The study was limited to a small number of participants; I recommend the study be repeated on a large number of participants in all South African provinces. Second, it would be interesting to conduct the same study (for a longer term) focusing on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender persons from different religious denominations.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Faculty of the Humanities

23-Mar-2018

Dear Miss Towa

Ethics Clearance: **Queer Spirituality: Experiences of black lesbian women in Bloemfontein.**

Principal Investigator: **Miss Nombulelo Towa**

Department: **Centre for Africa Studies (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2017/0675**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted from 23-Mar-2018 to 23-Mar-2019.

Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Asta Rau

Chair: Research Ethics Committee

Faculty of the Humanities

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Did you grow up in village/township or suburb?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do you identify in terms of sexuality?
2. When did you first become aware of your sexual orientation?
3. How do you define religion/spirituality?
4. What religion/spiritual tradition did you grow up with?
5. What are some of the difficulties/challenges that you experienced between the way you identify in terms of your sexual orientation and your religious/spiritual beliefs?
6. How were you able to resolve any conflict between your sexual orientation and religious orientation?
7. Do you think black lesbian women feel accepted or rejected in any Christian or any other traditional denomination? Please explain
8. What experiences have you had of religion as a black lesbian woman? Did you have to be silent about sexuality? Did you have to hide your sexual identity?
9. Have you ever felt excluded in a church because of your sexual orientation? If yes, how did you react to it?
10. If no to the previous question, why do you think some lesbians become excluded in their own Christian denomination?
11. Thinking about your own experiences in a church, relating to your sexual orientation, how would you say it has affected your relationship with God or your faith?
12. Did you make any changes with regard to your church/faith because of this experience?
13. How you describe your current relationship between your sexual identity and religious identity?
14. Define spirituality
15. Would you say you consider yourself a spiritual person, regardless of any experiences you have had within a church?
16. Do you practice any form of spirituality outside a Christian denomination?
17. Does this type of spirituality conflict with your sexuality in any way?
18. How do you maintain your spirituality?
19. Are there any places or spaces where you feel more comfortable to express both your sexuality and spirituality?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the *insert specific data collection method*.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date:
