Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness and Difference" in "Queer" Identification

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Abstract

"The LGBTQIA+ community", like all social groupings, is moulded by dialectical forces: inclusivity/exclusivity, belonging/non-belonging, sameness/difference. Literature on it is riddled with dichotomous conflicts over (dis)identification and (anti)relationality in theory, lived experiences, and political mobilisation. Dominant discourses tend to overlook intersectional complexities therein, focus on labels over interactions, and reiterate a framing of the LGBTQIA+ as inherently vulnerable. The gaps point to a need for a more open and reparative investigation that creates space for exploring and (re)negotiating the assumed coalition. This study investigated what diverse groups of queer-identified individuals experienced when sharing their lived accounts of "sameness and difference" with others. Twenty-one people each participated in one of four focus groups and in a follow-up interview were invited to reflect on their experience. Decolonial Intersectional Narrative Analysis (Boonzaier, 2019) and a Bakhtinian-dialogical analysis (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011) were used to inspect the "what" and the "how" of the group dialogues, respectively. Participants recounted significant experiences of sameness and difference that both foregrounded and transcended their particular intersectional identities. Moments/relationships of being treated as more an object than a full subject, due to divergence from certain monoglossic gendered/sexed/sexual norms (both intra- and extra-communally), were co-narrated as keys to ongoing queer abjection. Participants expressed that dialoguing in this particular setting was an experience of coming-out-of-isolation, intersubjective learning, and strengthening senses of self and community. Future research and activism are encouraged to invest in accessible open dialogue as a site itself for LGBTQIA+ community-building in South Africa and beyond.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+, queer, dialogism, sameness and difference, critical psychology

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Identity – both individual and collective – is a complex construction and can be conceptualised in many ways. For one, identities are narratives, "stories people tell themselves about who they are (and who they are not)" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). A side note: "stories" are also addressed to particular audiences and written in corresponding registers. This thesis speaks to two audiences: the academics evaluating it and the participants who helped produce it. Considering that knowledge tends to be "housed in an academic ghetto" (hooks, 2002, p. 22) in that it is typically written in jargon, hifalutin vocabulary, and complex sentence structures that make it unintelligible to readers who are not academics (Lafrance & Wigginton, 2019), I realised that, in the interest of being more decolonial with this psychology research, I ought to write this report in more accessible language too. So, I produced a Participants' Summary and "How to Read" Guide (Appendix A). Moreover, since this thesis focuses on "sameness and difference", I offer the academic reader two routes to reading it. There is a standard ("same") route – reading the academic report first and the layman's last – or there is the reverse ("different") route: reading from the participant's perspective. The former follows on from the next paragraph.

Given that identities are narratives, we may then ask: what are the narratives circulating about what it means to be LGBTQIA+/queer[1] in contemporary South Africa? On the one hand, it means to be part of a nation which has pioneered constitutionalising LGBTQIA+ rights. On the other, it means to exist in the disillusioned distance between freedom on paper and freedom in lived reality (Epprecht, 2013; Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015; Shefer, 2004; Tucker, 2009). Homophobic violence still permeates the majority of LGBTQIA+ lives in some form in post-apartheid South Africa (Judge, 2018). Moreover, how

[1] Here, I use "queer" as synonymous with "LGBTQIA+", but I insist that these meaning are not welded to each other. Throughout scholarship (indeed, this paper too), queer is used to signify many things – not just beings of sexual and gender variance, but theoretical and socio-political positions as well (Butler, 1993a; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 2004).

many local queers understand homophobic violence (e.g., what counts as violence, who that tends to befall, who enacts it, where, how often, and for what reasons) draws on and reasserts other narratives, of other identities, that reflect major rifts in the social fabric of the rainbow nation (Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015). It is perhaps unsurprising that division (or divisiveness) still exists along axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality among queer peoples today, for it reflects an inheritance of the deeply established structures of group segregation and regulation born from colonialism and advanced through the apartheid regime (Leap, 2012; Tucker, 2009). Indeed, postcolonial scholars (e.g., Lugones, 2007; 2010; Malherbe et al., 2019) insist that coloniality – the power mechanisms of colonisation – permeates the modern social world atmospherically. A core power mechanism is, according to Lugones (2010), a vertical binary, where the dominating regards/treats the dominated as less-than-human, not occupying full or "proper" subjecthood.

The narrative that this paints, while historically conscious and critically aware, may also be pessimistic (Sedgwick, 2003) or pain-focused (Tuck & Yang, 2014). As Reddy et al. (2018) propose, we need to engage in projects that question the meaning-making within our narratives as sexually and gender-variant people, in order to direct or precondition the development of our freedom. Since Psychology operates as a knowledge production house of human sexuality and gender and has a track record of producing and disseminating pathologies as queer(phobic) "truths" (Alldred & Fox, 2015), we are obliged as researchers to take a more reparative (Sedgwick, 2003) or desire-based (Tuck &Yang, 2014) approach. We should perhaps not frame LGBTQIA+ people through risk, as if precarious by virtue of occupying those sexual and gender positions (Boonzaier, 2018), or provide queerphobic violence as the departure point for making meanings of queer identification. Indeed, if we look to the body of queer theory for some more generative, transformative, even radical potential in telling stories of queerness, its hallmarks seem to offer ways out of that

hierarchical speciation of people which characterises coloniality. These hallmarks include the subversion, rejection, or destabilisation of (1) normative, impermeable, unchanging, essentialising identity categories and (2) arrangement of these categories (or aspects therein) according to dualisms, dichotomies, oppositions, or binaries (Brown & Nash, 2010; Cohen, 1997; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Ghaziani & Brim, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016).

However, it is hard to see these hallmarks exemplified in queer scholarship, for it is riddled with dichotomous conflicts over identification, sociality, and power. There are debates between the identificatory and dis-identificatory functions of "queer", or advocacies for or against using it like other identity categories (see, e.g., Cohen, 1997; Green, 2002; 2010). There are relational theorists (e.g., Butler, 1993a; 1993b) and anti-relational theorists (e.g., Edelman, 2004) debating, respectively, the collectivising or individualising nature of the queer category. There are also conflicts about homonormativity and anti-normativity, or assimilatory versus disruptive queer political movements (see, e.g., Brown, 2009; Oswin, 2005). It appears that none of these camps, in any of these conceptual dichotomies, is superior to the other in absolute terms, yet their debating continues – all the while tending to overlook the needs of more marginal queers (intersectionally speaking) and thus to uphold and invisibilise that vertical binary about which subjectivities tend to "matter". The myopia of these debates may be telling of the narrow position from which a lot of queer scholarship is theorised, for indeed, queer theory is often critiqued as being too White, Western, middle-class, and literary, or disconnected from lived sociality (Brown & Nash, 2010; Cohen, 1997; Riggs, 2010; Muñoz, 1999). Hence, the call for research to investigate intersectionally diverse people of sexual and gender variance in Southern countries (like ours) by including a critique of Northern queer theoretical (pro)positions (Reddy et al., 2018).

When we conceptualise identity in different, non-hegemonic ways, we may find a more productive route out of these binary brawls. Many critical queer, feminist, and

postcolonial scholars (e.g., Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Kiguwa, 2004; Shefer, 2004; Sedgwick, 1990) posit that identity is not a thing (a static noun) but a process (a continuous verb). With this conceptualisation, we can observe how power is not cemented to people's descriptors universally, but to their actions in certain contexts, and thus how it shifts, as their positions with others do, from moment to moment (Oswin, 2005; Shefer, 2004). We can more cogently engage with intersectionality, as different dimensions of queer individuals' multi-sidedness, and the attendant privileges or disadvantages, get more or less salient at certain times (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). It also means we should perhaps regard a binary not as a battle for one side to win, but as a dialectical pair between which identity, as a process, moves. In other words, we should not resist contradiction or simultaneity, but work *with* it, to find what happens productively or unproductively therein (Boellstorff, 2010). These theoretical propositions accord well with trends in African scholarship (see, e.g., Lewis, 2011; Mavuso et al., 2019). They also orient us to meet the call by Ghaziani et al. (2016) and Boellstorff (2010) to research how both "sameness" *and "*difference"[2] characterise queer/LGBTQIA+ life outside of the global North.

To supplement this lens, we should perhaps also make use of a theory that foregrounds a third conceptualisation of identity: that it is a product of interaction (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Muñoz, 2009; Riggs, 2010; Sedgwick, 1990). That theory is Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism, which, simply put, posits that the self or psyche is characterised by a dialogical tension between one's own and myriad other external voices – voices which are encountered, internalised, and externalised through interaction (Aubert & Soler, 2007; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011). Dialogism also holds that this socially mediated self can think, experience, and perform contrary tasks simultaneously (Salgado & Clegg, 2011;

[2] In this research, "sameness and difference" are relative terms of phenomenological relationality, referring to broad, (inter)subjective feelings of relating and not relating, which can co-occur. They are not synonymous with "same or different", which are mutually exclusive options in an observable or measurable categorical dichotomy.

Shotter & Billig, 1998), and is therefore quite agreeable to investigating the dialectics of "sameness and difference" between "queer"-identified individuals. Moreover, a dialogical investigation suggests that we bring individuals together to communicate with each other – a call which is also lodged by queer and postcolonial scholars (e.g., Epprecht, 2013; Lugones, 2010) who consider dialogue and story-telling essential for thinking "beyond the logic of coloniality" (Malherbe et al., 2019, p. 83). Thus, through a dialogical encounter, queer- and/or LGBTQIA+-identified South Africans could together explore their narratives, processes, and relations of being, and in doing so, create the potential for more generative, diverse, and non-oppositional meanings about sexual and gender variance to emerge.

This study therefore aimed to explore how diversely composed groups of queer-identified individuals narrated their identifications, as well as their accounts of experiencing sameness and difference with others (queer or non-queer). It focused not only on what content got generated in these discussions, but how that content was co-constructed between individuals in interaction. Beyond aiming to add to existing knowledge about sexual and gender diversity both locally and globally, this study also sought to inspect the utility in the sharing of these intersubjective experiences – such as what socially cohesive dynamics, or political potentials to combat queerphobic violence, they promoted or precluded. The following literature review elucidates all the threads weaved through this introduction in greater depth. After an explication of the theoretical frameworks from queer theory and dialogism that ground this study, the methodological choices for this investigation are explained.

Literature Review

When it comes to LGBTQIA+ rights, contemporary South Africa is positioned as one of the most liberal nations on the globe (Epprecht, 2013; Tucker, 2009). As the first country to constitutionally outlaw homophobic discrimination (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2020),

and the fastest to move from the criminalisation of queerness to the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Tucker, 2009), South Africa is lauded the world over for its flagship Bill of Rights regarding LGBTQIA+ lives (Matebeni, 2015). As a result of this international image, many LGBTQIA+ Africans leave their draconianly homophobic states to find home in this so-crafted idyllic rainbow nation (Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2020). Yet, disillusionment greets, for the reality of South African LGBTQIA+ life is far removed from the vision enshrined in its constitution (Epprecht, 2013; Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015; Shefer, 2004; Tucker, 2009).

LGBTQIA+ South Africa: Ongoing Historical Problems

Blackwashing Homophobia

Queerphobic violence still pervades the lives of most LGBTQIA+ South Africans (Judge, 2018). It is a multifarious violence, spanning physical assault, rape, and murder (Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015), hate speech and demonisation (Epprecht, 2013; Moagi & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2020), community and familial ostracism (Msibi, 2012), and institutional exclusion and neglect (Hames, 2018; Müller, 2013). Indeed, South Africa continues to witness "some of the most horrific reported acts of homophobic violence" globally (Epprecht, 2013, p. 33). The psychological effects of this violent queerphobic atmosphere are marked, for it is consistently reported that LGBTQIA+ adults are at significantly greater risk of developing severe mental illness and committing suicide – a risk, furthermore, that directly correlates with exposure to queerphobia (Kidd et al., 2016). Unhelpfully, the physical and psychological health services available to LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to be inadequate if not overtly stigmatising (Kidd et al., 2016; Müller, 2013). It is thus a broad and pervasive atmosphere of anti-LGBTQIA+ animosity that precludes the realisation of constitutional aspirations. This reinforces observations – of LGBTQIA+ life in other parts of the world (e.g., Ghaziani et al., 2016; Riggs, 2010), and of

"other" social issues in South Africa (e.g., women's equality; Kiguwa, 2004) – that legal reforms by themselves cannot be relied upon to accomplish the healing of social malaises.

It also highlights the first in a long series of contradictions for the LGBTQIA+: that "both *murder* and *marriage* signpost queer life in post-apartheid South Africa" (Judge, 2018, p. 14, emphasis in original). How might it be, then, that the global eye still holds this nation as one of *the* queer-friendly exemplars, considering the omnipresent and not-unreported anti-LGBTQIA+ hostilities? The split, it appears, is upheld by intersectional divisions to do with race and class, as well as gender (Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015; Rink, 2013; Tucker, 2009). Empirically, violence is disproportionately experienced by Black LGBTQIA+ South Africans (Judge, 2018; Livermon, 2012), and for Black lesbians in particular, experiences of physical and/or sexual homophobic violence are almost expected as part and parcel of life (Matebeni, 2015). Discursively, the perpetration of homophobic violence is predominantly attached to Black (cis-hetero) men, particularly of a low socio-economic status (Judge, 2018).

The problematics of this commonly circulated "blackwashing homophobia" discourse (Judge, 2018) are numerous. For one, it racialises the cleavage between marriage and murder, in that Whiteness is constructed as the space of queer progress and safety while Blackness is reiterated as the realm of queer danger and precarity (Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015). To render poor, Black South Africans as both the source and target of homophobic violence is to construct Black and impoverished bodies as essentially "the problem", instead of the poisonous and unequal conditions in which many such bodies have been forced to live (Boonzaier, 2018; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2019). A corollary: to position the (affluent) White queer body as outside the realm of injurability, complicity, and responsibility is to construct its liveability as the barometer of human rights-based progress – and is to value Whiteness, Western-ness, and neoliberalism as assimilatory ideals (Livermon, 2012; Judge, 2018; Rao, 2020). In short, the discourse that blackwashes homophobia perpetuates colonial-

and apartheid-legacy racial and economic oppression. Moreover, by separating LGBTQIA+ reality across essentialised race and class identities, the discourse forecloses any possibilities of real solidarity among all members of the umbrella acronym (Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015). Further: by defining violence through spectacle (i.e., news of the most lethal and horrific acts reported in seeming isolation of each other), it submerges – and therefore normalises – the quotidian manifestations of more micro-aggressive derogation and rejection experienced by all LGBTQIA+ people (Judge, 2018).

This picture is painted by the brush of coloniality – a term that refers to the perpetuation of power patterns (social, economic, political, ontological, and epistemological) established during the project of colonisation (Malherbe et al., 2019; Lugones, 2007; 2010; Poulain, 2019; Ratele, 2020). The colonial project sought/seeks to render the conditions and meanings it has engineered as natural, timeless, invisible, and inescapable – part of the very fabric of life itself (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Hence, according to the above discourse, Blackness *continues* to be the issue – as if by its very essence. Hence, as another example, the vitriolic (and universalising) statements of many contemporary African leaders that "homosexuality is un-African", despite historical records that sexual and gender diversity were accepted (albeit not uniformly) in many of these societies prior to colonisation – and were heavily repressed thereafter when scripts of "natural" kin-creation (i.e., heterosexual nuclear family-making) were deployed to congeal the new-born post-colony (Epprecht, 2013; Lewis, 2011; Rao, 2020). Perpetuating the image of "homophobic Africa" premises continued Western interference to "save the Africans from themselves", as with colonisation – except now democratic modernity is characterised by the (lip-serviced) acceptance of homosexuality (Butler, 2010; Epprecht, 2013; Judge, 2018). At the same time, an amnesia persists that the punishing/erasing of the gendered and sexual relations that did not fit the then-emerging European epistemes was as much at the heart of colonialism as

racialised enslavement (Lugones, 2007; Ratele, 2020). This historical trajectory of increasingly homophobic Africa therefore illustrates a further colonial mechanism: the turning of the colonised against themselves, through the conditioned internalisation of colonial epistemes (Ratele, 2020; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2016). One particular episteme operates at the very core of coloniality, powerful because it enables all forms of domination (Lugones, 2010). Indeed, this episteme rings in the voices of homophobia across Africa today (Olaoluwa, 2018): evaluating difference according to "a hierarchical dichotomy between human and non-human" (Lugones, 2010, p. 743).

Discursive Dominance and Queer Dehumanisation

The dominant picture of South African queerphobic violence rests upon this hierarchical dichotomy. Racially, the colonial construction of the Black body as a thingified subject (Césaire, 1972; Ratele, 2020) or an object more than a human, may explain Black queer bodies seemingly not being accounted for when South Africa's LGBTQIA+ liveability continues to be praised. Dehumanisation also befalls the blackwashed perpetrators of this violence, who are often depicted as monstrous, and therefore not-quite-human (Judge, 2018; Ratele, 2020). This continued Othering of Black bodies is responsible for ongoing historical splits in Black and White LGBTQIA+ movements. They have gone from apartheid-era divides – between The Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) and the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), the former organisation advocating only for White gay liveability while the latter, headed by Simon Nkoli, led an intersectional fight – to post-apartheid's constituent demographics of Johannesburg Pride and Soweto Pride being, respectively, predominantly White and Black (Matebeni, 2015). In Cape Town – the city that has come to symbolise Africa's queer capital (Tucker, 2009) – the popular representation of the queer (or rather, gay) terrain is De Waterkant, a mainly White, affluent neighbourhood; meanwhile, tourists will find no direction to locales of more (racially and economically)

diverse queer communities via the Pink Map city guide (Rink, 2013). Even direct confrontation of these exclusions is resisted, for at Johannesburg Pride in 2012, the voices of Black lesbians protesting their continued homophobic victimisation were ignored by the (mainly White) marchers (Matebeni, 2015). It was as if the former's issues did not concern the latter, despite the hierarchical dichotomy working on all queer bodies seemingly regardless of race. As Butler (2002) explains, the queer stands outside of those (colonial) cis-heteronormative laws of gender and sexuality that gatekeep human recognisability, and so once detected as being queer, an unintelligible "thing", one becomes a target of violence.

Butler's (2002) tracing of this "matrix of intelligibility" (p. 24) in *Gender Trouble* and Foucault's (1978) accounting of the construction of the hetero/homo sexual species in *The History of Sexuality* illustrate a crucial point about sexual and gendered subjectivities: they are moulded by discursive practices. To understand oneself and one's social position (as well as another's) is to make recourse to single identifying terms, to narratives of experiences, and to systems of meaning (i.e., discourses) that provide interpretation of those terms and stories (Butler, 1993a; 1993b; 2002; Foucault, 1978; Jones, 2015; Parker, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Zosky & Alberts, 2016). These discourses are not socio-politically neutral; they are distilled through historical and institutional developments, so that to identify persons (to render them legible through available semantic webs) is also always to locate them along existing power spectra (Butler, 1993a; Foucault, 1978; 1981). Hence, in investigating understandings of South African queerphobic violence, Judge (2018) found that dominant (hegemonically aligned) discourses, firstly, blackwashed homophobia, and secondly, constructed queerphobic violence as integral to queer subjectivity. In other words, this dominant system of meanings makes it compulsory for the LGBTQIA+ to consider how to be a subject alongside the omnipresent threat of queerphobic violence – as if by virtue of being queer, one is inviting queerphobic violence (Butler, 2002; Foucault, 1978; Finlay, 2017; Judge, 2018). Because of

this, Judge (2018, p. 77) asks, "what of [queer] subjectivity is foreclosed if it is only ever imagined in subjection to fear?".

Building on this, I ask: what meanings of queer subjectivity would emerge if a researcher did not explicitly invite participants to account for their relation to violence and extrapolate for those meanings from there? Understandings of homophobic violence do indeed need investigation, but framing marginalised subjectivities through pain, precarity, risk, and trauma is potentially complicitous with the hegemonic (Boonzaier, 2018; 2019) and at the very least limiting of the complexities of what can be experienced in the fullness of life (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Hence, critical inquirers advocate for a more reparative (Sedgwick, 2003) or desire-based (Tuck & Yang, 2014) framework that does not ignore or deny the realities of violent experiences, but that invites space for the generative, accretive, and expansive alongside that pain.

As a discipline that creates, disseminates, and gatekeeps discourses on human truths – and which has a history of essentialising, pathologising, and vulnerabilising LGBTQIA+ individuals and promoting myriad hegemonic interests (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Fine & Addelston, 1996; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Kiguwa, 2004; Shefer, 2004) – psychology is obliged to take such a reparative approach to queer research. How we frame questions provides departure points for the discourses that emerge and submerge in the research encounter (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Judge, 2018; Warner, 2004). This is crucial to consider not only because discourse is central to the maintenance of oppressive systems of power, but because it is also essential for their dismantlement (Butler, 1993a; 1993b; 2006; Foucault, 1978; 1981; Muñoz, 1999). Foucault (1981) describes discourse as polyvalent, capable of disrupting power as much as reinforcing it – yet certain conditions and contexts of communication will enable or disable particular power operations (Muñoz, 1999). If we do not foreground homophobic violence in exploring the meaning-making of queer experiences,

we may therefore create a space that at least does not prime or privilege a discourse that operates to anchor queer subjectivity to pain, oppression, and non-belonging. It would also remain to be seen if the same divisiveness in the blackwashing discourse would emerge to preclude coalitional possibilities based on the crossing of colonially imposed categorical identities and their dichotomous (B/black and W/white) arrangement. Such an impulse, as it happens, is at the heart of a vast and fraught body of scholarship called queer theory.

Meaning Duels in Relations with "Queer" Identification

To Identify or Not to Identify? Double Troubles in the Politics of Identity.

Queer theory is a broad and heterogeneous web of intellectual engagements with sexuality, gender, and the problematisation of related identity constructs as they are normatively (re)produced (Brown & Nash, 2010; Nicolazzo, 2016; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015; Sedgwick, 1994). The latter characteristic makes this wide body of literature necessary to delve into, for it implies we may be able to retrieve meanings of queerness of a more liberatory kind than those explored above that are propagated by the hegemon. If rejecting historically unchanging, impermeable identity categories and their dualistic arrangements are indeed hallmarks of queer theory (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019), then it may contain answers for transforming colonial discourses that blackwash homophobia and that uphold both conceptual and structural impasses to wider solidarity-formations among LGBTQIA+ South Africans. However, these answers are not easy to find, for the discourses of queer theory are characterised by multiple internal conflicts.

To begin with, the term "queer" itself, as an identity marker, appears axiomatic of these hallmarks. It exemplifies the problems of relying on categorical terms for identification, for "queer" is used in multiple and contradictory ways. It is used negatively and positively, as an enduring homophobic slur (Butler, 1993a; Levy & Johnson, 2012) and an empowering in-group reclamation thereof (Zosky & Alberts, 2016). It is also used inclusively – as a referent

for general sexual and gender variance outside of the cis-hetero-norm, and thus as a synonym both for the "LGBTQIA+" umbrella term and for any one particular identity within the acronym (Gamson, 2000; Zosky & Alberts, 2016) – and exclusively, referring, firstly, to the "Q" within the acronym in particular, for those individuals who do not experience their identifications captured well enough by any of the other categories (Levy & Johnson, 2012; Pfeffer, 2014). Secondly, "queer" is clarified by some (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016) as belonging *only* to the realm of non-normative sexualities (inter alia: bi-, pan-, and predominantly, homosexuality), while non-normative genders are better described by terms like "trans", "non-binary", and (with a significant prefix) "genderqueer" (Finlay, 2017; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Critical theorists (e.g., Alldred & Fox, 2015; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015) explain that this diversity of significations indicates not that the contradictions need to (or even can) be resolved, but rather that the term is inherently open and unbounded. In fact, "queer" also performs a significatory function antithetical to the ones listed above. It is often deployed to reject the dominant system of identity classification entirely, on the basis that labels cannot neatly, singularly, or consistently capture the complexities of sexual and gendered subjectivity (Butler, 1991; 1993a; 2002; Cohen, 1997; Gamson, 2000; 2003; Higginbotham, 2018; Jones, 2015; Judge, 2018; McDonald, 2013; Muñoz, 1999; 2009). "Queer" therefore operates both as a term of (multiple) identification and as one of disidentification – "an identity founded on the negation of identity" (Green, 2010, p. 326).

Though this dis-identificatory position appears to offer useful resistance to the coloniality of human categorisation, that usefulness is in fact doubted by intersectional critiques. The main limitation in discarding identities is the unspoken implication of doing so from positions of social privilege (Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 2009; Riggs, 2010; Taylor, 2010; Tucker, 2009). Identity-based communal bonds are important for some people's survival – particularly those who share multiple histories of oppression and a reality of continued

material, political, and symbolic instability (Baitinger, 2019; Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 2009). To transgress one's identity categories and the social ties that these entail, without the risk of disintegrating one's sense of wholeness, one's community belongings, and the material resources available therein, appears to be a privileged move available perhaps only to those who occupy middle-class, White, Western positionings – positionings which are relatively more socially, politically, and economically stable to begin with (Baitinger, 2019; Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 2009; Riggs, 2010; Tucker, 2009). Moreover, calling for the elimination of identity categories can ignore the political necessity of their use. Sexed and gendered classifications shape and are shaped by institutions and social structures, and so without pointing to a clearly bounded constituency on the lower beam of the hierarchical dichotomy, no political resources and reformations can be conferred onto that constituency (Gamson, 2000; 2003; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Green, 2002). Indeed, obtaining queer legal rights both abroad (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012) and at home (Judge, 2018; Livermon, 2012) has relied, by its very nature, on the politics of mobilising an "LGBTQIA+" collective identity.

At the same time, however, the camp of queer (as) identification, or an LGBTQIA+ identity politics, also displays significant shortcomings. It is widely noted that identity categories are reductive, essentialising, and reifying, as they aggregate complex, changing, and unique individuals under a narrowly defined banner that is ever frozen, naturalised, and strengthened in opposition to other banners (Adams & Jones, 2011; Alldred & Fox, 2015; Gamson, 2003; Ghaziani & Brim, 2019; Riggs, 2010). Fixing subjectivities to unchangeable essences renders their relations to each other as a natural order, thereby legitimising the status quo (Kiguwa, 2004). Moreover, identity politics tends to focus on power imbalances *between* categories ("queer" vs "non-queer") to the detriment of those *within* them (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012), hence an un(der)-acknowledged predominance of one sub-group's (e.g., White queers') perspectives over another's (Black queers'). Very similar to

those shortcomings articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in both the women's and Black Americans' empowerment movements – which failed to account for the particular lived grievances produced by the inseparable combination of "Black" *and "*woman" (Luna, 2016) – LGBTQIA+ identity politics tends to fall into intersectional blindness (Cohen, 1997; Riggs, 2010). Even without looking at those social dimensions "outside of" gendered and sexual categories, the umbrella acronym hides power imbalances between its very letters (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015). Homosexuality tends to wear the face of the community (Cohen, 1997; Nicolazzo, 2016), while bisexuality tends to be invalidated and erased (Callis, 2014), intersex bodies continue to be problematised (Roen, 2019), and people of gender diversity, like trans individuals, remain under-represented – or in the case of non-binary people, invisibilised from the acronym itself (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). For these reasons, scholars declare that the all-inclusive rainbow concept of a singular, solidified LGBTQIA+ community is, in reality, a myth (Conte, 2018; Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015; Poulain, 2019), or in Duong's (2012, p. 378) words, "a fragile political achievement, rather than historically or descriptively given".

It thus appears that there is no superior camp, for both identity politics and dis-identity politics carry limitations for productive engagement with the most marginal queer subjects. However, not all duels in queer theorisation display such an impasse. In a related debate between relational (e.g., Butler, 2010; Muñoz, 1999; 2009) and anti-relational theorists (e.g., Edelman, 2004), the former seem to trump the latter. Anti-relational theorists contend that queer desire is at its core anarchic to the social order, and resultantly, that queer politics must be antisocial, working to upend systems and norms by which people (are made to) congeal through assigned identities, moving instead towards a radical individualism (Baitinger, 2019; Edelman, 2004). Its critics (e.g., Butler, 2010; Muñoz, 2009) point out that this rebellious, anti-social queer seems to operate from a place of confidence that their life

would remain liveable if all socio-political structures and the relations they enable were to collapse. Thus, this anti-relational stance seems mostly accommodating of White, male, materially resourced positions (Baitinger, 2019; Muñoz, 2009). That stance also holds all norms as everywhere and always confining and excluding, instead of also in some places and times offering community and stability in an otherwise precarious world (Butler, 2004; Rao, 2020; Warner, 1999). Anti-relationism is therefore criticised not only for being too privileged, but for being too rhetorical, fanciful, myopic, and detached from lived political reality (Baitinger, 2019; Muñoz, 2009). Relationism, on the other hand, works with an understanding that those categories that discursively speciate people cannot be done away with, however problematic, but also that the relations they prescribe to enable or disable should be approached with an impulse for communitarian renegotiation (Baitinger, 2019; Muñoz, 2009; Riggs, 2010). Yet, Muñoz (2009) cautions against relationists romanticising community in absolute terms, like the anti-relationists idealise the pole of individuality. Indeed, within and between many queer groupings, tensions persist in constructing duels – fights between apparent binary positions.

"Right and Wrong" Kinds of Queerness: Interminable Quarrels

That the duels exist is troubling, but also unavoidable, for queer theory's cornerstone commitment (i.e., its continual rejection of dichotomous classifications in sexed, gendered, and sexual humanity) exists precisely because these reductive arrangements have an interpellatory monopoly on the world (Ghaziani et al., 2016; Ghaziani & Brim, 2019). Queer theory's primary antagonist is the cis-heteronormative conceptual monolith that conflates sex and gender ("male *is* man; female *is* woman"), reduces them to only two – and thus opposite – options ("*either* man *or* woman"), and bases human sexuality on, above all else, the dominant alloerotic attraction to one of those two poles ("heterosexual *or* homosexual") – all the while threading a social hierarchy through these sexed/gendered/sexual binaries (Berlant

& Warner, 1998; Foucault, 1978; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Rao, 2020; Sedgwick, 1994). As Butler (1993b), a seminal queer theorist, explains: these gendered and sexual categories do not represent the "essence" of actual human subjectivities; they are conceptual ideals against which people (are taught to) regulate their own (and others') behaviours – ideals which, by definition, cannot ever be completely embodied in lived reality because, as previously mentioned, human subjectivity is not as concretisable as these homogenising categories would have it. So, queer theory's rejection of (the interpellatory trap of) these categories and their binary arrangement is *also* useful for those who *do* have a felt alliance, however strong, to the realm of "cis-heterosexual". Yet, as Cohen (1997) notes, the way LGBTQIA+ identity politics has operated – presuming shared political commitment by virtue of shared identity – has actually, in effect, reinforced the divide between "heterosexual and everything 'queer'" (p. 438), thereby over-estimating their differences (Green, 2002).

One overlooked issue in the cracks of the binary of "cis-hetero/queer" is the erasure and invalidation of those who occupy the borderlands (Callis, 2014; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016). As Callis (2014) found, those whose sexualities do not operate well in the hetero-homo binary – like bisexual individuals – face double rejection: regarded as simultaneously too straight for queer circles and too queer for straight ones. Matsuno and Budge (2017) and Nicolazzo (2016) have also documented this experience of liminality among those with non-binary genders: they are at once trans enough not to belong to the cisgender population, yet not trans enough to find home within binary trans communities. Not only do these binaries cast out those who do not fit into either of their poles, but they also imply unproblematised norms of queer belonging and evaluation: that there can be "right" and "wrong" kinds of queers (Judge, 2018; Oswin, 2005). This queer-enough question is levelled at many dimensions of LGBTQIA+ life – for example, in the binary between "innate" and "latent" queers. Sedgwick (1994), another seminal queer theorist, dismisses the

hierarchical evaluation that tends to occur, one way or another, between those whose experience of gay identity has been "most immutable and immemorial" (p. 26) compared to those whose reckoning "has seemed to themselves to come relatively late" (p. 27).

Another dimension fraught with right-or-wrong queerness is that of appearance – the very first interactional sign by which one's identification is (un)announced and/or (mis)read (Hutson, 2010; Pfeffer, 2014). Presentations are often evaluated intra-communally according to cis-heteronormative aesthetic ideals and logics. In gay male spaces, the popularly desirable form is masculine, muscled or lean, able-bodied, affluently adorned, and often White; meanwhile, gays who do not meet these criteria often form the bodily unwanted (Conte, 2018; Green, 2002; Hutson, 2010; Pfeffer, 2014). Many lesbians have experienced being regarded as "too butch" or "not butch enough" (Hutson, 2010; Pfeffer, 2014) – the latter signifying a "failure" to code sufficiently as queer (Halberstam, 2011). Similarly, Nicolazzo (2016) documents how "passing" as one's gender, which often entails undergoing biomedical operations to move across the binary, is used as a metric for trans "authenticity" – not just by cisgender society, but within certain trans communities too. When queers judge one another's grounds to their claims of queer identification, it resembles the cis-hetero hegemon's long-documented tendency to remove authority over the definition of queerness from queer subjects themselves (Foucault; 1978; Sedgwick, 1990; 1994). Thus, in the above ways, participation in a duel – such as internally debating "authentic versus inauthentic" queerness – allows the power structure behind that duel, the hierarchical binary based on erroneous conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality, to perpetuate inescapably.

What about the dichotomy between power-aligned versus power-resistant queers? A potent theme running through the literature and underlying the tensions identified so far is the political distinction between homonormative and anti-normative queerness, or as Duong (2012, p. 376) puts it, "the gap between being gay and claiming queerness".

Homonormativity describes a homosexuality that assimilates into, and does not disrupt, heteronormative logics and structures (Brown, 2009; Conte, 2018; Duggan, 2002; Judge, 2018; Oswin, 2005). It produces "good gays" (Warner, 1999, p. 131) who no longer resort to resistance made public, who instead have been conferred access to the same privacy and normalcy of heterosexual life that they were long denied: marriage, consumer cultures, and a haveable future of white picket fences (Duggan, 2002; Judge, 2018; Taylor, 2010). Homonormativity is thus accommodating – even promoting – of the values of neoliberalism, middle-classness, and Whiteness (Duggan, 2002; Duong, 2012; Taylor, 2010) and is seemingly to blame for South Africa's classed and raced divides that Judge (2018) found in the discourses of understanding homophobia and that Matebeni (2015) documented in the ongoing histories of Pride movements and schisms therebetween.

Yet, as some scholars (Brown, 2009; Brown & Nash, 2010; Oswin, 2005) warn, there is a danger in trying to separate complicit and non-complicit queers. It can essentialise those who occupy White (male) middle-class positions, and like a blackwashing homophobia discourse, can serve to discard/discredit queerphobia (however less lethal) experienced by people in these positions (Brown & Nash, 2010). Moreover, as Rao (2020 p. 30) crucially puts it, "[h]ow can we do justice to queer desires for normativity as a means toward a liveable life without always and everywhere levelling the charge of homonormativity?" As cautioned before, certain norms can enable breathability, so for some of the most marginal queer communities fighting for salvation from fatal queerphobia, reaching upwards to a realm of relatively more mobility, material safety, and recognised subjecthood – that is, the middle-classes – often seems far more achievable and realistic than a radical, insurrectional queer project of dismantling entire structures of society (Taylor, 2010). It would therefore hardly be an exercise in justice to charge these communities with "bad queerness" for not being anti-normative enough. The binary between homo- and anti-normativity, or complicit versus non-

complicit queerness, appears to be a conceptual trap like all others, then. It is as Sedgwick (1990) cogently noted: there is no definitive, arguable, exhumable rightness to one side of these binaries over another – and so, such an exercise is doomed. The real problem, she contends, is that "our very resources for asking questions about sexuality" are so profoundly constituted by these binary impasses; by "the persistence of the deadlock itself" (p. 91).

Surfing Moebius Strips and Repairing Simultaneities

Intersectionality and Solidarity across Identity Politics

A major flaw with the last binary – between complicit and non-complicit queers – is a misunderstanding of the nature of intersectionality. Any one individual always occupies multiple social locations at once – of gender, sexuality, race, class, and illimitable others signified embarrassingly by the "et cetera" bookending such lists (Butler, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 2006) – and such an individual's relationship to power cannot be calculated factorially or deterministically by simple arithmetic of the privilege or marginal status assigned to separate labels (Rao, 2020; Riggs, 2010; Wiley & Bikmen; 2012). The intersection of our various identities is a highly complex shape (Muñoz, 1999; Riggs, 2010; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). It looks less like a literal crossroads at which separable axes (e.g., sexuality and race) come together for a brief moment, and more like a Moebius strip, where the axes are inseparable and blend back and forth into each other metonymically – looking distinct at one angle and part of the same singular structure at another (Rao, 2020; Riggs, 2010). This complex shape is both inside us and outside us, both personal and political (Yuval-Davis, 2016), for the various structural systems of domination – heteronormativity, patriarchy, White supremacy, capitalism – are themselves constitutive of each other, each built by and having built one another during the colonial conquest (Lugones, 2010). So, to ask "are you a complicit or non-complicit queer?" is to work with a fundamentally flawed question because, firstly, it looks at only the intrapersonal dimension of the problem, addressing the symptom (internalisation)

and not the disease (institutionalisation; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Secondly, it assumes privilege and marginalisation are separable in absolute terms, and that the contradictory presence of both is intolerable.

Yet, postcolonial feminist critique maintains that it is myopic to ignore, invalidate, or condemn contradictions both in selfhood and individual relationships to power (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Lugones; 2010; Mavuso et al., 2019; Shefer, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2016). Because of the complexity of the Moebius strip, the same person can experience privilege and marginalisation, and can act in power-aligned and power-resistant ways (Brown, 2009; Cohen, 1997; Oswin, 2005; Rao, 2020; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). We are all beings who live in a "fractured locus", in which we can perform "both the enactment of the coloniality of gender and the resistant response from a subaltern sense of self" (Lugones, 2010, p. 754). We must therefore get more comfortable with contradiction, so that we can more soberly witness inconsistencies between our perceptions of who we are and how we actually think, feel, and behave moment to moment (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018), and from there tease out what is productive and unproductive about these paradoxes (Yuval-Davis, 2016). Witness, for example, how power operates contradictorily through identity categories. It is true that we carry *predispositions* to experiences of privilege and marginality by virtue of our social identities (Riggs, 2010), but these are not *fates* about how we operate in power matrices. Through uninterrogated self-hatred, queers can do heteronormativity, women can do patriarchy, and Black people can do racism; while with an ongoing, critical self- and social consciousness, straight people can do queer allyship, men can do feminism, and White people can do anti-racism (Kiguwa, 2004; Smith, 2021). The marginal can enact oppression (an unproductive contradiction), and the privileged can enact resistance (a productive one). Thus, this intersectional analysis reveals that "one true representation" of an identity category and its power relationship does not exist. Subjectivity is not a static thing of simple or even

complex classification; it is an ongoing, shifting, relational process of experience (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Luna, 2016; Mavuso et al., 2019; Shefer, 2004).

This intersectional perspective also creates space for solidarities to form on the basis not of shared identity, but of shared relations to dominant power (Cohen, 1997; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Higginbotham, 2018; Reddy et al., 2018; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). Cohen (1997) illustrated the productiveness of this queer political promise by tracing the coalitional mobilisation of all Americans excluded by policies that only benefited White middle-class heterosexuality. Access to HIV-related health care was denied to, and then successfully fought for by, not only LGBTQIA+ people but also heterosexual people of colour and formerly incarcerated individuals of any sexual orientation and race. By articulating a common material oppression across identities, these advocates were able to form a movement against the systems of normative sexuality that made resistance not only, or even necessarily, an LGBTQIA+ concern (Cohen, 1997). This common grievance fostered a supraordinate identification with one another, and thereby prevented competitive victimhood (i.e., internal conflict about which minoritised category is “worse off”) from derailing the formation and deployment of a large, and therefore effective, body of resistors (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). On the African continent, there are indeed beyond-LGBTQIA+ articulations of the need for erotic justice – which are emphasising the wide economic or epidemiological costs of anti-queer atmospheres (Epprecht, 2013).

In South Africa, however, while Judge (2018) found expression of not-only-LGBTQIA+ resistance, that expression nonetheless seemed to perpetuate binary identification divides. According to one participant, homophobic violence predominating in Black, lower-class communities is, like other kinds of violence therein, a symptom of relentless structural neglect. This productively calls on not-just-LGBTQIA+ people to combat (multiple intersections of) violence. However, its supraordinate grievance seems only

common to Black and/or lower-class individuals, and unexperienced by White and/or upper-class ones – queer or not. Of course, these wider material inequalities do need addressing, but that this split was still articulated from a resistant position gives further reason not to adopt a vulnerabilising frame. Even when seeking expressions of resistance in the research encounter, these may be influenced by the divisiveness of dominant discourses.

Deploying Dialectics from the Borderlands of "Us and Them"

To open up the frame – to allow for a wider spectrum of feelings, and thus political potentials – about queer selfhoods, communities, and relations across identification – we may need to ask about the phenomenology of distinguishing and equating more generally. Ghaziani et al. (2016) trace the history of American LGBTQIA+ movements' tactics of deploying both their sameness to and difference from cis-hetero society. At times stressing queer people's common humanity to the straight majority, and at others asserting their apologetic uniqueness from it, both tactics have been successful, whether respectively garnering queers the same civil rights as others or protecting queer countercultural niches from institutional quashing. It is not the case that either the difference or sameness stance is (or must be decided to be) objectively superior to the other; rather, that different political stakes and threats at certain moments will call for different leanings along this spectrum (Ghaziani et al., 2016). The two therefore cannot be separated, not only as political strategies, but as phenomena – or rather, a vector phenomenon – through which we see ourselves with others. Indeed, identities are dynamically produced through the co-occurrence of sameness and difference (Tucker, 2009).

While it is more productive to appreciate this co-occurrence, as opposed to trying to remove one side of the coin, we must watch how it operates, for it can still produce harmful meanings (Fine & Addelston, 1996). For example, the racial stereotype takes all those who are "different" and, via the hierarchical dichotomy, lumps them into homogeneity, into being

so "same as" each other that there is no room for individualities (Riggs, 2010). Sameness-and-difference can also construct groupings positively, albeit through an added layer of complexity. Looking at coalition-building among women-of-colour, Luna (2016) noted how these women deployed both a "same-difference" strategy (comparing themselves to all those who are not women-of-colour) and a "difference-in-sameness" one (paying intersectional attention to internal diversity among them). The same-difference strategy seems to resemble Cohen's (1997) productive solidarity-across-identity potential, yet it runs the risk of overlooking/silencing/reinforcing important power imbalances within that coalition. The difference-in-sameness strategy aims to correct/avoid those imbalances, but it can become so immobilised by anxieties about exclusion that no political action occurs. Luna (2016) recognised that both logics are essential to effective mobilisation, and must be kept in continual balance, with the collective negotiating "which similarities and differences will 'matter', how they will be defined, by whom, and under what conditions" (p. 787).

Appreciating sameness-and-difference in this way, we can see, finally, the grounded grip of the hallmarks of queer theory. To queer identities is to *destabilise* (*neither reify nor discard)* them; to appreciate that they are tools without which we cannot move, but which we must continually protest to ensure we leave no one behind (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Butler, 1993a; Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 1999; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015; Pfeffer, 2014; Riggs, 2010). To queer binaries is not to participate in their apparent choice; it is instead to surf them as *dialectical units* (Boellstorff, 2010; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Muñoz, 2009; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015), to treat them as mutually defining pairs that cannot be hybridised into one (Lugones, 2010; Sedgwick, 1990). Any attempt to synthesise them will hide the fractured locus of colonial interpellation (Lugones, 2010) and erode the third space in which subjectivity resides, simultaneously identifying *and* counter-identifying (Gamson, 2003; Muñoz, 1999; Sedgwick, 1990); "being *and* becoming, belonging *and* longing to belong" (Yuval-Davis,

2006, p. 202, emphasis added); operating consciously *as well as* unconsciously (Finlay, 2017; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). For Muñoz (2009), the real generative promise of this idea is a radical negativity insisting that those qualities dominantly constructed as opposites are, in fact, non-oppositional. "Surfing binarisms" (Boellstorff, 2010, p. 221) allows us to appreciate how discourses affect subjectivities not only as regimes of disciplinary order but also as menus from which to agentically fashion the self (Green, 2010). It renders not just visible but understandable the concomitant complicity and resistance of the queer self, and orients our eyes to those non-idealistic, non-extreme, and more relatable moments where there is neither "wholesale rearticulation" nor "spectacular disruption" of power (Green, 2002, p. 539). Moreover, it shines light on the fulcrum space that both helps to form and to cross identities: the gendered/sexual borderlands – which is not just a realm in which non-binary genders and sexualities "reside", but a site whose boundaries people on all sides work to reinforce, move, traverse, gatekeep, and/or dismantle (Callis, 2014).

Pushing these boundaries – of the meanings of sexual and gender identities, of the significances of sameness and difference to others – is what queer world-making is all about (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Duong, 2012; Muñoz, 2009; Wagaman et al., 2018). *Queer world-making* is that reparative impulse to envision alternative realms, plot horizons of transformation, or reach for utopic futurities where the social world is no longer chained to hegemonic architectures (Detamore, 2010; Duong, 2012; Judge, 2018; Muñoz, 2009; Wagaman et al., 2018). Part of that impulse looks at the atmospheric nature of complicity and flips it on its head, revealing our fundamental interdependence (Brown, 2009). Interdependence recognises that the self cannot be separated from the social; indeed, that we as individuals and groups are reliant on and responsible to one another for who we are; that both subjectivities and the social world are outcomes of relational processes (Brown, 2009; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Muñoz, 2009; Riggs, 2010).

This blurring of the self and the social – or rather, the spotlighting of the borderlands therebetween – disrupts mainstream psychological theories of identity (Kiguwa, 2004), hegemonic understandings that split the personal from the political (Yuval-Davis, 2016) and Western epistemological supremacy, for it echoes traditional African ideas of (the sense of) self as always communally bound (Mkhize, 2004). It thus has the potential to trouble what needs troubling in this thread of queer divisiveness – but how might we encourage such a recognition? Queer scholarship has been critiqued as not sufficiently accounting for the interactional, or the contribution of the social to the self (Brown & Nash, 2010; Francis, 2012; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Green, 2002). At the same time, what is called for as a necessary means to erotic justice (Epprecht, 2013) and to cultivate enduring resistance to coloniality (Lugones, 2010) is having inclusive conversations. Dialogue, says Lugones (2010), is "where we need to *dwell*, learning about each other" (p. 753, emphasis in original). We thus emerge from queer theory and turn to another school of thought that foregrounds the interactional, that blends self and social, and that complements the dialectical lens found here.

Dialogism: Analytic Augmentation to Queer Dialectics

Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism propounds that both meanings in language (words, narratives, discourses) and individual selfhoods (subjectivities, identities) are fundamentally produced by interaction with others. Though he was a literary theorist (which may not ease critiques about queer theory being too literary), Bakhtin's dialogism has found compelling purchase in psychological research (e.g., Aubert & Soler, 2007; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2004; Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998). From a developmental psychology perspective of selfhood, dialogism proposes firstly that one learns, or gains knowledge of the world, predominantly through dialogical encounters with others (i.e., language-based interaction), and secondly, that these encounters become internalised and mould the self-concept (Aubert & Soler, 2007; Mkhize, 2004). Thus, a person's self or

psyche is an inherently dialogical entity: it is composed of multiple voices from their life-worlds interacting with their own wilful, witnessing presence (Mkhize, 2004; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998). Put differently, a singular self is not in fact isolable from the impact of other subjectivities; rather, the individual "is created by and through others and the Other is part of the self" (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011, p. 493).

Promisingly, Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) describe the complex arrangement of social-inside-the-self as "like the surface of a Moebius strip" (p. 504). This tenet of dialogism therefore appears to complement the aforementioned depiction of intersectionality. It also resonates with the contention of some queer scholars – both contemporary (e.g., Hutson, 2010; Pfeffer, 2014) and seminal (e.g., Sedgwick, 1990) – that sexual and gendered identities are always relational accomplishments, integrally influenced by interaction. In fact, Francis (2012) has powerfully demonstrated that gender performativity itself can be read through Bakhtinian dialogism, although their empirical application of it to non-cisgender and/or non-heterosexual lived experiences and interactions appears wanting. Moreover, as Mkhize (2004) traces, dialogism demonstrates compatibility with African conceptions of the self not just in scholarship but in lived experience, and so appears germane to researching queer subjectivities in South Africa.

Dialogism's conception of what constitutes "the Other" also captures the varying levels of sociality affecting an individual. The voice of the Other that is incorporated into the self can be interpersonal (i.e., of another individual), transpersonal (i.e., of a community of others, whether tangibly meetable or not), or institutional (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2004; Shotter & Billig, 1998; Skinner et al., 2001). When a person speaks, their own agentic expression is influenced by the voices of these many Others, and the particular context of their utterance has a bearing on which of these social voices is more prominent, or

gets more ventriloquised, than others (Aubert & Soler, 2007; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2004). That context usually contains another speaker/listener who may resemble, if not actually be, one of the virtual Others listed above. In either case, the first speaker's anticipation of the present other's response will also shape what they do and do not say, and how (Francis, 2012; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Skinner et al., 2001). Hence, Bakhtin (1981) contends that an utterance is multi-voiced, characterised by internal conflict, and cannot quite be repeated, for each conversational context, each pair of interlocuters, as well as which (counter)transferences are triggered between them, creates something unique (Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998; Skinner et al., 2001). This supports a destabilised, inconsistent, contradictory notion of selfhood, since how one subjectivity expresses (and experiences) itself through a particular space-moment in dialogue cannot be *exactly* the same as it does in others. Taking it further, since *subsequent* dialogical moments can join the chorus of internalised voices, and therefore impact the shape of the dialogical self, selfhood must be conceived as something ongoing or unfinalisable (Mkhize, 2004; Salgado & Clegg, 2011).

What dialogism also connects well with are Butlerian and Foucauldian notions of the relationship of the present speaking subject to historical chains of discourse. "Where there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse," Butler (1993b, p. 18) explains, "there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that 'I' and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will". Butler's (1993a; 1993b) performativity theory contends not only that the understandings of self that a subject has access to come from a pre-figured world, a world of discourses distilled through history, but also that whatever one can say is in some way bound by this discursive world. Thus, her declaration that the subject cannot be "the exclusive origin or owner of what is said" (Butler, 1993b; p. 19) reflects Bakhtin's (1981) insistence that "[l]anguage is not a neutral medium that passes freely and

easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (p. 294). On the flip side of discursive power, post-structural queer theorists also note the impulse for subjects to turn against the constraining chains of discourse (Butler, 1993a; 1993b), to exercise their wills in enacting counter-storytelling (Wagaman et al., 2018) or "reverse discourse", in which queerness can "speak on its own behalf" (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). Dialogism acknowledges this agentic will capable of pushing back against the chains of pre-existing meanings, of reflectively sorting through the internal social voices to feel what is personally more meaningful, of externalising these intentions in the form of new stories that at least try to craft new possibilities (Bakhtin, 1981; Mkhize, 2004; Skinner et al, 2001). Yet, as Bakhtin (1981) notes, "forcing [language] to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (p. 294).

The process is difficult and complicated because language (whether in speech or thought) is "heteroglossic" (Bakhtin, 1981), in other words, characterised by an irresolvable multi-voicedness and tension in meaning (Shotter & Billig, 1998; Skinner et al., 2001). One of the core tensions is between what Bakhtin (1981) calls centripetal and centrifugal forces, which respectively aim either for assent, unison, and singularity or dissent, polyvocality, and multiplicity. Bakhtin (1981) powerfully proposed that this is a *dialectical* pair of forces characterising all levels of language – even singular words (Shotter & Billig, 1998). Hence, perhaps, the fraught nature of the word "queer", as explored above: at once convergently synonymous with the general "LGBTQIA+" descriptor, and also divergent in its multiple and contradictory functions and representations (in theory, lived experience, and political mobility) regarding projects of (dis)identification and (anti)relationality. This "yes but" polemic (Riggs, 2010) characterises both internal thought – being influenced by myriad Others, or social voices, that are variously in line or at odds with one another – and external dialogue as a pair of speakers negotiates meanings. In that negotiation, another dialogical

tension is present: between the expressive and repressive, or said and unsaid (Bakhtin, 1981; Shotter & Billig, 1998). These forces also co-occur, for as some themes get articulated, the spotlight is drawn away from others.

Looking at these dialectics can indicate operations of power, for it is the nature of Western intellectual hegemony to enforce "monoglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981; Francis, 2012), that is, to reduce "the vagaries of multiple perspectives" towards a monologue of universalisable truth, casting those artefacts it cannot account for as unreal, outliers, or mistakes to be ignored (Salgado & Clegg, 2011, p. 433). In fact, Francis (2012) posits the gender binary, or cis-normative matrix of intelligibility, as *the* monoglossic (i.e., dominant, totalising, atmosphere-saturating) voice of gender – under which divergent, heteroglossic, or "queer" performances are rendered "impossible". Yet, even for cis-heterosexual subjects, heteroglossic enactments of gender are "continuously pulsating beneath the monoglossic façade" (Francis, 2012, p. 5). Hence, any dialogical encounter has the potential to galvanise or fracture this façade. If surrounded by accounts that converge meanings towards those reflected in official discourses, one may be less likely to voice one's dissenting, resistant account, feeling the audience inhospitable to holding those meanings (Shotter & Billig, 1998). Conversely, if the conversational space is amenable to counter-hegemonic utterances, to breaks with official consciousness, and to comfort with multiplicity, then what gets expressed in dialogue may spark a collectively transformative push-back – or push forward, as if to the queer utopic horizon – against the discursively constrained world we come into. As Lugones (2010) notes of effective resistance, "[c]ommunities rather than individuals enable the doing; one does with someone else, not in individualist isolation" (p. 754). So, how centripetal-centrifugal and expressive-repressive dialectics work in groups of dialoguing individuals may reveal what doings are (not) sanctioned, requested, or hoped for.

Thus, surfing binarisms in its own way, dialogism creates an analytic space to see how certain understandings of queer subjective experience, in reaching resonance or dissonance, work with or against available discourses, and thus reinforce or challenge the dominant ideologies shaping those particular worlds (Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998; Skinner et al., 2001). A dialogical investigation will ask: "how do the I and the Other relate with each other, creating mutuality and difference simultaneously?" and the objects of analysis will the *relations* that are (1) exposed as characterising the internal worlds of individuals, and (2) transpiring in communication between the I and the present Other (Salgado & Clegg, 2011, p. 430). That it looks at people-in-relations (or people-*as*-relations), and not at people-as-entities (marked by various identities) is promising. It should attenuate the risks, firstly, of producing a homogenised tale of "the queer experience", however specified by various intersecting categories (Mavuso et al., 2019), and secondly, of perpetuating a "West and the rest" binary, as if these positions, discourses, or voices cannot co-exist (albeit tensely) within one individual (Mkhize, 2004; Tucker, 2009). It necessitates comfort in contradiction, for dialectics mould subjectivities, thoughts, and utterances. It also foregrounds interdependence: how no singular selfhood exists independent of all others (Brown, 2009; Riggs, 2010). Finally, in asking that stories of experience get told amongst and through others – stories that create tolerant space for the centrifugal (Shotter & Billig, 1998) and that keep queer possibilities playfully, unjudgmentally open (Brown & Nash, 2010) – a dialogical setting may allow us to think beyond the logic of coloniality (Malherbe et al., 2019) – and to do so together.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this research was to explore "queer" identifications through significant experiences of dual relational phenomena: of feeling "the same as" *and* (not *or*) "different to" another. Using a bottom-up approach, the research focused on participants'

determinations of the meanings of their identifications and their relational experiences, hence the broadness and openness of the quotational phrases in the previous sentence. This openness is necessary to see what kinds of mutuality and difference (identity-related or not) with other people (queer or not) were provided as significant to participants’ lived realities, and why. The project explored this picture through the provision of narratives, with analytic attention to the interactional dynamics present firstly within the narratives themselves and secondly in the context of sharing them. Looking at what transpired between and amongst diverse groups of queer-identified people as they shared and related (or not) to each other’s narrated experiences, this project aimed to illuminate a means by which social reflexion and critical bonding can (or cannot) occur. Thus, the results of this research may provide both theoretical and praxical insights to: (a) global queer scholarship on identification and relationality, (b) South African research on and discourses of sexual and gender diversity, and (c) socio-political potentials or obstacles for coalition formation.

Research Questions

1. What do diverse groups of queer- and/or LGBTQIA+-identified people experience when they share their experiences of “sameness and difference” with others?
    - 1.1. What identifications and relational experiences do queer-identified people construct in their narrativising?
    - 1.2. How are group interactional dynamics (constructed as) influencing this narrativising?
    - 1.3. What do these interactions mean in terms of participants’ senses of community with each other?
    - 1.4. How do the above answers speak back to queer theory and discourses on sexual and gender minority identification?
    - 1.5. What, if any, potential for political direction emerges from the above?

Theoretical Framework

The overarching theoretical perspective of this research is composed of two broad parts, each under the umbrella of post-structuralism. It adopts a strand of queer theory that critiques intersectional normative power and binary constructions of identity (per Butler, 1993a; 1993b; Brown & Nash, 2010; Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 1999; 2009; Riggs, 2010), and aims to supplement those critiques with the foregrounding of the interactional and intersubjective offered by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism (adapted for psychological perspectives by Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2004; Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998; Skinner et al., 2001).

Specifying a Queer Theoretical Framework

Queer theory is not a unified or systematic framework, but a heterogenous network of intellectual engagements (Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015). The perspective of queer theory employed here is one that challenges the arrangement of subjectivities along oppositional binaries (Boellstorff, 2010; Brown & Nash, 2010) and instead affords the subject a complex simultaneity of the forces within a binary (Muñoz, 1999; 2009). This perspective creates space to view queer-identified subjects as those who occupy positionings both of privilege and disadvantage, who experience simultaneous states of belonging and unbelonging, and who deploy but also trouble identity categories. It also insists on an analysis of power dynamics within, across, and beyond identity categories (Cohen, 1997). Insofar as this analysis is intersectionally conscious, it allows and draws on the concepts of multiplicity, interconnectedness, contextual fluidity, and inconsistency of subjectivities that are advocated in critical, decolonial, and feminist perspectives on identification (e.g., Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Kiguwa, 2004). Such an awareness is necessary for adequately engaging with more marginalised queer-identified individuals who are underrepresented in the White, Western body of queer theory, and for legitimising their challenges to the dominant orders of the

social world while they may participate in them. It allows a validation of contradictions that may arise from queer-identified individuals' constructions of identification and experiences of relationality with others.

What needs clarification in this perspective is the relationship of discourse to interpellation or subject formation (Butler, 1993a; 1993b; 2002). As Finlay (2017) notes, some interpretations of Butler conclude that discourse shapes subjecthood *completely*. This reading is multiply problematic for queer and trans individuals. If a subject only comes to understand their gender/sexuality by accessing what discourse proposes are "real" categories/identities, it would then be impossible to know oneself and/or one's orientation (even without naming it) as other than what was assigned at birth or assumed through rearing. Relatedly, if a subject is hailed through *incorrect* terms (i.e., misgendered), and if interpellation (subject formation) is accomplished through repeated hailing-and-responding, then trans/non-binary/queer people would either understand themselves as members of that incorrect/non-affirming category or would be constructed to continually doubt their own self-identification (Finlay, 2017). In any case, if hailing/interpellation formed the subject entirely, there would be no room for agency (Butler, 2002; Finlay, 2017). We should instead consider that discourse does not *wholly* determine subjects. It provides gravitational reference points for their constitution but will fail to rope in those unrecognisable parts of subjectivity (Butler, 1993a; 2002; Finlay, 2017). There is a remainder (Butler, 2002) after interpellation: that unconscious, unintelligible part of the psyche that cannot be captured by the rules of language, but which nonetheless exerts a force against it. Thus, even without terms to render these parts of themselves narrativisable, a subject can nonetheless insist nonconformity to those categories thrown at them (Finlay, 2017). One can validly state "I am not that" without being able to specify "I am this". Such a conception of discourse and the psyche supports that it is impossible for us to be *fully recognised* by the language we have available – and

thus, that a subject cannot be concretised by identity categories (Butler, 1993a; 2002; Finlay, 2017).

Delineating a Dialogical Perspective

Dialogism centralises an epistemological tenet that is under-emphasised in queer scholarship: that subjectivities are outcomes of relational processes (Bakhtin, 1981; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010). While it similarly does not have an established systematic framework, dialogism offers a methodological grip that focuses on the construction of narratives (Shotter & Billig, 1998; Skinner et al., 2001). It allows us, firstly, to see what voices other than the subject's own populate their narratives and how those voices affect the subject's understandings, and secondly, to consider how the presence of others in the context of the subject's narrativising affect what is said. In each of these dual prongs, we can witness dialectical forces (as we can in queer theory): between expression and repression in the narrative account and between assent and dissent amongst the voices, present or past (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998). It additionally allows us to witness discursive interpellation and negotiation thereof, which is central to queer theory (Butler; 1993a, 1993b), for the uniqueness of each narrativisation-in-context means new meanings and reflections can emerge that allow the subject to rework the systems of interpretation available for their experiences (Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Skinner et al., 2001). In addition to making space for relational-identification epistemologies such as African communitarian *ubuntu* (Mkhize, 2004), Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism creates opportunity for dominant discourses to be subverted both individually and collectively, and enables a witnessing of how certain interpretations may facilitate or prevent the formation of alliances.

According to Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011), dialogism must account for two potential pitfalls. First, in proposing that Others form the "I", it must guard against an extreme social constructionist stance that an individual subjectivity is completely at the

epiphenomenal mercy of the social. Second, in framing all dialogical moments as unique, and thus that the subject is unstable, inconsistent, and multiplicitous in the ways and conditions in which it feels and expresses itself, dialogism also needs to account for subjects' felt stability. In responding to both challenges, dialogists should also be wary of re-empowering essentialism. To side-step this first, a dialogistic framework emphasises that selves are not things (and therefore cannot be essentialised) but are instead processes or enactments (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Salgado & Clegg, 2011). Then, regarding the first challenge, dialogism reiterates that the psyche is genuinely subjective – not an artefact of, or identical to, the social – but is also so deeply embedded in the social that it must fashion its identity from the materials offered by this context (Francis, 2012; Salgado & Clegg, 2011). In the words of Salgado and Clegg (2011), the self is "an organizing act, an arrow through time that clothes itself… out of its socio-cultural context and so is simultaneously a totally unique event and a deeply relational manifestation of a shared world" (p. 430). Finally, moving onto the second challenge, dialogism holds that stability of selfhood has less to do with that psyche's essence and more to do with the stability of *contexts* in which they find themselves and *signs* with which they interact (Francis, 2012; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011). Where there are material conditions in which the subject can (or is expected to) operate consistently, and where they are surrounded by voices that create a more centripetal inner dialogue, these will contribute to the subject's phenomenon of being the same over time (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011). It is through these responses – which effectively surf the binarism of social constructionism versus essentialism and conceives "the enacting of self at precisely the point where… [they] short-circuit" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 6) – that this research orients its dialogical theoretical approach.

Methods

Research Design

This study is qualitative by research design. Qualitative approaches more adequately capture accounts of queer-identified experience (Warner, 2004), and are necessary to explore the language-bound such as narratives, discourses, and the meanings of subjective identification and interactional bond (Parker, 2005). This qualitative approach also aligns itself with critical psychology which, like queer theory, calls for the problematisation of disciplinary borders, taken-for-granted epistemological assumptions, and assumed power relations in mainstream disciplinary research (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Brown & Nash, 2010; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015). A critical perspective demands heightened awareness to the fact that the psychological discipline (a) produces, and does not uncover, knowledge, (b) can act as gatekeeper to what counts as knowledge, and (c) has produced "knowledge" on sexually and gender-diverse subjectivities that limits, de-contextualises, de-politicises, and pathologises (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015; Shefer, 2004). Indeed, psychology can be regarded as *the* discipline of normality (and normativity) and has a long-demonstrated obsession with dichotomising the people it researches (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Judge, 2018) as well as with treating identity in essentialising and universalising ways (Kiguwa, 2004).

On the other hand, a critical approach, particularly in a qualitative paradigm and especially under the queer and dialogical lenses outlined above, challenges the claims of generalisability made in the name of strengthening social science research (Brown & Nash, 2010), and so may be less prone to those universalising errors. Yet, that also should not be uncritically assumed. In fact, Mkhize (2004) advises that a critical psychological researcher should continuously pose Bakhtinian questions to themselves about the voices involved in the process of knowledge production: who is interpreting data about whom, from which ideological/theoretical and material/contextual positions, and for what purposes? These questions need also be considered about research participants, for critical approaches contend

that power dynamics shift throughout the research encounter (Gore, 2018), and that the findings produced are – like dialogical phenomena – co-constructed through the relationship between researcher and researched (Detamore, 2010). This study therefore maintained a critical reflexivity in designing its methods so as to minimise the reinforcement of power hierarchies in the construction of its findings.

Participants

Recruitment Decisions

This study utilised homogenous purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) in order to recruit individuals who broadly identified as "queer" and/or "LGBTQIA+". Although individuals can identify as queer but not as LGBTQIA+ and vice versa (Gamson, 2000; Higginbotham, 2018), both terms were used in recruitment because this research (1) is distilled from, and aimed to speak back to, the problems of anti-LGBTQIA+ violence and the misunderstandings of sexual and gender variance, and (2) wished to explore the taken-for-granted synonymity between the terms. This study additionally aimed for perspectival diversity in what it means to be and relate as queer, and wished to vary participant characteristics regarding gender, sexuality, race, socio-economic status, cultural background, and age. As such, the research advertisement (see Appendix B) was sent to a variety of LGBTQIA+-aligned establishments and collectives around Cape Town. I reached out to Triangle Project, UCT Rainbow Society, PWR Project, The Outgoers, The Raptor Room, and Gender Dynamix, and the first four of these parties agreed to distribute the advert. Some of these organisations, such as Triangle Project (www.triangleproject.org.za) and PWR Project www.pwrproject.org) are quite well-represented in terms of the demographics in LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities that they serve. Recruiting from such well-represented organisations allowed a relatively diverse sample of participants to be formed.

Determining the number of participants to recruit was informed by recommendations for focus group size and quantity in tandem with this study's logistical limits. Though 6 to 12 participants is a common range (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Wilkinson, 1998), Krueger and Casey (2014) state that the ideal size for non-commercial (i.e., academic) purposes is smaller than that. So-called "mini-focus groups" with 4 to 6 participants have been growing in popularity not only because of their relatively easier recruitment but also because smaller groups tend to increase participants' comfort in sharing their experiences and ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Smaller groups were also a relatively safer option as this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and so having fewer bodies, sufficiently distanceable from each other in the same indoor space, was preferable from a health risk perspective.

In addition, multiple focus groups are necessary to reach theoretical saturation (i.e., a point at which no new content is provided that could significantly shape the emergent theoretical results), and a minimum of 3 focus groups is recommended to approach it (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). In consideration of recruiting a large enough sample, *pre-existing groups* (i.e., 2 or more participants who knew each other prior to the research encounter) were allowed to participate. Pre-existing groups can carry certain other advantages, such as tending to relax participants by virtue of their familiarity with one another (Munday, 2006), to encourage more naturalistic interaction, and to provide opportunity to challenge each other's contradictions between how they state to have behaved/opined versus their associates' witnessing/impression of how they behave/opine (Kitzinger, 1994).

The Sample

A total of 32 individuals initially expressed interest in participating in this study. When following up with these interested individuals, 5 explicitly withdrew before attending

the research encounter and provided the following reasons: two were exposed to COVID-19, two had schedules suddenly shift due to work obligations, and one felt too uncomfortable about not being "out" as queer and so changed their mind. A further 6 parties did not continue correspondence with the researcher and were assumed to have withdrawn by the end of the data collection phase. The total sample size of this study was therefore 21 participants. There were four focus groups: two (1st and 3rd) groups of 6 participants, one (2nd) group of 4 participants, and one (4th) group of 5 participants. Though homogeneity of sub-sample size was aimed for, some of those individuals who withdrew did so just before a focus group commenced.

In terms of demographic information collected via a pre-encounter survey (see Appendix C), the sample was relatively young: fourteen individuals were in the 18–25 age range; six were in the 25–34 age range, and one occupied the 35–44 age range. Occupationally, the majority (i.e., thirteen) were university students, while three were employed full-time, and five were unemployed. Racially, there was a relative mix in numbers between participants who identified as "Black" (n = 7), "White" (n = 8), and "Coloured" or "Mixed" (n = 6). Although this research does not wish to converge individual experiences under these sub-group identity markers (or to assume that they entail essentially similar perspectives), these markers are nonetheless the measures/means available for ensuring some representational diversity (a pre-requisite in the research question). In terms of sexual and gender identity labels, the highly personal nature of these terms was explicitly explored during the research encounter (while labels of other social dimensions were not), and so to uphold individuals' self-determinations and to guard against a reading of the same label as meaning precisely the same thing between participants, I do not list here the number of individuals using identical terms. That being said, the terms participants used to describe their sexual identities included "homosexual", "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual", "pansexual",

"asexual", "queer", "toric", "androsexual", and "heterosexual". The terms they used to describe their gender identities included "cis man", "cis woman", "trans man", "trans woman", "genderqueer", "gender-neutral", "fluid", and "non-binary".

Procedures

I contacted the above LGBTQIA+-aligned organisations via email and/or their Instagram page to explain that I was looking for queer- and/or LGBTQIA+-identified individuals to participate voluntarily in this study. I attached a suitable format of the research advertisement to the message, clarified any questions the organisational representative had about the study, and requested if they would be willing to distribute the advertisement through their relevant public announcement platforms (such as their social media, email lists, or on-site advertisement/bulletin boards).

Those who were interested in participating contacted me via the email address included in the advertisement. I clarified any questions that the interested parties had about the study and about what participation entailed before confirming that they were willing to participate. I ascertained their preferred means of communication (continuing with email or switching to an instant-messaging application like WhatsApp) and requested their availability schedules to that I could establish a convenient day and time to form a focus group. I also requested that participants follow a link to www.suveymonkey.com to complete the demographic information survey sometime before the day of the focus group.

Once I had determined mutually convenient times, I suggested dates to participants in the order in which they first reached out to me. In other words, group 1 consisted of the first 6 participants who expressed interest, group 2 consisted of the next 4 who expressed interest, and so on. I did not purposefully use demographic information to compose certain groups. I also informed participants of the location of the focus groups: they were held in a large private room at Observatory Community and Recreation Centre in Observatory, Cape Town.

I provided directions and photographs of the venue and surrounding areas to help participants navigate their way to the Centre. Per Krueger and Casey's (2014) suggestion, I hired an assistant (from the Psychology Honours class) to help me set up the space, escort participants to the venue, and carry out other logistical manoeuvres so that I could focus on moderation/facilitation.

On the day of the focus group, once my assistant had led the participants to the focus group room, I allocated half an hour to, firstly, set a welcoming and relaxing tone for participants by interacting informally with them and offering them refreshments in the form of coffee or water (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2014). Secondly, I ran participants through the ethical procedures involved in the research (see Ethical Considerations for more). Finally, I provided participants with name-cards (which included their pronouns as provided on the demographic information survey) so that they could more easily, directly, and appropriately refer to one another throughout the study (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999).

Thereafter, the focus group discussion commenced (see Data Collection for more details), which I moderated. At the end of the discussion, I debriefed participants (see Ethical Considerations for more) and informed them that I would be in contact to schedule each of their reflective one-on-one interviews at a later time. Once I had ascertained a mutually convenient time for the interviews, I arranged (based on the interviewee's preference) for either a digital video-call via Zoom or an in-person interview held in the same private room at Observatory Community and Recreation Centre. Both types of interviews were audio- and video-recorded.

Data Collection

Focus Groups

Focus groups were selected as the primary method for data collection because they generate interactions and therefore provide a window into how people co-construct and negotiate meaning through face-to-face communication (Hollander, 2004; Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998). Functioning to demonstrate what people say in certain social contexts (that are made up of relations amongst participants, between participants and the researcher, and between all involved and the wider social milieu in which the conversation takes place), and thus how narrativisation may be influenced by such contexts, focus groups offer "insights into the relational aspects of the self" and how "social inequalities are [or are not]… perpetuated through talk" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 123). Orienting investigative eyes to assent and dissent within the group, we may be able to see how participants portray their understandings in relation to others', how group standards might develop that censor certain perspectives and encourage others, and thus how ideological, discursive work can (or cannot) be done by these expressive-repressive dynamics (Hollander, 2004; Kitzinger, 1994; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Thus, focus groups are a potent site for inspecting the dialogical construction of narrative, self, and the social (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011).

In addition, focus groups hold the potential to balance the researcher's power out in the encounter, since by virtue of their numbers, participants tend to have more control over the discussion process (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998). Participants often act as co-researchers, posing follow-up questions to each other, challenging each other's statements, and steering topic threads into unanticipated yet valuable directions (Kitzinger, 1994; Munday, 2006; Wilkinson, 1998). However, this power-balancing cannot be assumed to emerge naturally. Munday (2006) cautions that a researcher may nonetheless exert "rigid control" (p. 98) over the process due to a preoccupation with keeping the conversation aligned with their agenda, topics, and questions, may frequently halt the natural flow of talk, and therefore keep the progression of discussion researcher-focused. For this reason, and

because this study adopts a bottom-up orientation in which priority should be given to "respondents' hierarchy of importance, *their* language and concepts, *their* frameworks for understanding the world" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 108, emphasis in original), I opted for using the strategy of *self-managed groups* (Hollander, 2004; Morgan, 1988; Wilkinson, 1998). Such a strategy entails the researcher providing an initial introduction and orientation to the purpose and ground rules of the focus group, then handing over the reins of facilitating the discussion to the group of participants and providing minimal input (Hollander, 2004; Morgan, 1988). At times I did step into the discussion to, for example, ask participants to provide an account of an actual lived experience of sameness and difference, instead of intellectualising that concept – a warranted step-in according to Krueger and Casey (2014). However, I did so after enough time had elapsed that I had acclimatised to each groups' preferred language, concepts, and emerging meanings for talking about the matter (as recommended by Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1988; Kitzinger, 1994; Tynan & Drayton, 1988; Wilkinson, 1998), so that I would not impose my own views and terminology (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

With the self-managed groups strategy in mind, I developed the focus group facilitation schedule (see Appendix D). For the opener, I asked participants to introduce themselves (Tynan & Drayton, 1988) and to answer a simple, neutral question – which did not highlight any status differences (Hollander, 2004) – in order to build rapport (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1988). Thereafter, I explained the scope and topic of the focus group, as well as my and their roles, and that natural conversation amongst them was encouraged (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1988; Tynan & Drayton, 1988). In setting some ground rules for engagement, I drew on the principles guiding Wagaman et al.'s (2018) counter-storytelling study to impress that there would perhaps be multiple truths in the discussion and that all of us should honour them. I relatedly emphasised that there are no right or wrong answers, and that it would be important to hear everyone's input (Côté-

Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1988; Krueger & Casey, 2014). After giving participants an opportunity to question or add to these ground rules, I then asked them to share with each other how they identified as queer and/or LGBTQIA+, and if it did not naturally follow, to share their experiences of sameness and difference with others. The entire recorded session, from introduction to debriefing, lasted 90 to 120 minutes – a well-designed duration (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Reflective Interviews

As the second part of data collection, I invited participants to follow-up interviews in which they reflected on their experiences of the focus group (see Appendix E). Starting with an open question about their general impression of the group (Hollander, 2004), I then asked about their experiences of sameness and difference with their co-participants. This provided an opportunity to witness intersubjective resonance (i.e., if members separately reported feeling the same as/different from each other) and narrative echoes (i.e., if their experiences of sameness and difference among focus group members echoed the experiences provided in their narrative accounts). Importantly, it also bound answers for the research question to participants' own accounts, as opposed to only the researcher's interpretations or inferences of the effects of the focus group on dialogical selves. It therefore might be said participants were invited to be co-interpreters (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Parker, 2005), commenting on their experiences of consensus and dissensus in the group as well as on any expression/repression dynamics. They could also provide clarification on or additions to their contributions (or lack thereof) to the focus group discussions if they felt it necessary. The interviews were semi-structured so that I could, firstly, follow participants down their reflections, and secondly, ask about particular moments in their focus group or details about their specific narratives if I felt it necessary. In this way, the reflective interviews also served a triangulatory function in investigating queer-identified individuals' experiences, adding

richness or another dimension to the data collected in the focus groups (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008).

That being said, it must be cautioned that the follow-up interviews were not used, in an individualistic way, to create a hierarchy of evidence that privileges what a single participant said in a "more private" interview as somehow more "honest" than what they expressed in the "more public" focus group (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Wilkinson, 1998). Nor did I assume – from an essentialist, monological position – that the accounts participants gave between the encounters should converge, so as to reveal either a singular truth or a stable and unitary underlying psyche (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Wilkinson, 1998). Rather, I proceeded from the position that what a participant provided in the follow-up interview was as socially mediated, or as co-constructed (between them and me) as it was in the focus group (Wilkinson, 1998). It is for this reason that I asked participants to comment on their perception of me as the group moderator and interviewer. It is also for this reason that I regarded the interviews as dialogical encounters too (Parker, 2005), and continually reflected upon my interpretations with the caution that I had been a co-participant – not just in the interviews but also in the focus groups.

Transcription

I collected the data by video- and audio-recording the focus groups and interviews. Video recordings were chosen to highlight non-verbal forms of communication (e.g., body language). I ran all the recordings through www.otter.ai for auto-transcription, and thereafter, went through each of these documents to correct the errors produced by it. I opted to do the entire transcription process by myself, as this allowed for immersion in the data, and drew my attention to important nuances that could have been overlooked by a transcriber who was not involved in the research encounters (Parker, 2005). In the Analysis and Discussion, note that I indicate: (a) my omission of certain sections of a participant's utterance via "[…]"; (b) a

pause of under 3 seconds via unbracketed ellipses; (c) non-verbal and non-verbatim communication via description in square brackets (e.g., "[nods]"; "[laughter]"), and (d) speaking at the same time via "=" in round brackets, inserted after the word of speaker A at which point speaker B interjects. For ease of reading, I have also removed the "messy" speech – for example, false starts, "um"s and "ah"s, and filler words ("like") – except where these seemed to indicate a dialogical feature (see below).

Data Analysis

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) emphasise that richer and more meaningful focus group data is rendered by analysing both the "what" and the "how" of the discussion. However, many scholars note that the latter (i.e., analysis of interactive data) is sorely under-done in the traditional use of focus group methods (Hollander, 2004; Kitzinger, 1994; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Munday, 2006; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Wilkinson, 1998). Because analysing content more than process seems to be easily slipped into (Munday, 2006; Wilkinson, 1998), I determined that two distinct (yet complementary) data analysis methods would be needed: one more content-focused, and the other more dialogically oriented. These were, respectively, Boonzaier's (2019) Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis (henceforth DINA) and Grossen and Salazar Orvig's (2011) Bakhtinian-dialogical analysis. They were not deployed in a separate serial fashion; rather, I injected the reading phases of the latter in between the reading phases of the former, so as to more closely align the analytic steps with the order of this study's sub-questions.

DINA Phase 1: Thematic Narrative Analysis

Answering research question 1.1 (i.e., what narratives of identification and relational experiences are constructed) required thematising participants' narrativised content on their identifications and relational experiences. The first phase of DINA – an analytic method that foregrounds narrativizing as a means through which identity is constructed, and that validates

subjective experience and agency (Boonzaier, 2019) – deploys the necessary analytic process via Riessman's (2008) Thematic Narrative Analysis.

Specifically, this first reading entailed identifying (a) what kinds of narratives (of being queer and/or LGBTQIA+ and experiencing sameness and difference) were told by participants, (b) which narratives were common and uncommon both in one group and across others, and (c) what thematic areas characterised these told stories. Thematic areas included the types of content they told, the structural unfolding of the narratives (what characterised the beginning-middle-end triad), and the emotional valence of the narratives (Boonzaier, 2019; Riessman, 2008). In identifying what kinds of narratives were told (step a), I looked at the narratives provided in the focus groups as well as those provided in the reflective interview, for in the latter, participants could reflect on any experiences of sameness and difference with their group members and could offer any additional input on their queer identifications (including if it had been affected by the group). In identifying which narratives were common and uncommon (step b), I supplemented my own analytic observations with participants' relevant reflections on the expressive-repressive and assenting-dissenting dynamics experienced in the focus group.

Dialogical Readings

Before proceeding with the subsequent phases of DINA, and in order to engage with research questions 1.2 (how group interactional dynamics influence their narrativizing) and 1.3 (what these interactions mean in terms of participants' senses of community), I deployed the process-focused analysis. A variety of useful analytic questions exists to consider when examining participants' interactions and how these affect the emerging data. For example, how do the questions that participants pose to one another reveal their underlying assumptions and worldviews? (Kitzinger, 1994); how does the first person to speak at length set the departure point and tone for the rest of the discussion? (Hollander, 2004); and how do

more dominant and/or more passive participants affect the dynamic of contributions by the whole group? (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). My primary choice for examining the "how" of the focus group content – that is, the Bakhtinian-dialogical method outlined by Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) – does accommodate these kinds of questions, but also, more importantly, it closely aligns the analytic lens with this study's theoretical framework. The method entailed a series of readings to examine the multiple dialogical forces operating in each focus group, and how those forces qualified the themes identified above.

Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) orient the first dialogical reading of focus group discussions to how external dialogues, internal dialogues, and autodialogues shape the discursive space. *External dialogue* refers to the here-and-now conversation amongst participants, and specifically to each participants' anticipation of the others' point(s) of view in forming their responses. *Internal dialogue* refers to connections between those here-and-now utterances and the then-and-there of discourses. Participants could draw these links to discourses between each other, or between themselves and absent Others. I later revisited my initial determinations of participants' discourse connections to analyse them in greater depth using phases two and three of DINA (see below). *Autodialogue* refers to the conflictual features of speech present in a singular speaker's utterance. These features include hedges/reservations, concessions, mitigators/qualifiers, contradictions – in short, signs of the double-voiced or polemical nature of expression.

The second reading considers the tensions occurring in this discursive space – such as between agreement and disagreement, expression and repression, singularity and multiplicity of perspectives – and tries to locate on which social-self dimensions these tensions are operating. The dimensions include the *personal* dimension (referring to the agentic individual), the *interpersonal* dimension (referring to the co-constructive dynamics of direct interactions), and the *transpersonal* dimension (representing larger communities of absent

Others to which participants belong, or which have at least shaped their selves). There is also the *impersonal* dimension, representing the dis-embodied institutional voices which fix laws, obligations, regulations, and categories to organise the self and the social.

A third reading contextualises the participants and the focus group situation in terms of material settings and influences. This includes consideration not only of how the immediate spatial/embodied/environmental arrangements of the research encounter may influence content and interaction, but also of what other social condition(s) or experience(s) the encounter or task may represent for participants. Some may relate it to a group counselling session, an academic seminar, an everyday platonic chat, and so on – whether experienced directly beforehand or filtered through cultural objects like films (Hollander, 2004; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011). These situational expectations/interpretations orient how a participant comes to the discursive space that they then help co-create through the above dynamics.

From the above dialogical readings, I examined what the interactional dynamics were *doing* to the meanings of "queer" identification and experiences of "sameness and difference" that were being constructed, related, negotiated, and challenged between participants in each focus group, as well as what they seemed to achieve (or hinder) for participants' senses of intersubjective connection with each other. I similarly read participants' reflective interviews in this dialogical fashion, examining what the interactions between them and me were doing to our co-interpretations of the focus group.

DINA Phases 2, 3, and 4: Discursive Analysis and Meta-Narrating

Thereafter, I returned to the subsequent phases of DINA, which investigate how the identified themes (and their dialogical influences) challenge or bolster hegemony and open up or close down possibilities for collective belonging (Boonzaier, 2019), thereby addressing

research questions 1.4 (how the accounts speak back to discourse and theory) and 1.5 (what political potential emerges therefrom).

Revisiting the internal dialogues in which participants drew connections to discourses, I proceeded with the second phase of DINA. I analysed how the narratives of experience were moulded by dominant, historically distilled discourses on an intersectional array of social identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.). I identified what kinds of discursive identities were constructed within these narratives, which perspectives were privileged therein (and which were not), and how they reflected existing social structures and wider public scripts (Boonzaier, 2019). Phase three entailed listening to the counter-discourses in these narratives; to ways in which participants articulated resistance and spoke against hegemonic understandings of the social groups to which they belong. In identifying these resistant articulations, I also examined if these offered possibilities for transformed collective belonging, for solidarity formation, and for empowering action (Boonzaier, 2019; Riessman, 2008).

Finally, the fourth phase entailed extrapolating from the previous phases (of DINA and the dialogical analysis) to create a meta-narrative. This crafting entailed “bringing together our reading of participants’ worlds, our analyses of existing scholarship in the field as well as bringing in our awareness and attention to sociopolitical and historical contexts in which we work” (Boonzaier, 2019, p. 487). The meta-narrative based on these multiple, interconnected, critical readings is written as the Analysis and Discussion section.

Reflexivity

Heightened researcher reflexivity is needed not only for this plurivocal narrativising (Boonzaier, 2019), but throughout the entire research process. For example, my personal identity may have shaped the research encounter from the moment of recruitment, since I mentioned on the research advertisement that I (the focus group moderator and interviewer)

am also a queer-/LGBTQIA+-identified individual, and thereby appealed to a certain insider status. While framing my researcher identity through this status could have signalled to participants a relative safety and ease for discussing topics as personal and sensitive as marginal sexual and/or gender identity (Hollander, 2004), a critical reflexive stance mandates that I do not rely on such an assumption. Indeed, the stance demands that researchers recognise (1) their own complex intersectional social locations (along with those of participants) and how these engender certain biases, (2) that these multiple locations mean one can be both insider and outsider, marginalised and complicit, depending on different interactions and moments, and (3) that experienced identifications and their boundaries can change (along with their power dynamics) for all involved (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; McDonald, 2013; Riggs, 2010). This necessitated that I (as primary researcher, focus group moderator, and interviewer) maintained a journal in which I reflected upon my positionings, interpretations, and relational experiences with participants, as they may have affected the research endeavour. It also meant paying continuous attention to my presence in the data, and wherever significant, working that into the Analysis and Discussion (meta-narrative).

My critical reflexive lens also extends to our discipline: to what lengths and limitations of responsibility and authoritativeness in knowledge production come with our positions as psychological researchers, and how that should be improved (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Parker, 2005). This is additionally why this study was designed to include reflexive interviews. In line with a dialogistic awareness that what is produced in the research encounters is co-constructed and negotiated by all involved (Detamore, 2010; Gemignani, 2017; Warner, 2004), I regarded participants as "co-interpreters" in an attempt to balance out the hierarchical in the traditional researcher-researched dyad (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Parker, 2005). This co-interpretive approach should commit the reported findings to alignment with participants' perspectives (Parker, 2005) and thus render the research practice

more ethical in representation. Yet, I also intend to invite participants at the end of this project to return to the site of the focus group and have an off-the-record session in which I can ascertain if I have truly represented their voices to their satisfaction.

Ethical Considerations

This engagement with reflexivity expanded to include an active, ongoing, dialogical practice with participants and their contexts represents an ethical practice in line with a decolonial-feminist approach to research (Matutu, 2019). Further, we should regard participants' refusals to disclose certain things not as uncooperative or necessarily telling of vulnerabilities, but as productive moves against the discipline's mining of data at the expense of those from whom it comes (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Such refusals – and relatedly, the interpretations offered by co-interpreters – should be considered ethically necessary moves away from the discipline's paternalistic ventriloquising of marginalised voices, and towards an agentic recognition of them (Matutu, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2014). While a humanised, relational, and contextually shifting engagement with the ethical was adopted, the following ethical protocols were also followed.

Prior to data collection, I scouted for a venue that would be suitable not only to the necessary privacy of confidential discussions, but that would meet the health and safety requirements of conducting human participant research under the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix F). Appropriate precautionary practices (e.g., providing masks, sanitizing objects and hands, spacing furniture adequately apart) were adopted throughout the data collection phase. In the context of a global pandemic, following these health and safety protocols represented an ethical necessity for in-person research.

Beyond these circumstantial considerations, standard ethical requirements were also addressed (see Appendix G for departmental and faculty ethical approval). Regarding informed consent, participants were given the opportunity to inquire about anything in the

informed consent form for the focus group (Appendix H) and for the interview (Appendix I) prior to signing them, as well as throughout the research process. Regarding records of their input, providing participants with transcripts of both their focus group discussions and interviews, and with a copy of this final report, created an informed opportunity to request any redactions if they feel it necessary.

Potential benefits and risks were clarified for participants in the research advertisement and informed consent forms. While I direct the reader to these appendices for elaboration on the possible benefits, some discussion of navigating the potential risks is warranted here. Risks entailed, firstly, conflictual interaction with focus group members in the course of their discussions. There may also have been psychological risk in participants sharing difficult or painful accounts of “difference”. In attempt to minimise this, focus group questions were not designed to evoke conflict, nor did they ask for painful or traumatic experiences specifically. Moreover, as moderator I outlined to participants the need for respectful and compassionate engagement with one another, and aimed to maintain this atmosphere of comfort and safety throughout the group discussion. To curb the risk of misrepresentation which may have occurred due to potential repressive dynamics in the focus group, participants were given the opportunity in their interview to add to or clarify their prior input.

Confidentiality is an ethical necessity that is heightened by the fact that openly disclosing one’s sexual and/or gender variance can involve risk of queerphobia (Levy & Johnson, 2012). Multiple confidentiality measures were therefore in place. Participants were each asked to provide a pseudonym by which they are referred in the transcripts and Analysis and Discussion. Another confidentiality issue was that by participating in focus groups, group members would be able to identify each other outside of the research setting and might share other members’ information publicly. While I could not guarantee that group members would

protect each other's privacy outside the focus group, I formulated a declaration for participants to read and sign (Appendix J) at the start of the focus group, so that they would understand the need for non-disclosure of group events and co-participant details to non-participants. Regarding the privacy of the data provided, recordings of the encounters were kept in a password-secured digital drive to which only I and my supervisor had access, and these recordings were destroyed once they had been transcribed completely. All identifying information of participants was removed from the transcripts that are now stored in UCT's Data Management repository. Finally, the focus group assistant (1) was asked to sign an ethical undertaking (see Appendix K) declaring their informed commitment to upholding participant confidentiality, (2) did not sit in on the focus group and was therefore not privy to participants' input, and (3) did not have access to raw data in the form of recordings or transcripts of the focus group or interviews.

Another potential risk related to the matter of confidentiality pertained to the very nature of the follow-up interviews. In line with mainstream ethical practice, participants' subsequent discussion with others of the people and events in the focus groups was discouraged. However, this was required in the interviews. Although participants were well-informed of the nature of these interviews (i.e., that it would require them to speak reflectively on their experience of the groups), this does not prevent the experience of discomfort (for participants or me) arising when discussing co-participants in their absence and on record. Thinking through this quandary, I turn to Page's (2017, p. 14) observation that "all research involves aspects of vulnerability and forms of not-knowing" to argue that we may not always know how (or be able) to extinguish the experience of discomfort in the research process – whether ahead of time or in the moment. As such, herein must enter an ongoing, dialogical engagement with the ethical (Matutu, 2019). To that end, I made sure to engage with participants off the record, before and after the formal interview recording

sessions, so that a ‘more private’ and perhaps safer space (Tuck & Yang, 2014) was available in which they could immediately raise any discomforts they may have had in the course of the discussions. Providing this report to participants also offered an opportunity for them to witness their and others’ interview content and to voice if any of this brought them unease, and so for me to make redactions if requested or facilitate co-participant mediations if necessary.

After their focus groups and interviews, debriefing participants included an explanation of the research material access, as well as the provision of monetary compensation for participating. It also included providing the contact details of counselling services (see Appendix L) in case any participants felt the need to contact them. Services that are catered to sexually and gender-diverse persons (such as those at Triangle Project) are included in that referral. At the end of the interviews, I made sure to check that participants still had this referral list. Participants were additionally informed that they could contact me at any point in order to discuss any qualms they had about their continued participation, which, as per a decolonial-feminist ethical reflexivity, were engaged with deep consideration.

Analysis and Discussion

The following meta-narrative is divided into two parts, exploring (a) what occurred within the focus groups and (b) participants’ reflections on taking part in them. The first part is broadly organised around three binarism-surfing sections: (1) holding and not holding multiplicities in “queer” (dis)identificatory logics, (2) facing cis-hetero monoglossic enactments by both strangers and family, and (3) finding negative and positive representations of queer self in the social. The sections are introduced by an excerpt of one group’s dialogue, selected as emblematic because it contains germane points echoed by participants in other groups, and so ties thematic subsections together. The second, reflective part addresses (a) co-interpretations of the dialogical effects that transpired in the groups,

followed by (b) participants' experiences of the groups and the research decisions that structured them. This general outline being the case, I caution that the parts, sections, and subsections are not neatly or exclusively separable. For example, some interview reflections have informed focus group explorations, and the binarisms in the first three sections blend or carry into each other. As is the nature of "dialogical thought, ideas do not converge on a single theme because ideas belong, inherently, to the many" (Salgado & Clegg, 2011, p. 432). It may be said, then, that the meta-narrative reflects a somewhat Moebius structure, encouraging (but not requiring) a back-and-forth reading. In this reading, note that I indicate dialogical analytic features (i.e., auto-/internal/external dialogue; personal/interpersonal/transpersonal/impersonal dimension; material/contextual influence) via italics in parentheses, reduced to their first term alone for ease of reading, such as: '(*internal*)', '(*interpersonal*)', and '(*material*)'.

Focus Group Explorations

Singular and Plural: "Queer" (Dis)Identificatory Logics

At the commencement of the discussions, I requested that everyone hold multiple truths of experience and resist comparing them as right or wrong. Given that a moderator's opening statements influence participants' orientations to the conversational space (Hollander, 2004; Tynan & Drayton, 1988), these ground rules may have contributed to participants accommodating heteroglossia in describing their self-identifications. Across all groups, participants voiced their individual relationships to identity without falling into disagreements or challenges (as experienced elsewhere), despite these relationships being superficially at odds with one another. This excerpt from an exchange in Group 1 exemplifies how different personal positions along the spectrum of comfort-discomfort with labels (and the factors affecting those positions) were expressed and received:

Casey: I immediately thought, you know, comfortable, *comfortable* […] If I had to explain my identity in the words of the community, I would be [gestures laying out on the table] “panromantic”, “asexual”, “transgender”, “non-binary”. But I'm also polyamorous, so it's very much, I don't know anyone who's like me. And that's okay […] Just don't put my identity down ‘cause my identity, I'm very much I don't want a label on my sexuality or my gender. I don't want it, but I recognise for some people, to have a label is to describe yourself. I personally don't want to be just a bullet point list. I don't ever want to be an essay that someone wrote, I don't want to fit in an autobiography.

James: I definitely relate to certain parts of that, especially with like how I describe my identity […] And it's also super difficult to describe in the language that we have, (=Casey: Ja), just these titles, like yes, they bring some comfort to me personally; I’m sure they bring comfort to other people as well. But like, it's more than that (=Casey: It really is).

Kiara: I feel, identities, there are set definitions of them. Just the other day I was going through […] the queer-pedia, and I was […] going through the definitions like [gestures scrolling on phone], okay, I'm waiting for myself to identify here, I can't see anything […] I feel people should define themselves. And sometimes I feel as queer folks, we tend to label people, unknowingly.

Casey: I feel even in the queer community, if people think non-binary, they think androgynous [=Several: Nodding]. But like, look at us [addressing Kiara], we are very different, [laugh], you know?

Kiara: Yeah, yeah. And also it's, [sigh], not being non-binary enough, you know.

James: And when people do try establish those terms within the non-binary thing, just like get a more specific point, then people label them as making up terms and stuff.

And that's another thing that really annoys me because, when I was much younger, then it was like “either you’re trans or you’re cis, anything in between that, you’re being a [air quotes] ‘special snowflake’, and you're wanting attention”. I hate attention, okay […] I’m non-binary. And that's okay, I'm not a special snowflake, I’m me.

Kiara: And I also find that, I feel, terms can overlap. So, with me, I identify as non-binary more on the demi-girl side. I remember when I said I identify as a lesbian, they be like “Oh no, you’re non-binary so, you know, unpopular opinion, you can’t identify as a lesbian”. And I just feel terms can [steepled fingers crossing] overlap.

Lily: I resonate with that a lot, the feeling of trying to explain while I'm talking to someone, because often people will just assume, “oh, you *look* straight, you don’t *look* queer”. And so it’s also been a weird thing for me. I didn't similarly have the vocabulary […] I identify as pansexual and I feel that fits me nicely because I see it as just liking who you like, without any restrictions, be it gender or sexuality or anything like that. I don't know, that gives me a sense of freedom.

Tenda: I am a trans man […] I‘m originally from Eastern Cape. And I never really understood why I wanted to come to Cape Town, growing up, but later on, as I progressed through high school, I knew I wanted to because I felt as if Cape Town would be that environment that would allow me to be me, because there's so much diversity here […] and there's just people being themselves.

Amara: Yeah, so I'm trans woman, and bisexual. And I really like those labels, they make me feel very safe, I guess [...] I think that's part of how I see myself and relate to the world around me is through labels, because I struggle a lot with assigning characteristics to myself in terms of like, charismatic or smart or whatever, because that's not tangible. Identity group labels really helped me because that’s objective.

Holding Self-Identification Heteroglossia. The first three respondents expressed problematisations of identity categories: Casey and James reject the reductionism of sexual and gendered subjectivity to labels (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Butler 1993a; Kiguwa, 2004), and Kiara takes issue with the prescriptive rigidity of them. James and Casey do so while vocally anticipating (*external*) that others in the group may find comfort in such terms, which Lily, Tenda, and especially Amara seem to confirm thereafter. Lily also adds a qualifier of uncertainty (*auto*) in "I don't know", which perhaps indicates a non-tenacious or cautious position in describing her contrasting comfort with an identity label. Note that for the former three, rejection or discomfort is not total; they do deploy and find "some comfort" (James) in labels, but do not feel wholly represented by them – like Finlay (2017).

These dynamics occur throughout the other groups. In Group 2, Luca uses "queer" as connected to the discourse (*internal*) of disidentification (Muñoz, 1999): "It's like a little cheat code because it's a label and it's not a label." At the same time, he anticipates (*external*): "I don't like people who use labels - let me get this right. People must choose how they identify themselves; it's not for me to decide. And if they find safety in labels, that's good for them". Indeed, the anticipation was justified since Sage then marked herself as "different from everyone else" in describing her relatively more stable identity in "cisgender lesbian". Meanwhile, Nick described a different, tense relationship with "queer", feeling an internal affinity (*personal)* for it, while grappling with the social unacceptability (*inter-/transpersonal*) of "not really labelling yourself". In this group, then, the unboundedness of "queer" was described as freeing for some and disorienting for others (Pfeffer, 2014). Jamie offered reassurance by validating multiplicity to Nick: "I think there's definitely space to use the language that makes you feel good in different times in different spaces […] That's definitely something that I do". They thus echo Perri's (2021) participants' advocacy of contextual flexibility in use of identificatory language. Jamie also described (*auto*) relating

with Luca's aversion to restricting themselves through labels, but that it is "actually pretty simple" to signify as "non-binary", "trans", and "genderqueer" – until they try to "explain the nitty gritty of how [their] gender feels to other people". They therefore touch on the pulsating heteroglossia of gender underneath the monoglossic façade of a label (Francis, 2012). Hence, their opinion that "no two people really experience it the same way".

That point was showcased in Group 3 which was, as one participant (Violet) put it, "the lesbian cohort". It was also the only multi-phasic group, where Asanda, Okuhle, and Uranaty arrived about 1 hour later than Percy, Violet, and Grace. The latter two left at the scheduled close, while the remaining members' conversation stretched on to make up for lost time. This (*contextual*) set-up meant that the latecomers' self-introductions were briefer than the others'. Nonetheless: Asanda did not draw distinctions between her use of "lesbian" and "queer", seeming to use them as uncomplicated synonyms. Uranaty described preferring to use "queer", since it is a lesser-known term in her community than "lesbian", which registers automatically and homophobically as "an enemy". In contrast, Okuhle explained preferring "lesbian" precisely because it is known, while "queer" tends to provoke others to insist that Okuhle explain herself further – which she wishes to avoid. Interactions with cis-hetero others (*interpersonal*) were therefore constructed as influencing participants' terminological decisions alongside (if not more than) their intrapsychic feelings (*personal*). Percy, from a similar background to the above participants (and who provided "queer" and "non-binary", and not "lesbian" or "woman", in her demographic survey), had opportunity to explain the two dimensions in greater depth. She feels a stronger gravitation towards "queer" than "lesbian" because, to her, the former better captures her internal sense of fluidity (*personal)*. However, she clarifies that as a femme-bodied queer, "in my community you're a 'lesbian' whether you like it or not".

This centripetal (*transpersonal*) force around "lesbian" indicating an (apparent) cis-woman attracted only to another (apparent) cis-woman was something that Violet resisted, echoing Kiara's point about overlapping terms. She described having encountered people of different genders identifying with "lesbian" and – as Jamie also did in Group 2 – made recourse to a rich history of trans and gender-nonconforming figures who have similarly identified, in order to bring forward the forgotten expansiveness of the label – an expansiveness reserved for dominantly recognised umbrellas like "queer". Violet, Jamie, and Kiara therefore echo Hord's (2020) participants' call for "lesbian" to be freed and emboldened by its divorce from binary, exclusionary systems that have hitherto structured identity. Relatedly, Grace resonated with Violet's (and elsewhere, Jamie's) not wanting to use labels that would preclude intimate relations she may yet have (Perri, 2021). She also described contending with negative connotations attached to both "queer" and "lesbian" while growing up, that positive reclamation seemed easier for the former term than the latter, and that she has used "gay" for her sexuality because she felt it a more "socially acceptable" (*inter-/transpersonal*) descriptor of homosexuality. Grace therefore touched on patriarchal ideological infusions into LGBTQIA+ terminology. This was echoed in Group 4, too.

As in the other groups, the conversational space held felt stability and comfort with labels (for cis gay men Benjamin, Caleb, and Malcolm) alongside felt instability and discomfort with them (for non-binary queers Lola and Natalia). Bookending the group's series of introductory identification accounts, Benjamin and Caleb described senses of "privilege" in their queerness. Here, "privilege" – the heteroglossia of which (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002) revealed itself at multiple points throughout this study – meant both an absence of the social-experiential struggle of not being cisgender, and the social capital of being a cis man specifically. Caleb even opined that he had never had an issue with his gender "maybe because of the privilege that is associated with being male".

He offered this after Lola's lengthy exploration – encouraged by Benjamin's prolonged curious (*external*) questioning – of their complex gender experience. Like Kiara and Casey, Lola is an "AFAB" (Assigned Female at Birth) non-binary person who maintains appearance codes that are conventionally read as feminine, thus rejecting conflations in identification and presentation (Hord, 2020). They described nonetheless (a) being frequently misread (*interpersonal*) as woman, thereby indicating the "chasm between self-identification and recognition" (Nicholas, 2019, p. 172), and (b) having discomfort with the "non-binary" term because of its dominant media representation (*internal*) as "a really androgynous or feminised AMAB [Assigned Male at Birth] person". While they do confirm that finding appearance codes (*material*) that signal gender neutrality is very difficult for any non-binary person (Cray, 2021; Galupo et al., 2020), they believe this is even more so for AFAB people: "If AMAB person wears a skirt, wears makeup, that's a little bit more obvious that it's a gender thing, whereas I'm wearing pants now. And even if I have a short haircut, people will go, 'Ah, lesbian'." After further (*external*) questioning from Benjamin, Lola exhibited (*auto/external*) a backtracking and anticipation, stating they don't want to speak to an AMAB experience. Natalia (he/she/they), an AMAB person, could then "fill in the blanks". They agreed that a non-binary identification is difficult to "physicalise" (a term the group liked and took up thereafter), and that while they don't relate to "male", they do carry male privilege by often being misread as one. Yet, exemplifying Kiara's point about LGBTQIA+ people labelling each other "unknowingly", she also described experiencing gendered marginalisation in queer spaces. There, it is "just assumed [he's] a gay dude"; they feel they don't quite belong; and she even gets the sense she is not "queer enough".

Confronting Intra-LGBTQIA+ Monoglossia. The discursive spaces of these groups validated that (dis)identifications as "queer" (and as other terms) are highly individualised, varied, first-person determinations – which, according to Sedgwick (1994), they can only

ever truly be. However, as should be evident by now, their accounts are shot through with tensions between determinations by the self and by the collective. Participants described grappling with various prescriptive, hierarchical, normative, and myopic forces within the LGBTQIA+/queer community. Returning to the emblematic excerpt, Lily's description of the invalidatory engagement commonly lodged her way that she doesn't "*look* queer" (*material*) was also experienced by many other participants internal to the community. Violet and Asanda narrated often being assumed straight by both queer and non-queer others because they pass (dominantly code) as cis-hetero women (Hutson, 2010; Pfeffer, 2014). Jamie described experiencing a normative pressure "from somewhere" (*transpersonal/internal*) to aesthetically perform "female masculinity" (Halberstam, 2011). Casey reported coming up against transnormativity within the trans community (i.e., their trans identification being undermined because they do not wish to biomedically transition; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016; Sumerau et al, 2020). When Casey spoke of this, I offered that they were tapping into "the theme of good and bad queers" – an extension/addition to Oswin's (2005) meaning – to which their group assented. Importantly, James described how "good queers" critique "bad queers" for "embarrassing" them in the eyes of the cis-hetero majority – that is, for diverging from dominant, binary systems of intelligibility (Sumerau et al., 2020).

These invalidatory regards were also described as being thrown at couple formations inside the queer community. The experience of pan- and bi-erasure (i.e., a non-straight couple being assumed straight because it is comprised of an AMAB and AFAB person; Callis, 2014; Hammack et al., 2019; Sumerau et al., 2020) was brought up across all the groups. Additionally, Uranaty described arguing with some queers who were invalidating pregnancy in "butch" lesbians because it did not fit their masculine leanings. This echoes Hames's (2018) participants' irritation with the butch-femme lesbian binary. Violet narrated how one non-binary coupling in her friend group ended because the more feminine partner abused the

more masculine one, but her other friends doubted this because of its inverted gender power dynamic. These (*trans-/interpersonal*) accounts exhibit how the internalised monoglossic gender binary operates to exclude, discredit, and impossibilise certain heteroglossic appearances, pairings, and dynamics within the LGBTQIA+ community itself (Francis, 2012).

Furthermore, participants narrated intra-communal conflicts over identificatory labels themselves – those already recognised in the acronym and "the others" (a further minoritising phrase Kiara had frustratingly encountered). For one, James described "pan and bi communities arguing [that] bisexual is transphobic," while Lily (in her interview) conversely described transphobic accusations lodged at her "pan" identity. Both participants resisted these accusations, finding them nonsensical. For another, Casey described others rejecting their asexuality as a queer identity at all, despite it queerly challenging normative forms of intimacy (Hammack et al., 2019). While many of these (*interpersonal*) invalidations were described as overt, either experienced through direct interaction or observed occurring in popular online queer forums, some participants also described them operating more implicitly. Natalia and Malcolm (quoted here) shared a sense of not being told "outright" that they "don't belong" or hearing "we don't want you here" in certain queer spaces where like-identified/-presenting individuals "gravitate towards each other", but nonetheless feeling rejecting energies or atmospheres therein. Interactions with intra-communal non-belonging may therefore also reflect Nicholas's (2019) focus on "less easy to identify levels" of exclusion – which, they add, are "resultant from privilege and norms" (p. 173).

Indeed, revealing itself again in these internal conflicts is the multifaceted concept of privilege. In Group 4, Caleb and Benjamin (quoted here) related being uncomfortable within gay male scenes (*inter-/transpersonal*) because of "toxic" norms to do with debauchery ("drugs, alcohol, sex") and bodily hierarchy ("you've got to have a gym body") therein,

which the pair experienced as criteria that "make [them] feel shit" (*personal*) for not meeting. Caleb added he felt that it a "very White male thing, though, specifically", and that such figures reason: "society has marginalised us, so we're going to take the attributes of everything that's been given privilege, like the straight White male […] do everything that that guy does [but] better". While the pair criticised homonormative gays who enact their identities through behaviours that reinforce White cis-hetero-patriarchy (Conte, 2018; Duggan, 2002; Sumerau et al., 2020), they also constructed undealt-with experiences of homophobic oppression as motivating those enactments. Thus, these narrators demonstrated understanding that subordination to and complicity with the hegemon can work simultaneously (Brown, 2009; Brown & Nash, 2010; Oswin, 2005).

At the same time, they may have exhibited operating in this fractured locus themselves. Malcolm, while conceding (*external*) to the group that he may "misunderstand it", stated he'd "never felt any form of privilege being male". He constructed the term as meaning ability to "get away with more" or having a "natural head-start" – which he stated he didn't, having experienced a lot of hardship and struggle throughout his life. In their interviews, Caleb and Benjamin took issue with Malcolm's denial of male privilege. However, in his interview, Malcolm took issue with being the only person of colour from a lower socio-economic background in Group 4. Thus, beyond the general heteroglossia of the word "privilege" (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002), there may have been intersectional myopia (unconsciously) at work here too. Malcolm's experience of male privilege may not be regarded "the same as" Benjamin's and Caleb's because gender cannot quite be considered (as the latter pair seemed to do) in isolation from race and class positions and the (dis)empowerments these craft in an individual's Moebius strip (Lugones, 2010; Rao, 2020; Riggs, 2010).

Clearer manifestations of intersectional blindness were constructed across the groups as being key factors in intra-communal conflicts. Kiara and Tenda shared frustrations over competitive victimhood (Wiley & Bikmen, 2012) between "Black" and "queer" in, for example, Black Lives Matter protests led by "homophobe[s]" (Kiara): "people think that [one kind of] discrimination is better than the next" (Tenda). While Lola did offer the importance of intersectional awareness at several points in their group, they mentioned in their interview that they would have liked to explore more deeply how some people problematically tend to foreground their dimensions of marginalisation (e.g., non-heterosexuality) and ignore their dimensions of privilege (e.g., Whiteness, maleness). Jamie, in fact, constructed this intersectional splitting as quite conscious in some cases: "I think some people feel more comfortable saying offensive things that they know are offensive because they have a layer of marginalisation which they feel protects them". Ultimately, this kind of mindset was constructed as a main culprit behind intra-communal enactments of sexism, racism, bi-/transphobia, and the various more Otherings explored so far.

Hegemonic and Counter-Hegemonic Logics. Beyond the above separable axis misconception of intersectionality (Rao, 2020; Riggs, 2010), participants narrated hitting (and breaking down) walls of other hegemonic logics to do with queer identification. Separately, Lola and Jamie echoed Kiara's point, in the emblematic excerpt, of the difficulty of locating oneself in ever-expanding lists of "hyper-specific", even "abstract" (Lola) labels of alternative sexualities and genders – use of which, as James noted, could result in "special snowflake" mockery (Cover, 2018; Sumerau et al., 2020). Jamie narrated that, when they were "trying to find [their] place in the world" (*personal*), there were online "toxic queer cultures" that viewed pressure to use micro-labels either as entirely necessary or entirely damaging. "As with anything when there's like two very opposing options," Jamie stated, "I don't think either of them are right. I think there was a lot of damage that was done by that

discourse more so than labelling specifically". Indeed, Cover (2018) and Perri (2018) propose queer micro-labelling projects are both productively expanding the hitherto limited lexicon of identity and unproductively reinforcing dominant identity schemas and policing of categories. In recognising the simultaneity of complicity and resistance in such projects, and that determining the absolute superiority of either adoption or rejection of micro-labels is not sound, Jamie advocates stepping out of dichotomous choices and surfing the binarism to find what is personally, non-prescriptively meaningful therein (Boellstorff, 2010; Muñoz, 1999; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015). Further, I would posit that, overall, participants' narrations and dialogues about their self-identifications seemed to point to a balance between relationism and anti-relationism (Muñoz, 2009): a communitarian call to respect deeply individualised self-determinations.

Another hegemonic identity logic that participants described resisting was the idea of sameness over time (Hammack et al., 2019; Perri, 2021). Across the groups, narrators held, validated, and related to shifting self-understandings and use of labels as they gradually learnt (of themselves, of new vocabulary, and from new encounters with LGBTQIA+ others). At the same time, they described "feeling bad about change" (Kiara). In Group 1, James, Tenda, and Amara voiced sharing a feeling of self-invalidation (*personal*) because, contrary to other trans people, they did not "know" themselves as trans from the earliest possible age. "The whole three-year-old trans person thing was a huge thing for me […] [It's] the public perception […] the most accepted kind of trans person," Amara narrated. In contrast, "when you're 15 or 18, 40, then it's like, 'No, come […] if you were this, you would have known, right?'". Not only do these narrators point towards the problem of the innate versus latent queer binary (Sedgwick, 1994), but they also indicate a wider issue to do with queer self-development and time. Rao (2020) calls this issue "chrononormativity", meaning "hegemonic temporal trajectories" such as "the progressive linearity of straight time" (p. 16). In Group 2,

when discussing that, ultimately, individual queers ought to find and do what makes us feel comfortable, Jamie opined that:

> People with a more heteronormative experience of the world… get to do that [in] puberty in high school […] all in one go […] I think often for queer people that happens a little bit later […] it can be traumatic, as well, to have that experience of creating yourself again, a second time.

In Group 4, Caleb replicated Jamie's construction, and in his case, described it interfering with his romantic (*interpersonal*) relationships. He and his partners would be "out of sync" and in "a different [respective] stage" of coming out and of self-acceptance, which meant Caleb had to relive parts of a process he had already been through. Indeed, these backwards or regressive feelings – as well as forwards utopian feelings, like Tenda's young dream of moving to the dominantly crafted (*internal*) queer African capital – are posited as integral to experiences of being queer in the heteronormative world (McDermott, 2021; Muñoz, 2009; Rao, 2020). Hence, as also mentioned in the groups, the importance of recognising that progress has been made for LGBTQIA+ liveability, while queerphobia of a colonial "past" also moves forward with it (Matebeni, 2015; Tucker, 2009).

Other counter-hegemonic ideas about relating to negative affect (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; McDermott, 2021) emerged across the groups. Responding to Benjamin's inquiry into the relationship between their non-binary experience and their mental health, Lola described having felt "not trans enough or non-binary enough" because they don't experience intense gender dysphoria. Lola's binary trans-masculine boyfriend, however, reminded Lola that they do feel "a lot of euphoria" (*personal*) when addressed correctly (*interpersonal*) with non-binary terminology. This echoes Beischel et al.'s (2021) and Galupo et al.'s (2020) participants who dislodged dysphoria as defining the trans experience, and

who demonstrated that gender euphoria and dysphoria are complex, non-exclusionary forces that manifest (or don't) in a variety of ways among non-cisgender individuals.

In Group 2, flipping negative affective ties to queer identifications took the form of a discussion on reclaiming slurs. Sage, Luca, and Jamie described being quite comfortable doing so. The latter two established commonality over using slurs like "fag(got)" and "dyke" for themselves, as well as for and from close friends with whom a mutual understanding of their use as "a term of endearment" (Luca) is established. All three, however, painted reclamation of the Afrikaans slur, "moffie" as much more difficult, thanks in part to the oppressive history (*internal*) of the language. Its original intent – to shame femininity in men and condemn homosexuality as a threat to the patriarchal "gender order on which Afrikaner power rested" (Pieterse, 2013, p. 620) – was constructed as carrying robustly through to the present. For example, Sage described her father throwing it at her younger brothers when they cry or talk about their feelings. She also described these brothers as "little assholes" who talk problematically, and constructed with Jamie how bigotry gets dialogically taught to children like this (*interpersonal*), internalised to be later externalised. In any case, for these narrators, the chain of pre-existing discursive effects (Butler, 1993b; Bakhtin, 1981) for "moffie" seemed more unbroken than for English slurs, hence the term's offending centripetal force was described as harder to shake. Divergently, Nick acknowledged the others' perspectives but stated that saying slurs "feels gross" to him, and so doesn't reclaim them at all. The absence of consensus on the matter, also found in Hames (2018), highlights how reclamation projects are indeed quite precarious (Herbert, 2015).

I offered this group that reclaiming slurs for oneself might be something like identifying with regular terms: use what feels good for you personally, and do not use what does not. The last, and perhaps most interesting, counter-hegemonic logic entailed locating

that relatable gravitation of identifying in very unexpected places. James offered the following to the Group 1:

> [I] ask myself, "What does my gender feel like? What does it taste like? What does it smell like?" […] my boyfriend, he decides, "No, my gender is a night full of stars, when I look up at that, I feel 'Yes, that's me'". And my one personally, is like those abandoned mansions, just completely overgrown. That's how I feel […] it shows just how wide spectrum is, how many possibilities there are, that you can relate to.

As Muñoz (1999) describes, "[t]o disidentify is to read oneself […] in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (p. 12), and indeed, starry skies and abandoned mansions are not culturally coded as options to which one can orient a gendered identification. James's account seems to exemplify Yuval-Davis's (2016) warning that we should detach ourselves from the very concept of gender, because upon closer examination we discover that it touches many things beyond borders and undermines our assumptions about what gender even is.

At the same time, though finding James's illustration very interesting, Lily (in her interview) mentioned trying this kind of identifying for a few days after the group, but not being successful. Interpreting that failure, she said, "Maybe I'm just not in touch with myself enough", to which I responded: "Maybe, or maybe it's also […] an individual thing. Maybe it fits you to describe yourself like that. Maybe it doesn't". I therefore offered participants a reminder of the dynamic they displayed when introducing their relationships with identificatory terms to one another, a dynamic they lamented as often absent or flawed when in interaction with other queer/LGBTQIA+ people "out there". That is: let us hold heteroglossia and allow – even admire – difference without falling into hierarchical evaluation of one another's "queer" identifications.

Strange and Intimate: Cis-Hetero Enactments of Monoglossia

That participants narrated difficult confrontations with un-held heteroglossia, hegemonic logics, and hierarchical dichotomies *inside* the queer community, enacted by LGBTQIA+ Others, speaks to the widespread and inevitable internalisation of cis-heteronormative ideology and social tactics among them (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; McArthur, 2015). The voices of cis-hetero Others, internalised through socialisation, get externalised intra-communally (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2004) when queers debate one another’s authenticity to claiming certain terms and performing presentations in particular ways (Foucault; 1978; Sedgwick, 1990; 1994). This point – as well as many others that likewise turned focus to cis-hetero people’s enactments of gender-sexuality monoglossia to the detriment of queers’ psychological health – is captured in the following excerpt from Group 3:

> Percy: Having to explain is the hardest part. I always find it very, very hard to explain myself, or explain my actions. Can we not just go forward without (=Grace: Yeah) me having to explain? Like, you don't always have to understand, that’s my thinking […] because there are certain things that you as a person can never understand about me, even if I explain them to you.
>
> Violet: But I think people do understand, whoever like the [air quotes] “people” are, I think they do understand but they want you to prove yourself. And that's the difference. Very rarely are you ever actually educating somebody with them listening.
>
> Grace: I think one thing I've just always loved about the queer spaces I find myself in is that there's so much more of that kind of understanding that you won't necessarily understand but still respecting that individual […] And, I know for some people, I mean, myself at some point included […] I didn't even understand what was going on […] Like the rest of the world, outside a lot of queer spaces, not that every queer space is completely unproblematic (=Violet: Yeah). But outside that, there's so much

> of the, you need to prove why you feel like this. And that's sometimes really hectic to do because it's quite traumatic for some people.

After the latecomers arrived, were oriented, and introduced themselves, they too brought up this frustrating theme of cis-hetero people's invasive questioning, and provided accounts of different ways the underlying dynamic manifested:

> Uranaty: There's a difference that, people always say, "how do you intimate?" Like, do I ask you how do you intimate? But I said to them, "come to me, I'll show you (=Okuhle & Grace: [Laugh]) how we be intimate […] So don't ask me 'how do we have sex?', all this stuff, I don't ask you how to have sex".
>
> Asanda: I think it is different to me as a lesbian who don't wear [gesturing to Uranaty] like that, like butch […] My friend I think for almost 10 years, we did have a argument when I was came out as a lesbian [...] we're like sisters, I can say it like that. But […] you know when you're trying to explain to someone but, she doesn't want to listen […] because she have her own things that you are saying in her mind […] I'm disappointed in her but, I lost my friend because of I am a lesbian.
>
> Okuhle: I also had problems in high school […] there'll always be a conversation about the LGBTIQ people. And […] being the only lesbian […] the whole class will look back at me, and I have to compete with the teacher […] So, it got to the point, they were like, "gays and lesbian must get burned, what they doing is a sin" [...] And I had this bisexual friend […] she was like "if you did abortion, that's a sin. If you're having sex before marriage, that's a sin. So there's nothing wrong with being lesbian or being gay or being bisexual, stop doing that" […] Luckily I was not there, but […] I was not gonna go inside and explain myself.

Invasions, Invalidations, and (In)visibilities in Cis-Hetero Society. The exasperating (*interpersonal*) experience of having to explain oneself emerged in other groups.

In Group 1, for example, Casey described being asked – by queer people – if they have tried sex, as if without such experience, their claim to asexual identity is doubtful. Kiara linked this to their having faced a similar question from cis-hetero men, implying their claim to lesbian identity is based on their not having had "the right" kind of hetero-sex. Lily narrated another example:

> This guy comes up to me and he's like, "Oh, so I heard you're gay now… is it because of your [gay] sister and you're just trying to be like her?" […] And then, I dated a guy afterwards. And then, "oh so you're straight again? Oh, you don't know what you want". [Sigh], it's infuriating, having to explain yourself, but also not wanting to give someone the satisfaction of seeing you frustrated.

As Violet and Asanda pointed out – and as voiced by participants in Judge (2018) and Sumerau et al. (2020) – these lines of questioning are not launched from a place of genuine curiosity and openness to learn.

By comparison, that place was present in Group 4. Although Malcolm and I felt a little uneasy with Benjamin's prolonged questioning of Lola's non-binary experience, Lola clarified in their interview experiencing it "coming from a good place", and not "invasive" as experienced "in a different setting or by different types of people". In contrast, the above invalidatory questionings can be seen as demonstrations of the dominant forcing queer Others (1) to articulate themselves, failingly, in the monoglossic language of gender and sexuality (Francis, 2012; Nicholas, 2019; Cover, 2018; Sumerau et al., 2020), and (2) resultantly, to internalise that sense of incoherence. Violet's scepticism of the "not understanding" attached to such cis-hetero Others exemplifies Sedgwick's (1990) powerful point that "ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and […] regimes of truth" (p. 8). Instead of an absence of knowing at all, these questions indicate the presence of a warped and unrelenting sense of gender expertise

(Nicholas, 2019) – hence Asanda's friend did not "want to listen […] because she have her own things that you are saying in her mind". Thus, these interactional tactics represent micro-aggressive, quotidian manifestations of the violence directed towards queers because our very existence threatens the cis-hetero matrix of gender and sexual intelligibility (Butler, 2002; Finlay, 2017; Francis, 2012; Nadal et al., 2016).

The sense of threat attached to not obeying monoglossic forces was also constructed as influencing participants' younger realisations of being queer and their current performances in (not) signalling their queerness. Echoing Grace in the above excerpt, participants across the groups (e.g., Luca, Lola, and Violet) described sensing their difference at a young age without being able to name it – demonstrating the un-interpellated queer unconscious (Finlay, 2017). Besides this being partly to do with a lack of adequate language, they constructed non-affirming social environments (*inter-/transpersonal)* as keeping them from stepping consciously into their queer limelight. Violet captured it as "not knowing what it was but knowing that there was something a lot deeper in me that was different, and that everybody around me could reject me for one day". Violet, Grace, and Percy resonated with this sense of potential ostracism, and even greater violence, influencing their present-day movements in the cis-hetero world of strangers (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Judge, 2018). A being "scared all the time" (Violet) and a state of hypervigilance (Nadal et al., 2016) about how strangers read and react to their demeanour, presentation, and speech (Percy) or their innocently affectionate conduct with their partners (Grace) was constructed as reason for performing a kind of strategic hiding (Perri, 2021; Poulain, 2019). "It's kind of difficult to be fully you, especially when you're outside, because anything can just happen," Percy said, "I've learned to avoid many things, and I'm very good at saying nothing". What seems to help in this hiding, as Asanda offered to Uranaty who appears "butch" (i.e., codes with

female masculinity) in contrast to her, is whether one passes (*material*) as cisgender and heterosexual.

Indeed, in Group 1, participants related over experiences of everyday sexism predicated on their (not) passing that reinforced the patriarchal gender binary. For example, AFAB non-binary individuals Kiara, Casey, and James shared (still) facing harassment by random men (including those in protective positions like security guards and doctors) who view them as women despite alterations they've made to their appearances. In contrast, Tenda and Amara provided accounts of how their respective bodily transitions have been accompanied by social transitions in these regards. Tenda – like Clements et al.'s (2021) trans-masculine participants – can now walk down a street with his little sister and no longer have men predatorily approach them, as used to happen before he went on testosterone. Amara – like participants in Arayasirikul and Wilson (2019) – described the reverse: that she never used to get harassed when presenting as male, but now that she presents as woman, she does. When I asked if this has affected how she chooses to present (because I, an AMAB genderfluid person who sometimes codes femininely, have often felt tensions about reception of my presentation choices), Amara constructed being stuck between a rock and a hard place: "it's very much like do I wanna be harassed or do I wanna be misgendered?". She thus provided a poignant lived example that "passing […] offers a way through but no way out of a society driven by trans-misogyny" (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019, p. 1433). In the same thread of dialogue, these trans and gender-nonconforming participants also described institutional (*impersonal*) manifestations of gender monoglossia, such as being policed in their use of sex-segregated public bathrooms and treated suspiciously through airport customs (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Nadal et al., 2016; Sumerau et al., 2020). Tying together their experiences of interpersonal harassment and structural hostilities therefore shone a light on how the political manifests in the (*inter*)personal (Yuval-Davis, 2016).

Interestingly, Sage (a cis woman who codes in more "masculine" ways) too described sometimes being the target of bathroom policing when misgendered as a man. In fact, her group provided examples of not just how the above cis-heteronormative dynamics manifest in other contexts and institutions, but also how categorical social positions cannot be relied on to predict experiences of privilege and marginalisation (Cohen, 1997; Wiley & Bikmen, 2010). Jamie, Nick, and Luca narrated facing homophobia from their school peers and the apathetic nature with which those incidents were (not) dealt by teachers and school administrators. In fact, Jamie described their school as exploitative of queer learners:

> If you were visibly in a minority, you would get used to make the school look good. But […] when you actually needed safety from homophobia […] you didn't get that, and you were told you're ungrateful [because] if you were at another school, you would be beat up for being gay.

Note that these systemic (*impersonal*) problematics (Francis, 2018; Nadal et al., 2016) occurred at schools whose "ad campaign" (Jamie) was being liberal and progressive, making them hardly any different from conservative institutions in which one might expect these occurrences (McArthur, 2015). Hence, for Nick, moving from the Free State to Cape Town "didn't change anything" regarding his experience of being bullied.

While Sage did experience discrimination from one teacher – who asked her to "keep [her] gayness under wraps" and therefore echoed the promotion of queerphobia by Okuhle's teachers and those that Francis (2018) examined – she narrated not experiencing any problems from her peers. "The kids were pretty open to it", Sage explained, "I think 'cause a lot of [them] come from very sort of tough backgrounds, so […] we were quite close as a class". Sage, the only "Coloured" individual in the otherwise "White" (or in Luca's case, White-passing) group, marked herself as "different" also in the sense of having gone to a public school, in a lower socioeconomic background than the others. Thus, participants'

respective raced and classed identities, and the power positions dominantly assigned to them, did not seem to *determine* the extent/severity of their experiences of schoolyard queerphobia in a straightforward way (Riggs, 2010; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

Something else that Luca and Grace had experienced at school – being outed – touched on another dynamic with the cis-hetero world that Group 3 participants initially stood divided on: the matter of disclosing one's queerness. Uranaty emphatically rejected that queers "have to come out" because: (a) straight people do not have to announce their identities, and so compulsory disclosure reinforces queer subordinate difference (Sedgwick, 1990); (b) it is not a once-off but a never-ending, exasperating process (Hames, 2018; McDonald et al., 2020); and (c) doing so tends to prompt further having to explain herself to others: "every time you say 'I'm a lesbian', there's a question". While her co-participants related to these frustrations, they also tried to caution against absolutely prescribing that queers totally reject disclosure, as Uranaty's assertive talk seemed to call for. One reason: Asanda and Violet (quoted here), who pass as non-queer women, explained that: "if I didn't come out, nobody would know". They therefore indicated how aesthetic coding (*material*) does the disclosure work for some queers and not others, who then turn to speech acts (McDonald et al., 2020).

Another reason: Grace narrated a different kind of affect and significance in her experience of disclosure:

> It's just a part of me that I want them to know about […] if they were thinking of making some kind of homophobic comment [...] I don't wanna say "no excuse" but they're aware of my presence, and I also feel that […] especially if a lot of people a bit older than me came out or I knew that they were queer in some shape or form, it was comforting for me, and it made me feel a bit safer […] so it's a combination of doing it for me and also […] for other people to feel a bit more safe.

She thus narrated how her disclosure to cis-hetero Others operated differently to Uranaty's, in that it almost warned against queerphobic talk. This highlights McDonald et al.'s (2020) axiom that individual closeting/disclosing experiences, even among like-identified people, are often non-identical. Grace also constructed disclosure as positive depending on the orientation of the person to whom it is done. Disclosure, therefore, was constructed as multi-valenced and interactionally dependent (McDonald et al., 2020). After Grace's account, Uranaty nonetheless repeated her rejecting stance, and the thread ended with Grace conceding (*external*): "each to their own".

Certain dialogical features may have influenced this in-group disagreement and its revisitation thereafter in interviews. Because Uranaty was a latecomer to the group, she did not get to hear Grace's account of how she was outed both at her school and to her parents. "I remember feeling […] just so powerless […] having that choice taken away from me", she had said, contrasting it with how "really nice" it now feels to have the choice to disclose herself on her own terms. Had Uranaty been present for this account (*contextual*), perhaps it would have altered how she engaged on the disclosure matter. In their interviews, while they both requested realisation of the (utopian) ideal – that is, the demise of the closet as a shaping feature of queer life (Sedgwick, 1990) – they also acknowledged each other's positions navigating the lived persistence of it. "That's what's most comfortable to her and that's what works," said Grace. "It can be positive for them […] [I] can't just say you can't because I don't want to come out," said Uranaty. In response to the latter, I again brought up the need to hold heteroglossia: "I think maybe it's like the terms that you use to describe yourself. It's just for you. What other terms people use, it's for them (=Uranaty: It's for them, yeah)". Indeed, because coming out is constituted by paradox – being both private and public, compulsory and forbidden, marginal and central, open and secret (Sedgwick, 1990) – disclosure processes can perhaps only ever be ongoing negotiations by individual queers

across changing contexts, feelings, and interactions (McDonald et al., 2020). As next explored, these negotiations also entail considering the impact of disclosure on those who are close to us, for as Sedgwick (1990) notes: "When gay people in a homophobic society come out … especially to parents … it is with the consciousness of a potential for serious injury that is likely to go in both directions" (p. 80).

Disownment, Denial, and (Dis)Integration in Cis-Hetero Families. As Asanda described of the 10-year-long friendship with someone who was like a sister, participants across the groups narrated how their bondedness to family members was weakened or severed simply by their being queer. In Group 4, Malcolm, Lola, and Benjamin co-constructed an untraversable hole in (*interpersonal*) belonging created by parental rejection of queerness (McDermott et al., 2021). Malcolm described as a child witnessing his late father display hatred towards queer individuals in their community, as well as "disgust" towards him when he was "walking or dancing" in a demeanour that signalled difference, saying "jy's amper soos 'n moffie"[3]. He also construed his father's homophobia as perhaps coming dialogically from the surrounding (*transpersonal*) community. People would gender-bash (Finlay, 2017) Malcolm to his "macho man" father by calling him a "meisie" (girl), and Malcolm opined that "maybe those things made him also feel the way he felt". His father's contempt meant Malcolm felt "so, so far away" from him that it precluded a sense of sameness, belonging, or "shared identity" (Benjamin) that is culturally expected of family (McDermott et al., 2021). This was despite the fact that Malcolm centripetally "tick[s] all the other boxes" (Benjamin) in terms of being a good child. Lola, who likewise was "a model child in every other way", similarly painted their mother's rejection as centrifugal in her conduct as a good parent (which Benjamin likened to his own parents): "in every way except that she doesn't accept my queerness, she's a great mom". Like Malcolm – and Jamie, too –

[3] Translation: "you're almost like a faggot".

Lola extended compassion (McDermott et al., 2021) to their mother for her observable struggle with internalised shame and "principles" in being unable to accept her child's queerness. Nonetheless, rejecting something so "fundamental" (Benjamin) about them demonstrated "conditional love" (Lola) – which James also described of their own non-accepting family. Lola thus claimed: "my mom never kicked me out physically. But she kicked me out emotionally".

Physical disownment was indeed narrated by other participants, reflecting experiences of queer youth in McDermott et al. (2021). Okuhle described as a teenager being kicked out by her mother for four years. Asanda narrated a longer journey: her family arranged a heterosexual marriage for her, and after several years of unhappiness, Asanda started an affair with a woman. Her and her husband's families had interventions regarding this, but they were ineffective, as was their disownment of Asanda thereafter. She remained resolute that her lesbianism could not be undone, which, as Asanda expressed, they ought to have known since they caught her in homoerotic play when she was a child. As was the case with Okuhle, spending many years standing her ground on her unchanging queerness eventually brought Asanda's family to reconsider their stance. Now, these families are explicitly supportive of Asanda and Okuhle and even attend LGBTQIA+ events like Pride with them. Percy's account of her family, however, does not have this happy-ending trajectory. Responding to Grace's family problematics narration, she expressed: "it's so nice to hear that you've never been beaten up" – as Percy had been many times. An important side note: although "Coloured" Grace constructed her family enacting social/psychological as opposed to physical violence, both Asanda and Percy expressed surprise (in their interviews) that her account disconfirmed the blackwashing homophobia discourse (*internal*), decoupling raced identity from queerphobic experiences (Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

Returning to Percy: she was "cut off" as a teenager because of her desire to wear "boys' clothes", and only recently returned to her mother's property because she had run out of options – not because of her mother's newfound acceptance. Percy constructed that "toxic" home as requiring her to perform survival-based withdrawal behaviours (McDermott et al., 2021) much like in the dangerous outside world: she remains "in a corner", having learnt "it's better to not say anything" to her mother at all, who only "sees what she sees" and not "what you just explained to her". According to Percy, her mother has never apologised for her multifariously violent behaviour (*interpersonal*) nor "the role it plays in my reality" (*personal*). One such behaviour is a dialogical act, duplicitous because it is based on a clash of realities between perpetrators and targets of micro-aggressions (Nadal et al., 2016): "They just say something, for them, it's completely fine and normal to say. With you, it's like a brick just fell out of the hand and you're [expected to be] normal after that".

Participants in other groups described several such duplicitous dialogical enactments coming from family members. When Kiara came out to their sister, she responded: "I still love you regardless," which evoked a chorus of shared disapproval from their group. The term "regardless" was constructed as implying "a negative aspect" (Lily and Tenda) to queerness, as if "they're so heroic" (Amara) for looking past it. I offered the group that it was "like the difference between acceptance and tolerance", where tolerance serves to keep untroubled the hierarchical binary of normalcy for the dominant and lesser-ness for the Other (Finlay, 2017; Nicholas, 2019). In Group 4, Malcolm and Lola shared disapproval over a religious discourse (*internal*) circulating in their family and community circles (*transpersonal*) of hating the sin but loving the sinner (Nadal et al., 2016; Pieterse, 2013). This manifested in messages like "it's fine if you're gay as long as you don't act on it", meaning "live a life of abstinence and deprive yourself of [love]" (Lola). In Group 3, Violet described dialogical silence being used as an Othering tactic (Sedgwick, 1990): "if I'm with

certain family members and everybody's […] chatting about […] relationships, or one day having children […] they just won't ask me. And that's how […] I know that these people know that I'm queer". Violet adds that when it comes to those topics, "it's just decided that that's not for you," constructing silence a form of active denial. Denial also manifested in Group 2's familial accounts. Although Nick and Jamie are both out to their respective parents who claim to be okay with it, whenever their partners visit them and behave in ways where "clearly there is something going on there" (Jamie), their parents respond with "that's your friend, right?" (Nick). These illustrations of family members who "think they're more accepting than they are in reality" (Jamie) may therefore demonstrate how the unconscious maintenance of gender and sexual monoglossia, to the detriment of queer children, persists by any contradictions necessary (Finlay, 2017).

Hearing these pain-laden accounts, participants with more accepting families described feeling comparatively "lucky" (Violet), "fortunate" (Luca, Jamie), "grateful" (Caleb, Casey, Violet,), and (as a synonym, thus emerging with another nuance; Chizkik & Chizhik, 2002) "privileged" (Luca, Natalia). This fortune is almost total for some participants, who narrated not having at all been "mistreated by [their] family" (Natalia), instead "accept[ing them] one hundred percent" (Caleb). Others constructed their luck as partial. Casey described their parents as "quite supportive. They weren't openly supportive, but they would respect my decision". Jamie echoed this: "my family are accepting […] [but] they're like 'we're okay with it, we're not gonna talk about it'". Luca too described his accepting family not really knowing how to talk about what they otherwise seemed "fine with". Violet's family members "put in work to […] try and make [her] as comfortable as possible," but there "are still faults, and things could be better". Looking at the seeming contradiction (*auto*) in these constructions, I read it functioning productively (Yuval-Davis, 2016): evoking a resilience-enhancing gratitude (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018) for whatever

positivity there is in an imperfect familial embrace of child queerness, especially compared to outright ostracism.

Indeed, comparisons to other families were embedded in accounts of a more reparative or desire-based orientation (Sedgwick, 1994; Tuck & Yang, 2014). The parents of Violet's current partner, for example, regard the couple without difference in a positive way: "they validate our relationship and see us as being a partnership the way that they are a partnership". Similarly, Sage (whose rejecting father prevented her more tolerating mother from attending Sage's wedding) finds acceptance in her spouse's family who, "as religious as they are", nonetheless attended their wedding. Sage provides another account of a gay family friend whose mother – "a woman that I grew up around", therefore embedded in the same socio-cultural (*contextual; transpersonal*) milieu as Sage's own family – accepts him wholeheartedly and even accompanies him to LGBTQIA+ events. Though there is some discontent in this situation, prompting Sage to ask herself "why can't my family be like that?", she does find solace in being able to visit these friends' homes. Likewise, Jamie found it "really healing" to visit a non-binary friend's "poster family […] for being a good parent to your queer and trans kids". They narrated: "[it] made me feel so much more comfortable within myself and safe", and even "good to go back to my family, which still needs some time". These positive relationships therefore resembled what McDermott et al. (2021)'s participants constructed: that being afforded familial respect and support for their self-determinations enhanced their psychological well-being. For those with difficult familial relationships, hearing others' relative fortune was not narrated as reinforcing their own sense of misfortune. Instead, they described feeling "so happy" (Grace) and "a bit more hopeful" (Lola) to hear directly that kinship rejection was not a universal experience for queer children. Indeed, as the next chapter explores, seeing these reparative possibilities was constructed across the groups as essential for positive queer self-development.

Exile and Home: Images of Queer Self in the Social

If, as dialogism contends, the self is moulded by Others (Aubert & Soler, 2007; Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2004), then portrayals of LGBTQIA+/queer Others – whether experienced through embodied interaction (*interpersonal*), media depictions, or networks of language (*internal*) – should influence how queers come to understand themselves (McInroy & Craig, 2017). Indeed, narrators across the groups illustrated how positive, negative, and even absent representations of what it means to be queer, or a particular kind of queer, had a significant impact on their developing senses of self. The following excerpt from Group 2 exemplifies these significances:

> Jamie: I struggled with my gender for years without knowing what I was […] I couldn't even let myself think a fully formed sentence about like, I feel weird about my gender. And I had no resources for that. I had resources for talking about queerness, a little bit, and they were bad resources that I wouldn't wish on anybody […] I met this friend of mine when I was in grade eleven. And I'd never met somebody who was non-binary before […] And I met them and we became super, super close friends really quickly […] that's an experience I have with sameness […] that first person you meet who understands what it's like to be you […] you're like, "oh, my God, I'm not crazy. I'm at home now" […] for the first time ever, I could […] feel some sense of, "it's okay, I can let myself explore this, I can let myself be who I am" […] only after that point did I start like letting myself express my gender differently […] And that was a massive experience of […] sameness having a huge impact on my quality of life.
>
> Sage: My first experience of like sameness with me identifying as a lesbian was quite late […] I went [to an all-female queer event], I checked it out and I immediately felt at home, 'cause everyone that I spoke to had if not exactly the same experience, had

so much similarities in their experience, in what they were feeling, in how they identify […] it was only after being exposed to that that I became confident in how I identify […] At that point, I was […] just done with trying to be what my family wants me to be […] At one point, my mom's family actually tried to have an intervention with me because my younger cousin […] she's come out as lesbian as well. And it's this thing of “Ja, you influenced her […]”, which is ridiculous.

Jamie: [They] think it’s contagious.

Luca: I've never really had a figure in my life that I could look to, specifically a queer, masculine figure […] even at school, I was like, the only queer kid who came out, and then the one person who I knew was queer […] He was that gay and mean stereotype […] so, growing up with only really the internet as an outlet for queerness, YouTube (=Jamie: Mmm) [Nick nods] became a safe space for me […] before Abigail came out as trans, she was my only real example of positive queer masculinity […] and I was like, “Wow, this is who I want to be” […] I don’t know how to say this without stepping on people's toes. But […] the idea of a role model never went away after she came out, like this person is still the person that I wanted to be. So, and then on top of that, I never really had male friends that were queer until I met my current roommate […] as much as I had queer friends who were women […] they couldn't relate to the certain specificities of what it means to be a queer man […] but when I'm talking to my roommate […] everything just clicks.

Nick: I relate to the YouTube situation because even though I have a gay brother, he wasn’t really a big influence in my life until more recently. YouTube was a major, major role in my life; it was like my safe space […] a place to go escape and just feel like someone was there […] instead of just being in my own head all the time.

Mirror Matters: (Not) Seeing Oneself in Models of Queerness. Jamie's opening remark – that the paucity of cultural resources (*internal*) for queerness around them, especially for gender variance (Nicholas, 2019), prolonged their struggle with self-understanding (*personal*) – was echoed by other participants. Separately, Nick and James described not even knowing that homosexuality was an option for human existence until adolescence. In fact, James narrated their "first introduction" to the very concept as stumbling across it in a book and thinking "it was a typo". Participants also narrated a connection between this perceived absence of discursive representation and their families' (*interpersonal*) silences. Jamie provided an account of their mother's one cousin, and another of their school principal (a close family friend) being lesbians, and even in respective long-term relationships, but never being named as lesbians by Jamie's family. As a result of this silence, Jamie stated: "I had no frame of reference that that was even a thing I could be […] there was no example of sameness for me in adult form […] And I had a really hard time trying to understand how my adulthood would look." Though they anticipated (*external*) that it may sound "quite selfish" of them to say (given the pain around perpetual un-acknowledgement that these queer women must have endured), they described thinking the following when eventually realising these women's queerness: "God, I wish I had known that as a child, I would have saved so much wasted time of having an issue with myself, and […] trying to find my place in the world".

James, too, described having intense, psychologically endangering issues of selfhood when cisgenderism was presented as the only option, to which they were thus expected to conform (Nadal et al., 2016). They narrated initially interpreting their gender questioning as "I'm not doing enough to be female", and so:

> I would try and force myself to wear dresses […] I was getting so, so, depressed with myself. And that was just leading to more self-hatred because I'm doing so much and I'm still not feeling feminine. What is wrong with me?

Hence, like those in McInroy and Craig (2020), these participants narrated intensely searching for LGBTQIA+ representation as they developed. They "grabbed onto whatever [they] can, wherever [they] can" (Luca) so that they could alchemise projections of queer adulthood from emptiness to happiness (McDermott, 2021), or in Jamie's words: to "get that little bit of reassurance that it's gonna be okay".

That search entailed evaluating representations as done right or wrong, which Group 1 explored at length. Kiara and James voiced the intersectional problematics in mainstream LGBTQIA+ representation, like participants in McInroy and Craig (2020). For Kiara, a limited dimension was embodiment (*material*; Francis, 2012): they described struggling with their identity because of fatphobia, having "imprinted on [themselves]" the "invalidation" that "you can't be lesbian because girls don't like fat girls". That struggle was abated by finding an AFAB Instagrammer whose motto was "I'm queer, I'm fat, I'm just living my life" (Kiara). James added racial problematics (Conte, 2018; Matebeni, 2015) to the matter of inadequate representation: that if one doesn't fit "the beautiful aesthetic of the European gay", one doesn't "get to be shown in this community". Although narrators acknowledged the burgeoning representation of identities other than gay and lesbian (Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016), some portrayals were nonetheless narrated as problematic, or "bad resources", as Jamie put it. In contrast to television shows such as *Sense8* – which Amara, James, and Casey emphatically praised for its creation by trans directors and its use of trans actors for trans roles – films such as *The Danish Girl* were criticised for using cis men to play trans women, thereby reinforcing the dangerous idea that trans is cis-in-disguise (Newman, 2020). Likewise, Casey described animations like *Voltron* engaging in queer-baiting – that is,

promising (productive) representation of queer individuals but failing to deliver it (McDermott, 2021; McInroy & Craig, 2017). In contrast, James described the animation *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* as doing a much better job at queer, particularly non-binary, representation, to which Casey and Kiara assented. Besides this also having to do with casting actors who shared identifications with their characters (allowing lived, nuanced, multi-dimensional experiences to get captured well; Newman, 2020), James praised *She-Ra* for its "easy and natural" integration of non-binary characters into the storyline, avoiding spectacles and tokenisation (McInroy & Craig, 2020). Similarly, Amara narrated feeling "seen" by the trans character of Jules in *Euphoria* whose normalising portrayal does not foreground trans pain and oppression (Boonzaier, 2018; Newman, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2014), but depicts her existence like that of any other high schooler.

Maleficent Messages: Pain, Propaganda, and Perversion. Conversely, messages that anchored pain to queer subjectivity were faced by other participants. These were described as encountered not in media, but in conversation with others (*interpersonal*). Jamie, for example, narrated as a child overhearing a conversation between their mother and her friend in which the former stated never wanting to have a gay child because "if you're gay, you're fucked, basically. Like, you're gonna have a horrible life, and there's gonna be no love for you in your life". Relatedly, other participants narrated hearing the micro-aggression of scapegoating queerness as the source of all wrongs (Nadal et al., 2016). Malcolm described family members attaching "the worst of everything in the world" to queer identity and sending the message that when his queer self was born, he was "already in hell". He also narrated keeping his distance from other known gay boys in his high school who received slurs ("bunnies" and "moffies"), while "scared" Malcolm (who had "people already making fun of [him]") was told by his peers: "I'm still okay with you because you gay, but moffies, I don't like moffies". The difference from "gay", besides (and related to) its derogation, is that

"moffie" signifies the gendered divergence of male effeminacy (Pieterse, 2013). To this day, Malcolm receives this kind of message from his straight friends, whom are "closer than some of [his] family". He constructed this message as part of the reason he both keeps his distance from the Cape Town gay scene and maintains his own behaviour at "the level of homosexual that [his friends] can take". Admitting it may be "a hint of internal homophobia", Malcolm's account thus demonstrates how repeated pejorative messaging from Others has restrictively impacted his performance of queer self (Aubert & Soler, 2007).

In Kiara's case, whenever their lesbian middle sister would make any sort of mistake, their eldest sibling would accuse "the lifestyle" of queerness as its source. This family's background as Jehovah's Witnesses meant that Kiara also "used to preach the word," which included "condemning queer people", hence they stated that one of their most significant and difficult experiences was coming out to themselves. Doing so meant confronting and resisting that indoctrinated discourse *(internal)* of damnation (Nadal et al., 2016), and finding self-acceptance (*personal*) despite the possibility that they may "have to let go of everything", including their family. The conflation of embracing queerness and losing communal (*transpersonal*) and even institutional (*impersonal*) bonds was also narrated by Sage. When Luca asked if she knew of any pro-LGBTQIA+ Mosque figures, Sage reported hearing about a local imam who openly marries queer couples, but who has since become shunned in the community and lost a large portion of his following. Jamie also cited this fear as possibly held by their principal, hence her silence; that if she came out publicly, parents would pull their kids out of that school. Thus, participants' accounts demonstrated that damning or anti-queer messages (*internal*) create intrapsychic as well as structural barriers (Lugones, 2010; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2016) both for queers to accept themselves and for cis-hetero allies to enact that allyship.

One particular anti-queer message, highlighted by Sage in the excerpt as "ridiculous", came up in other groups as well: that there is a *gay agenda*. This term refers to the idea that gayness is "contagious" (Jamie) enough that a straight person may "turn" gay simply by being exposed to other gay people or to pro-LGBTQIA+ ideas (Francis, 2021). Reflecting the anxiety that queers' very existence threatens the socio-political order of cis-hetero-normativity (Butler, 2002; Francis, 2012), the "gay agenda" accusation functions as another deflective tactic of reinforcing the queerphobic hierarchical binary. Asanda, for example, described straight women at her church ostracising and avoiding her lest she turn them lesbian, while also disliking that she sits next to their husbands, lest she go after them, too – as if she is ruled by an uncontained sexuality. Viewing her like this, their real agenda becomes evicting Asanda from the church space entirely.

> The absurdity and contradictoriness of the gay agenda was also captured in Group 4:
>
> Lola: That's what always gets me, when people are like, "Ah, I don't want you around my children, you're gonna turn them gay," like, honey, I had so many straight people around me (=Malcolm: Seriously, yeah!), [laugh].
>
> Benjamin: Why did I not turn straight?

In another example, Lola (a schoolteacher) narrated stopping queerphobic talk from one of their students in the classroom. That child's parents then complained to the principal about Lola pushing the gay agenda by doing so. Lola figured that part of this complaint has to do with the micro-aggressive hyper-sexualisation of queers (Francis, 2018; Nadal et al., 2016), so that supporting queer children gets warped to mean promoting their unbridled sexual activity. Yet, as Lola resists, when their 13-year-old queer students "are talking about the crushes they have, sex is the furthest thing from their minds. It's wholesome, it's innocent […] they wanna hold hands on the playground". The group then identified another hypocrisy: that straight adults can be just as "promiscuous" (or chaste) as queer adults, but this

promiscuity is not attached to straight identity the way it is to gay identity. "The straight agenda", Malcolm states, "is still a whole, a loving family, and a beautiful home and a white picket fence", a discursive construction pointed out by Francis (2018). This group's reflections on the moralistic splitting of "good and bad" sexual practices (committal and non-committal) onto "good and bad" sexual identities (hetero and homo) emerged after a tense discussion on sexual norms internal to the gay male community.

Following Caleb's and Benjamin's discussion on homonormative gay men, I asked if Malcolm – and Natalia who often gets mistaken as a "gay dude" – related to their accounts. Malcolm constructed gay male circles as "a very highly sexualised community" and referenced "a joke" the character of Jack from *Will & Grace* (*internal*) made in explaining his issue with that: "if you straight, you'll go on a date, and maybe the date might lead to sex if you're lucky. If you're gay, you'll have sex and maybe that sex will lead to a date". While Malcolm cautioned (*external*) that he is not speaking for everybody, and even admitted (*auto*) "that's maybe the way I also did it" when "starting out", his take was that "it becomes quite scary that that is still the culture – sex first". Natalia related to how frustrating "hook-up culture" can be "if you're looking for a serious relationship and sex means something very big to you", with the (*external*) caveat that "it doesn't necessarily mean you're anti-casual sex" by feeling such a frustration. Caleb seemed to assent, calling it walking through a "mine field" – which he doubled-back on (*auto*) as a "bad analogy" – when interacting with a "sexual person who doesn't value sex". At this point, Lola stepped in:

> I also just think we should be careful of saying just because somebody engages in casual sex doesn't mean they don't value sex, right? (=Benjamin: Yes, ja). It can just be that they hold it in a different light and I think that that's valid.

Benjamin likewise cautioned against "innately thinking that hook-up culture is negative". Malcolm conceded: "if you are that kind of person, and [casual sex is] not an issue for you, so

be it”. Lola and Benjamin therefore intervened in what appeared to be centripetal dialogue about physical intimacy that may have carried an underlying hierarchical evaluation between committal and non-committal kinds of sex.

By preventing that monoglossic narrative of sexual intimacy from reigning, these centrifugal inflections were productive in noticing and resisting “the condemnation of particular characteristics in queer people mirror[ing] the condemnation they receive from heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies” (McDermott, 2021, p. 847). This moment of dialogue thus reflected the call for a flexible paradigm that recognises and legitimises individuals’ diverse engagements with normative scripts of sex (Hammack et al., 2015) and choices that affirm their respective longings, whether they entail promiscuity or celibacy (hooks, 2000) or fluctuations therebetween.

However, not all centrifugal inflections functioned as generatively (or centripetal ones as restrictively). In the above conversation, when Benjamin was wondering aloud if a negative attitude towards casual intimacy was more “an issue with how you were taught to think about sex”, he offered the following problematic illustration, which his co-participants resisted:

> Benjamin: Would rape be as traumatising as it is if so much value weren’t placed upon sex?
>
> Lola: Yes, because rape isn't about sex. [Tyler nods]
>
> Benjamin: Yes, I know, it’s about power. But I'm saying, if sex weren't taking the pedestal like it is, and someone was raped, would it be as traumatising, if they didn’t see it as super important? If it, no-no- [Indistinguishable overlap].
>
> Lola: -to answer your question, right, let’s talk about someone who doesn't value sex in the way that society has told them […] Let’s talk about an empowered prostitute, somebody who wakes up and is like, “Yass, this is how I'm gonna do my day”. If that

> person is raped, it's still trauma (=Caleb: Yes; =Benjamin: No-no-no, [inaudible] it's still power). No, no, so, so to answer question, in my opinion, yes, it would still be as traumatising (=Caleb: Ja, I agree) [Malcolm nods]. I don't think we can reduce rape to the way that society values sex.
>
> Benjamin: No-no, but that's what I'm trying to ask because, like you said with, if there weren't a gender binary, there wouldn't be issues [...] So I'm not saying I'm right. I'm just trying to just speak about it.

Though Benjamin aimed to draw connections between rape and enforcement of the gender binary as practices of social control (Kiguwa, 2004), the rest of the group (mainly Lola, but with small, aligned communications from Caleb and Malcolm) resisted any construction, however hypothetical, that would in effect make rape "more okay", noticing the danger in that line of thinking. Notice also that Benjamin doubles back (*external/auto*) with many "no-no" cautions followed by a fuller articulation that he is not a proponent of such thinking and is "just" raising it as a point of discussion. I unpack Benjamin's orientation to the focus group dialogue further in the reflective section. What is significant here is that – much like Warner's (1999) caution that we should not value "subversion and resistance […] independently of *which* norms they subvert or resist" (p. 155; emphasis in original) – we should also not view a centrifugal force (Benjamin's utterance) as always productively transformative, or a centripetal force (the rest of the group's shared rejection of his utterance) as always oppressively normative. The moment also demonstrates how resistance of (sexual) coloniality is something done as a collective (Lugones, 2010).

Resisting Alienation Together. In the emblematic excerpt, Jamie described feeling gender-experiential sameness with another queer (*interpersonal*) "having a huge impact on [their] quality of life" (*personal*). Other participants' narratives echoed this impact. In Group 3, for example, Grace stated: "the first few queer people that I ever got to know pretty much

changed my whole life", while Violet (in her interview) similarly articulated: "an experience of sameness, it's so profound for me. I hold on to that quite sacredly, the times that it has happened". In Group 1, Casey accredited (previously known) Kiara – the first non-binary AFAB person they had seen who, like them, did not present androgynously – for their own coming out: "it was kind of you, when you came out, that I realised, and then I came out". The phrase Jamie used to describe this sense of sameness – that is, feeling "at home" – is what Yuval-Davis (2006) uses to describe belonging. Nick seemed to capture this meaning when he narrated feeling "like someone was there" and that he was no longer "in [his] own head all the time" when turning to the "safe space" of queer YouTube. Note that Sage did not relate to the YouTube experience because "there was a lot that wasn't available" to access in her relatively less-resourced household (*material*). Nonetheless, she described "relying on the people that [she's] surrounded [her]self with". These participants thus seemed to reflect Riggs's (2010) depiction of interdependence as "our fundamental contingency upon the existence of others"; and even that we might "owe them an existential debt" for "they have already given *me*" (p. 315, emphasis in original).

The politics of belonging is also about "the dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Crowley, 1999 as cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204), and in this case, those boundaries (or lack thereof) have to do with identity. In the excerpt, Luca captured multi-directional operations on the identity borderlands that influenced his feelings of "sameness and difference" with other queers. On the one hand, shared identity could not be relied upon in and of itself for intersubjective resonance (Luna, 2016), hence Luca did not identify with the only other gay person in his school. On the other hand, he narrated how shared identity (and as implied, shared relational bonds, styles, or values) with his current roommate did matter for his experiences to "click" with another. Even more interesting was his account – acknowledging the dirty work of potentially "stepping on people's toes" (*external*) – of

finding a queer masculine role model in a YouTuber who remained such a role model even after later coming out as a trans woman. It therefore could be said that this demonstrates a relational experience of building allegiance across differences in identity (Cohen, 1997; Luna, 2016; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

Percy also narrated this dynamic of solidarity, but coming from non-queer people. When I asked, after hearing the isolation characterising her accounts, if she has anyone with whom she can be herself, Percy described often visiting one of her (straight male) cousins. If ever any of his friends start to make Percy uncomfortable, he intervenes, and so she always “expect[s] to be okay” at his place. Percy then described befriending a straight man who, firstly, noticed her guardedness around him (as Percy narrated displaying to most men) and reassured her that he is not there to question her into discomfort. Secondly, she described him often being mistaken for gay because he has “his own way of doing things” (indicating a non-normative masculinity performance), and so they “clicked on” their differences in the gender monoglossic world.

Having a shared (but not exact) gender journey with another was also narrated as significant and special by James. They narrated how their binary trans boyfriend has been a “massive help” with their own transition because the pair are “going through the steps together”. Like Luca, James described their boyfriend understanding their experience because he is like-identified (in the trans umbrella), while James’s other queer friends (bisexual, ace, gay) “won’t be able to understand that”. This relational resonance was painted as extremely necessary for James’s well-being: “I honestly don’t know if I’d be able to make it through, if I didn't have that kind of outlet”. Tenda related to this account, describing in his interview how he, like James, has found immense support from his (notably, cis) partner Lily on his gender transition journey. Yet, in their interview, James clarified they relate to their boyfriend “to a certain degree”, because there are differences in their identifications (binary trans man

and non-binary masc-leaning person) and in the nature of their respective dysphoric experiences (Beischel et al., 2021; Galupo et al., 2020). Participants therefore demonstrated that in order to effectively build solidarity, or lasting supportive togetherness, recognition of both similarities and differences – to do and not to do with identities – is essential (Ghaziani et al., 2016; Luna, 2016).

Finally, Group 1 demonstrated interdependence in another way when, towards the end of their session, the matter of gender-affirming healthcare (*material*) came up. The discussion was characterised by shared frustrations over how difficult institutional (*impersonal*) access to this kind of healthcare is. In seeking resources, some described dealing with psychologists who either were not informed about queer matters and in turn asked the participant to educate them (Kiara), or simply turned the participant away because it was not their area of expertise (Tenda). Casey also brought up how the (pathologising) diagnosis of dysphoria seems to gatekeep receipt of such healthcare (Beischel et al., 2021). James and Amara described it as "ridiculous" that insurance companies refuse to cover such healthcare, deeming it cosmetic instead of lifesaving, which it is "both in terms of mental health and also in terms of passing […] If you don't have a surgery, someone could kill you" (Amara). Then, James and Tenda, who have each had almost free gender-affirming healthcare, shared their contacts and tips with Casey, who confided that they were looking for resources to get top surgery. Thus, these participants demonstrated that building solidarity is not only about finding, creating, and nurturing the intersubjective (*inter-/personal*) psychological phenomenon of "home", but also about pooling and more widely distributing (*material*) resources, so as to enhance the embodied and socially situated liveability of queer and trans people (Cohen, 1997; Luna, 2016; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

Reflective Interview Co-Interpretations

Dialogical Effects

Exploring the groups' dialogical effects in reflective, individual interviews took the form of me asking participants about their perceptions of (a) group agreement and disagreement, (b) their own expressions and repressions therein, and (c) their feelings of sameness and difference with co-participants (Bakhtin, 1981; Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998). The themes that emerged in each exploration were, respectively but not too boundedly, (a) varied perspectives and orientations impacting perceptions of (dis)agreement, (b) the anticipatory elsewhere affecting the here-and-now of expression/repression, and (c) the relationship(s) between direct dialogue and matched feelings of sameness and difference.

Varied Experiences, Approaches, and Perceptions of (Dis)Agreement. Many responses to the question of agreement and disagreement did entail a specific determination of each instance. For example, agreement was felt over: evolving identifications (Lily) and queer self-confidence (Sage) over time; school problematics and the significance of YouTube representation (Jamie); and queerness being variably accepted in different levels or forms (Lola). Disagreement was indicated as felt over different approaches to coming out (Grace; Uranaty) and to sexual intimacy (Malcolm; Lola). At the same time, what was notable in some responses to the "disagreement" question was not a description of differing opinions that fomented conflict, but instead of differing experiences that called for recognition. For example, Violet's response included a description of feeling "distant from" Grace and Percy because of their staunchly religious, non-accepting families, and Amara's response focused on "identity clashes" between binary trans and non-binary trans participants in their respective difficulties of "how we exist in the world and how society treats us" (*transpersonal*).

In fact, because of that impetus for recognising differing experiences – and holding that multiplicity – at least one participant in each group reported not experiencing (or recalling) any disagreement in the sense of conflict-fomentation. Casey responded: "I can't

think of anything that we specifically disagreed on or fought about. It was just… very much understanding from different experiences". Likewise, Benjamin described: "no one had conflicting experiences, or experiences that invalidated, or threw doubt onto another one […] it was very little disagreement and more just understanding and just hearing". Similarly, Jamie offered: "I don't think there was any significant disagreement on anything. Just different experiences of the same thing sometimes", which Percy complemented: "We are in one space, and we […] all share what we're facing. It's different, but the emotions and everything, it's the same". There was also an articulated respect of others' responses to certain situations, even though the speaking participant would not have made the same choices themselves. Okuhle voiced: "there was nothing I didn't understand, even though Uranaty said, the part of, she doesn't believe in Bible, but that's her opinion […] that's how she feels, and it's fine", and Violet offered: "I felt that everybody, I guess was handling themselves in a way that made sense to me even if it wasn't what I would do". These participants thus constructed that the discursive space of the focus group enabled a comfort with multiplicity in perspectives and even an ability to understand across agentic gaps (Shotter & Billig, 1998).

There was, however, a moment of tension in Group 4 that I felt needed revisiting. Interestingly, although Caleb voiced it as something he disagreed with, neither Lola nor Benjamin – those most overtly involved in the disagreement – brought up Benjamin's hypothetical illustration of rape on their own. Although Lola described being glad the moment in the group ended where it did because they felt it off-topic for this study, I gave it explorative time and space in the interviews (and here in writing) because it resembles constructions that tie queer "difference" to practices of "sex wrongness", such as bestiality and necrophilia (Francis, 2021). Lola and I, in an interview prior to Benjamin's, had the following dialogue:

> Lola: I forgot about that. But yes, no, I was not okay with that, and I did call him out.
>
> Tyler: Yes, you did. So, thank you, I was also on the edge of calling him out on that.
>
> Lola: I think that's something that maybe we should have said in the beginning, is that we need to remember that everything we speak about, somebody in this room could have experienced. So… I'm curious as to whether he would have said that in front of a rape survivor (=Tyler: Yes, exactly) […] and I think that also maybe shows, that he probably hasn't had a lot of conversations about rape, and that he probably hasn't – I'm making assumptions here – been a victim of any sort of sexual harassment or sexual assaults.

Note, firstly, that I position myself as an allied would-be intervener in the conflict had Lola not done so themselves. Although later in the interview, Lola expressed "I'm sure that if it had gone on for much longer, you would have done it yourself", I nonetheless felt compelled to demonstrate that, and so brought some of their points into the interview with Benjamin:

> Tyler: If someone in the focus group had experienced a violation like that, what do you think your question would have done to the group?
>
> Benjamin: Uhm… like thinking of statistically, there probably definitely was someone that had been raped […] I suppose I would have maybe then asked, first, if they were fine discussing it. […] my best friend was raped […] we have spoken at length about it […] And then for me, I was never raped but there were instances of like, coercion into having sex (=Tyler: Oh), where like, I should probably deal with that.

It thus appeared that Lola's caveat assumption (*external/auto*) was warranted, for Benjamin had indeed experienced sexual problematics and also engaged in conversations with rape survivors. This admittance struck me (and I daresay, would have struck others like Lola) as

unexpected, given the potential problematics underlying his illustration. Yet, further examination of Benjamin's input, choice of words, and interpretations of his co-participants and the group showed that his particular associational context (Hollander, 2004) may have accounted for it.

When I asked him what he was thinking in trying to express his point, Benjamin stated he was thinking of a "hyperbolic example that illustrated the point" of things affected by systematic changes in attitude. For him, "[i]t was just for the purposes of discussion", hence he was doing a lot of "hypothesising" in the group. Moreover, Benjamin experienced the group as "more of a[n] intellectual, like academic setting" which he described as: "nice for me because […] I've kind of intellectualised a lot of these questions for myself". When I asked about difference from co-participants, he indicated Malcolm, describing him as less involved in the intellectualised kind of talk that was transpiring between Benjamin and Lola. After pointing out that I had to bring the group away from that kind of talk towards accounts of personal experience (Krueger & Casey, 2014), Benjamin conceded: "I suppose Malcolm actually followed the brief". Giving feedback on how to improve the groups, Benjamin suggested hosting two kinds: an intellectual and experiential one. It was thus apparent that Benjamin filtered the group encounter through the setting of something like an academic seminar, and so proceeded with a more abstracted, concept-focused, experientially distanced orientation to the conversation. The emergence of the rape-related disagreement seems therefore to be (partially) explained by differences in what the encounter represented (*contextual*) for participants (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Hollander, 2004).

The Dialogical Elsewhere and Expressive-Repressive Reflections. That intellectual orientation also seemed at work in Benjamin's questioning – or acting as a co-researcher (Kitzinger, 1994; Munday, 2006; Wilkinson, 1998) – of Lola. In his interview, he expressed: "I might have come off as maybe a bit argumentative in terms of my questions,

'cause I know I do, often". Being regarded in *previous* situations as argumentative or offending was also constructed by other participants as affecting their expressive-repressive conduct in the focus groups (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Hollander, 2004; Skinner et al., 2001). Grace, who "did debating at school", described "trying to work on not always getting in there with [her] opinion," and set a conscious intention to "just listen" in her group. Luca, when noting that there was not much disagreement in his group, wondered if it was really due to "a reluctance to actually engage in that way, in an almost argumentative sense". He added: "I've been told sometimes I can't watch my tone […] So I was just trying my best to keep myself grounded". When I remarked that his group indeed seemed "very careful to choose your words", he responded: "we *are* being recorded", thereby indicating the (*contextual*) focus group set-up as also effecting expression and repression. Group composition was additionally mentioned as affecting repression (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Kitzinger, 1994). Lola would have liked to speak more on "male privilege in queer circles", but being the only AFAB person in Group 4, they chose not to. They noted, with unease over word choice (*auto*): "it sounds weird to say if I had [air quotes] 'backup', but if I had another person who is like, 'Yes, I am agreeing with what they're saying'", then they would have voiced the topic.

Another topic unvoiced in the group but voiced in the interview was Lily's account, mentioned in the first section, of having experienced some bisexual people invalidating her pansexual orientation and accusing it of being transphobic. She "opted not to say it" because she did not want to "step on anyone's toes", added: "I've conditioned myself to be hyper-conscious" of saying things that "could be triggering" to others, and mentioned: "I can come off very mean, and I don't want that". Although this concern over her own behaviour comes from encounters prior to the group, when I asked if there were co-participants influencing that feeling, Lily mentioned: "James was more reserved and so I didn't wanna come in an attacky way. And then Casey's very outspoken. I'm not trying to be having a debate [with

them]". Present and absent Others thus seemed to influence Lily's repression (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Skinner et al., 2001), but only the latter appeared to do so for Nick. He admitted he "could have said a little bit more", being quite a passive participant. When I asked what contributed to his shyness and quietness, he described feeling "scared" about expressing himself to strangers – "I feel like they're gonna judge me" – and clarified "[i]t wasn't necessarily the group. It was just me". Nick did not have additional accounts to add in his interview; however, the (projected) fear of judgement in the focus group did prevent two other participants from disclosing how they navigated surviving traumatic experiences and the impact these had had on their queer identifications (Hollander, 2004; McDonald et al., 2020).

When prompted about accounts they wanted to share but didn't, Kiara and Okuhle each narrated having been raped in their teens and turning towards heterosexual relations thereafter as an attempt to cope with that trauma. For Okuhle, the impetus to do so entailed grappling with the injury-as-origin discourse (*internal*) of lesbianism (Judge, 2018): "I always thought, me being raped, I'm scared of men. And I chose to be lesbian". After forcing herself to have sex with men and feeling "no connection", Okuhle returned to a secure lesbian identification, realising: "I'm not actually straight, this is who I am". For Kiara, forcing themselves to have sex with men was in attempt to "erase everything" and "make [their] own memories", which they came to realise did "not help [them] whatsoever, it would just add more trauma". After each participant narrated having rebuilt themselves from the trauma, I asked why they didn't share this in the group but did so with me. Both indicated apprehension of their group's reception: "I always fear that, the LGBTI community, they're too very judgmental" (Okuhle); "mostly the victim is the one who is shamed more than the rapist, and so, it's thinking of the reaction of people" (Kiara). They also constructed talking about the experience as a necessary means of healing from it and explained electing to do so

with me because I felt non-judgemental to them. Thus, participants provided multiple interactional factors as influencing their expression-repression, including (a) the (*external*) anticipation influenced by absent and present others, (b) the (*contextual*) set up of the focus groups (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011), (c) the level of stigma attached to their accounts, and (d) the quality of facilitator-participant rapport (Hollander, 2004).

Overt Dialogue and Co-Participant Sameness and Difference. Three individuals described feeling "sameness and difference" with all their co-participants. Caleb overtly declared feeling difference from everyone, "[b]ecause everyone was so different", while also indicating a sameness in that his group seemed "quite educated" (himself included). Violet explicitly stated feeling sameness with everyone, but with phrases such as "in a way", "[to] varying degrees", and "[we] didn't have a whole lot" hedged (*auto*) onto her points about how she related with each co-participant – thus implying an element of difference there too. Jamie overtly constructed the simultaneity of "sameness and difference" in their interview: "I think we all had very different experiences of self and of the universe. But I did find it interesting that there were little pockets of sameness with everybody." Perhaps more accounts of simultaneity were not offered because I did not ask about a dialectical unit ("who did you feel sameness and difference with?") but rather about each phenomenon separately ("who did you feel sameness with?"; "who did you feel difference with?"). My provision of departure points for participant's responses (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Warner, 2004) may thus have reflected the enduring deadlock of dichotomising questions (Sedgwick, 1990).

That being the case, other participants' responses illuminated a curious connection between matched reflections of sameness or difference with co-participants and whether the pair had engaged in direct dialogue. Kiara and Casey, who did interact directly in (and outside of) the group, each reported feeling sameness with one another: Casey with Kiara because of shared AFAB non-binary identification and presentations; Kiara with Casey

because of coming from a similarly prescriptive, traditional background. In Group 4, those who directly engaged with each other not only mutualised who they felt sameness with, but also mutualised their reasons for it. Malcolm and Natalia separately reported feeling sameness with each other over the not-quite-fitting-in phenomenon experienced in queer social scenes. Lola and Malcolm mutually reported sameness too, but over their shared non-acceptance by their religious family members.

As a corollary, accounts that did not match each other seemed attributable to a lack of direct dialogue between those participants during the focus groups. With a response that importantly reflected sameness transcending identity differences (Cohen, 1997; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012), Lily stated:

> The person I expected to feel the most sameness with was Kiara because they're also Black and femme-bodied. But then, I found myself relating a lot to James as well […] I genuinely felt, especially, I have to say, James […] in another life, we could have been from, birds of a feather.

James, on the other hand, identified Lily as a person they felt difference from. They attributed this, firstly, to their respective experiences regarding sexual orientation: Lily “being perceived as switching between straight and gay” while James has always “dated men or male-identifying people”. They also explained: “I think it was just because we didn't engage much between the two of us”.

Likewise, Caleb identified Lola as someone he felt sameness towards, because he related to their call for queer “spaces that aren’t nightlife-central”, and also described their gender divergent accounts having “taught [him] a lot” and “broadened [his] views quite a bit”. Lola, on the other hand, identified Caleb as the person they “related to the least”. Part of the reason for this was, contrary to Caleb’s account:

> [H]e didn't seem as interested in the gender stuff, because it was something he didn't relate to. And so there was like a… a slight apathy, I would almost say, towards it […] but obviously not in a way that made me feel unsafe or like I couldn't share.

Like James, Lola attributed this sense of distance to their observation that "there was no point that we were kind of having a conversation".

This pattern, however, was not confirmed by other participants. For example, for the pairs (a) James and Casey and (b) Benjamin and Lola – which were mostly characterised by agreeable direct conversation – the first individual explicitly declared feeling sameness with the second, but the second did not mirror that. Another example: Percy described feeling sameness with Grace's familial problematics, but Grace described feeling difference from Percy's due to the "worse" nature of homophobia therein. This was also despite the pair engaging directly. The divergence from pattern perhaps confirms that there are a plethora of factors influencing individuals' perspectives on relationality, or the reporting thereof after the event, which a social psychological/dialogical researcher may not always be able narrow down or disentangle reliably (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Hollander, 2011). Luca offered one such factor, though: the impact of more passive participants on the focus group (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008):

> I think I felt the most difference with Jamie […] I can't really pinpoint why. Uhm… it's also interesting how […] I kept picking up on Nick's anxiety […] I really wanted him to say more because it constantly felt like Jamie and I were talking the most. And there was definitely a point where I was like, "Mmm, I should shut up now".

Since we cannot access psyches through language (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011), I cannot claim to pinpoint why Luca felt this way despite his direct and agreeable engagements with Jamie. Yet, it is curious to note his observation of Nick's social anxiety and his internal pressure to reduce his talking juxtaposed with this declaration of difference. What I could

claim is that different intersubjective energies were shaping the discursive space in each group, hence the pattern of explicit dialogue to sameness and difference did not operate in the same way. Notably, Luca's articulation may also serve the function (Wilkinson, 1998) of calling for a greater balance in contributed perspectives. Indeed, such a call emerged in participants' reflections on the research experience itself.

Encounter Experiences

Participants' accounts of how they experienced the research encounter were collected by asking: (a) of their experience of the focus group in general, (b) how they felt about their queerness after it, (c) how they felt about me as the moderator and interviewer, (d) if they had any feedback on improving the group, and (e) if they had any final thoughts on the experience of participating. Four (again, not neatly isolable) themes emerged: (1) feelings of togetherness, (2) learning of self and others, (3) experiencing freedom in dialogue, and (4) insider-outsider dynamics between the researcher and researched. These interview-derived themes are also reflected, to a degree, in the groups themselves when at the close of the session, I asked how the encounter had been[4]. This excerpt from Group 4 exemplifies them:

> Tyler: How has this been?
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> Benjamin: Nothing I haven't thought about before at length […] Maybe just like consolidation and validation of my own thoughts.
>
> Malcolm: I think the human experience can be very, I don't want to use the word, "complicated" can have such negative connotations. But the human experience is very varied […] for me, I learned, I think I learned a lot from you guys, [laugh sigh] (=Tyler: Yeah, me too), honestly.
>
> Lola: I think it's good that we have these conversations, and my friend asked me why I went all the way here [...], and I was like, "because there's not enough queer

[4] Because of the multi-phasic composition of Group 3, in which some left before others, I did not get to ask the whole group about their experience of the session as it closed. I rely on their interview reflections in this regard.

> academia by (=Malcolm: Yes, yes) queer people". And I think that this was me doing a [inaudible] for my community. […] it was also encouraging to speak about how there is a need for queer spaces that aren't hypersexualised and aren't nightlife-centred and to hear that that's a sentiment that is shared. […] we've found all these differences and these similarities, but I think the challenge now lies, what are we going to do about that? And what are we going to do to create the community that we want? And it's exciting that that's happening, and that we have the opportunity to even do that freely. So, this is a very positive [inaudible].
>
> Natalia: Yeah, I would add to that, it's nice to have a space which isn't particularly performative, or buzzword-heavy […] it's a bit different to the university environment, not that that's a bad thing, the university environment, but it can be a bit stifling […] this is, feels very relaxed and natural.
>
> Caleb: I don't have a lot of gay friends, or queer friends, in general. And the reason I wanted to come was to have, be able to speak about queer issues. And I feel like that is something that I feel very satisfied in now. […] And, as you [Lola] said, this is […] for academic reasons as well, 'cause I did do sociology in gender studies, and I feel like this just lit it up. It wasn't (=Benjamin: It made it real) text, like I knew about everything, but this just [clicks fingers] gave it light (=Lola: Made it real). Yes, yes.

Feelings of Togetherness. Group 1 echoed Lola's point about a shared request for queer spaces that are not focused on nightlife. James described it as "nice" to be able to meet and "openly talk" to queers who "have completely different experiences", and Kiara responded feeling the same "because there aren't many places to meet queer people if you're not in a club". Another point of Lola's, echoed overtly in Group 2, was the sense of "community" (*transpersonal*) tied to the space of the focus group. In-group, Luca voiced at the end of the session: "I miss talking to queer people" (which Jamie seconded), and in his

interview, he reported that the group “brought back the sense of community.” One of the reasons that sense slips away was articulated by Amara and Casey. They each described it as “nice” to see that other gender-variant people exist around them, since many such people “pass” and are thus largely invisible in one’s day-to-day movements.

Another reason for a lost sense of community may be due to the dialogical internalisation of queer incoherence and alienation. I posit this because many participants constructed their experience of participating as one that resembled an effect of feminist consciousness-raising groups (Hollander, 2004; hooks, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998): a sense of coming out of isolation. Lola reported feeling “grateful that there are other people that I can connect with. It was a very – whatever the opposite of isolating is – experience”. James described it as “validating” to interact with other non-binary people: “[it] made me feel like, ‘okay, yeah, this isn’t just an individual thing, I’m not confused, a lot of people experience this’”. Group 3 participants provided the same sense: that initially “we thought, ‘maybe I’m going through this alone’” (Okuhle), but in the group, “you realise[d] that you're actually not alone in this” (Percy). Kiara even reported thinking they were “reaching” when they told themselves there’s “segregation” among LGBTQIA+ subgroups, but “after the focus group, [they] realised that it’s not reaching”. This even prompted Kiara to reconsider their engagements with Tenda and Lily outside the group, whom Kiara described having known as part of a queer clique at their university – one that Kiara “can’t get into” despite trying. “I feel, it's… if I tried to just sort of break the barrier, and have conversations, we would get somewhere,” they concluded. They seem, therefore, to see the possible utility of the relational-conversation dynamic of the group for building social bridges in the outside world (Epprecht, 2013; Lugones, 2010).

This coming-out-of-isolation, a phenomenon that arguably shone a light on the self-in-the-social and social-in-the-self (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Salgado & Clegg, 2011),

was narrated as strengthening both a sense of (*personal*) queer selfhood and a sense of (*inter-/transpersonal*) social closeness. Hence, as Caleb co-constructed with Lola and Benjamin, it moved the sociological from the textual to the "real". Regarding selfhood, when I asked participants about sense of their queerness after the focus group, they described feeling "more secure" (Lily), "more settled" (Caleb), "very proud" (Okuhle), and "even bolder" (Percy) in it, or that the group was "affirming" (Natalia, Luca), and "very validating" (Grace) of it. These feelings were constructed as linked to witnessing or engaging with others. For example, Lily put it down to "seeing so many different types of queerness, and everyone was just so comfortable in their skin"; Caleb described caring less about his gender performance thanks to "interact[ing] with people who are more comfortable in their gender-nonconforming-ness". Jamie, in their group, offered that when they "talk to queer people about this kind of stuff", they often get the sense that they "understand [themselves] better a little bit". However, in their interview, Jamie stated that they felt their queerness hadn't changed after the focus group – as did Asanda, Malcolm, and even Luca, too. Dialogically, this is not a problem, since we cannot expect accounts between encounters to reveal no inconsistencies and converge on a single truth (Kiguwa, 2004; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Wilkinson, 1998). It also points to consideration that some of the accounts painting the project in a positive light (here and in the rest of this subsection) might have been influenced by social desirability pressures or impression management (Hollander, 2004).

At the same time, some participants provided responses that spoke to interpersonal strengthening happening outside of the research encounter. In fact, Uranaty provided two. Firstly, she described it as helpful to hear what Percy and Okuhle – members of her pre-existing friendship circle (Munday, 2006; Kitzinger, 1994) – "were thinking" in terms of matters that they don't ordinarily discuss: "it was lovely to hear how they feel so you can't

push the button where they can be angry". Secondly, she shared that, as someone who has not been "chased away at home", hearing her co-participants' accounts of that experience prompted her to offer sanctuary to three lesbians in her community who had since been disowned. Uranaty may therefore demonstrate a sense of interdependence emerging from events and connections in which "forms of obligation come into existence" (Smith et al., 2007 as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 1500). She also described wanting greater access to resources, skills, knowledge, and contacts, "so that [she] can help them" better. Lacking sufficient support on "the outside" was also mentioned by Lola, describing the focus group experience as "bittersweet":

> It was really enriching and really good, but it also brought more attention to the way that the rest of society isn't accepting […] like, you don't realise that you're missing something until you have it for a little while and then you don't.

They may therefore touch on how queer utopian moments – if we can generously consider coming-out-of-isolation to be one such moment – are fleeting, since the cis-heteronormative world is inimical to their enduring realisation (Duong, 2012).

Learning of Others and Self. What participants *could* carry through into their subsequent engagements, less with cis-hetero society and more with LGBTQIA+ others, was what they learned of varied queer realities in the focus group dialogues. Indeed, Tenda and Nick echoed Malcolm's in-group response of having learnt from their co-participants. In their interviews, they got to elaborate. Tenda learnt from the non-binary individuals, seeing how gender monoglossia (Francis, 2012) is harsher for them than for binary trans people like him:

> society likes to box people, and because they're not in that box, it's very hard for them. With us trans people, trans men, trans women, we are still in a box, so it's easier for us to get into society and be accepted.

Nick clarified it as "insightful" for him to learn that others had experienced the same kinds of school bullying as he had, despite their different (English/Afrikaans, liberal/conservative) backgrounds. The "things that hadn't really occurred to" Malcolm came from Lola: the new terminology they provided ("AFAB" and "AMAB"), their relationship with polyamory, and the challenges they had faced with their gender identity. Sage, like Malcolm, found "educational" her co-participant's conversation on (micro)labels that expand beyond "three" (i.e., hetero-, homo-, and bisexual), and their accounts of tense, unstable, dis-identificatory relationships with labels in general. Lola found it "really interesting to hear more about the male gay scene", remarking how the "hodgepodge group of people that have been put under one umbrella" stand to learn a great deal from each other (Duong, 2012; Matebeni, 2015; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015).

That learning, according to participants' accounts, was not just about others, but also entailed a deeper reflection on the self. Lola painted benefitting from Benjamin's curious questioning (which perhaps indicated his own desire to learn) because it was "facilitated in a safe way" (*interpersonal*). Somewhat echoing Jamie in the previous subsection: "I found it very enlightening for myself as well, to be asked those questions and to have to answer them". Sage reflected on the bullying conversation and declared finding it "quite eye-opening":

> [A]t some stage, I thought I had it quite bad […] but then, just sitting in on that group and hearing what everyone else had been through made me realise that […] some experiences, in comparison to mine, was quite different, especially the bullying component, because I've never been subject to that.

However, it is important that I do not overstress the impact or degree of the experience of learning. Luca narrated with an uncertain search (*auto*) for words: "it wasn't so far as to say it was enlightening. But it was not, [sigh], 'eye-opening' seems almost too much

of an exaggeration as well, but you get the idea". Nonetheless, his learning also pointed to destabilising the simple equation of social category determining a particular position/experience of power (Rao, 2020; Riggs, 2010; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). This had to do with hearing that Sage does know of an imam who openly officiates queer marriages. Luca described feeling "very happy" to hear disproven the "singular" story of Islamic faith being inherently homophobic. Thus, in a dialogical framework, learning of or about an Other may not only mean an accompanying learning of the self (provided reflexivity is encouraged, as by these interviews; Salgado & Clegg, 2011; Shotter & Billig, 1998), but also a learning *against* homogenising (monoglossic) tales of all who belong to the same (*transpersonal*) group or (*impersonal*) institution (Mavuso et al., 2019).

Freedom in Dialogue. Many participants echoed Natalia's above appreciation for the conversational (*interpersonal*) space being "relaxed and natural", as opposed to "stifling". As an in-group example, Casey also contrasted the group's conversational space with their university's LGBTQIA+ society, which is "inclusive, but it's very difficult to communicate". Participants' interview elaborations appeared to tie their appreciation of the discursive atmosphere to the principles that guided the (*external*) ground rules of engagement: encouraging natural conversation, honouring multiple truths, hearing everyone's input, and refraining from right-or-wrong judgments (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1988; Kreuger & Casey, 2014; Wagaman et al., 2018). Lily, for example, declared:

> I think it was the first time, I think in my life, that I've been in a place where it was just a really free space where you could just say whatever and, even if people didn't necessarily understand, no one was judging.

Her sentiment was repeated by others, responding to the question either about their experience of or feedback about the group. Okuhle stated: "it was the first time me opening up about certain things […] I feel like it's okay to talk about it"; Percy offered: "it's been a

while since I've openly spoke about my thoughts […] being in a space where you're comfortable to openly speak about anything"; and Asanda praised: "it was very nice […] we were open to talk about our experiences and no one judge us". For some, the rare openness was in contrast to such things as their regular duty – Asanda being the leader of an LGBTQIA+ "safe space" in her township where attendants get to purge their experiences "but I never talk about mine" – or their restrictive everyday environments: "even if you meet someone in the taxi by the streets", Percy contrasted, it is "abnormal" to have an "open-minded conversation". Caleb also accredited the reparative or desire-based framework (Sedgwick, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2014) as reason for his enjoyment of the space. He "found it so liberating because it was more than just listening to people's problems". I would posit that for these reasons, several other people (Benjamin, Kiara, Luca, and Amara) explicitly wished the discussion had (or at least suggested it could have) gone on for much longer.

Relatedly, participants approved of the self-managed group strategy (Hollander, 2004; Morgan, 1988; Wilkinson, 1998). Although Luca thought I would do more involved moderation, he stated: "I think I like how it went, for the most part, 'cause […] you would get it going, and then you will just let it happen". Others echoed liking that I "let the discussion happen" (Grace), allowing "the participants to say what they felt, what they wanted to say" (Malcolm), which "made the space open and free" (Lily). They also liked that I "did come in when [I] needed to" (Grace), for example: "when things seem to derail, [I] brought [them] back" (Lily). Participants contrasted this with a more rigid, controlling style of moderation (Munday, 2006). Malcolm "enjoyed" me letting the participants say what they want "without necessarily going, 'okay, less of that and more of this'". Asanda likewise offered: "you make us feel comfortable to talk about our experiences. Not that you have, 'okay, I have this paper, I can't talk about this'". Uranaty perceived this generative lack of rigidity as connected to my seeming like a researcher who was open to learning from their participants:

> You’ve come to learn from other people, and you didn't say that “I know, this is gonna happen, so I want this.” Some of the other people, like, facilitator, will say this: “I want this, I want this, I want this”.

Thus, my mirroring participants who claimed to have learned from the experience – as in the “me too” response to Malcolm in the emblematic excerpt – and my treating them as wise throughout the encounter (Krueger & Casey, 2014) was constructed by these individuals as my contribution – as a co-participant – to shaping the positive discursive space of free dialogue (Parker, 2005; Wilkinson, 1998).

Inside and Outside; Researcher and Researched. What was also reported as helping to ease some participants (Casey, Amara, Lola, and Benjamin) into the conversational space was my insider status as a fellow queer/LGBTQIA+ person (Hollander, 2004; Morgan, 1988). For Benjamin, it was because the matters under discussion were “not news to [me]”. Lola even declared: “I wouldn't have done it if you weren't queer”, because it’s “like a White person doing a study on POC. It feels like it's not really the right person to be doing that”. At the same time, insider status by itself cannot be relied on to create relational bridges (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010). What better achieves that is sharing my own personal experiences with participants – something that is called for as a power balancing move by feminist researchers (e.g., Gore, 2018; Matutu, 2019).

Yet, like Gore (2018), I was reluctant to do so in the focus groups, and Lola and Caleb brought that to my attention. Responding to the “experience of the moderator” question, Caleb noted that he “didn’t get to know” me and so I stood out as *not* a co-participant like the rest of his group, and Lola “would have liked to hear about [my] experiences, just because [I was] another queer person at the table”. To each participant, I responded that it had to do with a hard-to-relent, mainstream disciplinary ideal of researcher professionalism that is wary of personal opinions (Detamore, 2010): “I don't want my experiences to kind of frame or bias

anyone else's answers". While Lola assured me that they understood my role, they pointed out: "your biases also matter, because you're the one who's going to be doing the interpretations on what we've said and […] writing up the report," and so it would have been helpful to receive my interpretations in the moment. By moving the research power dynamics in this way (Gore, 2018), I felt compelled to tell Lola that they had an "interpretive voice that mimics" my own, and that I related to Natalia's accounts of oscillating between feelings of playfulness/glamour and discomfort/misperception with my presentation choices as an AMAB non-binary person. I also shared this directly with Natalia in her interview, but his response was not much more than an agreeable "it's a very tricky one". While Lola claimed to "feel a bit better" hearing my small personal contribution, I went away with a self-conscious unease, since I had been aware of these methodological critiques prior the research encounter. Thankfully, Gore (2018) and Matutu (2019) remind me that researchers are fallible humans, and I find helpful Page's (2017) contention that "not knowing" how to respond *in the moment* with participants is sometimes inevitable.

Another possible mistake was the relative demographic homogeneity of Group 2 and 4. Lola brought up how they would have liked another AFAB queer person to converse with. They, as well as Malcolm and Benjamin, and Luca in Group 2, also would have appreciated hearing from another person of colour, since there was only one in these groups. While Sage (the "Coloured" person in Group 2) did not voice this sense of difference, Malcolm (the "Coloured" person in Group 4), did. He described the issue as perhaps rendering "a little one-sided […] the full picture of what the LGBTI […] experience might be in Cape Town" without more accounts from people "from a bit of a different walk of life". Malcolm also provided (*external*) a caveat: "I'm not sure what their backgrounds is, I don't want to make judgment calls about anybody," but nonetheless added, reflecting some empirical literature

(Judge, 2018; Matebeni, 2015; Tucker, 2009): "I would like to think that their lived experiences is much different to maybe mine".

To all who brough it up, I offered that they would get a greater feel for the demographic diversity of the entire study when they viewed this final report, since there was also quite an internally diverse group (Group 1) and even one that had – excluding myself – no White people (Group 3). Though it might have eased Malcolm's concern about accounting for "different walks of life", this explanation does not undo his experience of being the only person of that "difference" in his group. Therefore, replications of this project should perhaps aim for at least two participants of a similar (disadvantaged) racial and gender assignment per group, as opposed to composing them according to the chronological order of their responses of interest in participating. However, this does open a question, particularly important for a study aiming to destabilise identity categories (Kiguwa, 2004): to what degree can we rely on racial markers as determinants of co-participants feeling "sameness and difference" in dialogue?

What is not questionable is the request to have a "more intentional cooldown" (Lola) of the focus group session. A couple of participants felt there was a "rush to close up" (Lily), and while they approved my provision of counselling services, even better would have been "maybe allocating 15 minutes at the end for everyone to recalibrate that they need to go back out into the world now" (Lola). This may have helped attenuate the "bittersweet" experience of leaving the oasis of open queer dialogue. A research decision that was approved, however, included my remuneration of participants. Lola described it as "good practice […] that needs to become the norm", as opposed to the "expectation for people to just share their stories, like for the good of whatever". It is of course possible that some participants (perhaps particularly the unemployed ones) wished to participate primarily for this remuneration (Mosavel & Oakar, 2009), and less for "the good of whatever". Finally, Uranaty appreciated the fact that I

scheduled follow-up interviews. She reported that she and Okuhle, who had both taken part in a number of research projects, had "never" before experienced a member check of any kind from an interviewer, never mind this participatory/collaborative sort (Thomas, 2017). This is further reason to have the second member check at the close of this project. Overall, then, I conclude that while there is certainly room for improvement, certain decolonial, feminist, critical intentions for this project were partially fulfilled.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore – through a critical, queer, decolonial, Bakhtinian-dialogical framework – what diverse groups of "queer"-/LGBTQIA+-identified people experienced when sharing their experiences of "sameness and difference" with others. Narrated experiences emerged to congeal under three broad themes: (1) negotiating personal and communal determinations of identity, (2) navigating invasions by strangers and distancings by families, and (3) finding the queer self in distorted or validating social mirrors. The conversational space of the groups was set up, and maintained, with the principles of being open to holding multiple truths ("heteroglossia"; Bakhtin, 1981) and hesitant to evaluating those truths as either right or wrong (Wagaman et al., 2018). As such, contributions from and dialogues between participants were characterised by surfing binarisms (Boellstorff, 2010), or seeing/articulating how both sides of apparent dichotomies were active and dynamic in their narratives of experience.

Under the first theme of "Singular and Plural", participants shed light on the binarism between singularities and multiplicities (or monoglossia and heteroglossia) of meanings attached to labels of identification (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Francis, 2012; Peñaloza & Ubach, 2015). There were those who self-described in ways that were identificatory ("I am this"), counter-identificatory ("I am not that"), and dis-identificatory ("I am only somewhat this"), and whose determinations were constructed as mainly intrapsychic or as mainly influenced

by interactions with others, both queer and non-queer (Muñoz, 1999; 2009). Unquestioned normativities internal to the LGBTQIA+ community were constructed as problematic in their implied hierarchical binary between right or wrong/good or bad/valid or invalid queers (Oswin, 2005; Pfeffer, 2014). In response, the emerging standpoint shared among participants was a communitarian need to respect individuality and the deeply idiosyncratic nature of self-determinations. They thus reflected Nancy's (2000 as cited in Muñoz, 2009, p. 30) concept of "being singular plural", in that we are "both particular in [our] difference[s] but at the same time always relational to other singularities". Disrupting centripetal/hegemonic logics was also articulated about other queer forces that shaped self-understanding, such as relating to feelings of non-linear time (Rao, 2020), reworking negative affect via reclaiming slurs (Herbert, 2015) and dislodging dysphoria as trans-defining (Beischel et al., 2021), and resonating with things beyond the categorical contents of gender (Yuval-Davis, 2016).

The theme of "Strange and Intimate" focused on participants' accounts of the reinforcement or persistence of the cis-hetero matrix of intelligibility (Butler, 2002) both from unknown (strange) people and with family, or closely known (intimate) people. Participants' constructed difficulties focused on highly invasive (intimate) invalidatory questioning from strangers/acquaintances (Sumerau et al., 2020), and parents splitting off positive filial regards to reject or disown (estrange) them for their queerness (McDermott et al., 2021). The tense contradictions in this chapter included: experiencing both questioning and silence as interactional hostilities (Sedgwick, 1990); use of duplicitous language that implies acceptance on the surface but non-acceptance beneath it (Nadal et al., 2016); and how transitioning physically, a positive self-development move, is attended both by a double-edged sword of transitioning socially and an anxiety over institutional surveillance (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Sumerau et al., 2020). A disagreeable dialogue initially characterised by a binary choice – between coming out or not – was resolved by participants

returning to the principle of holding multiple truths and recognising context as distinguishing “having to” versus “electing to” come out, to whom, and for what purposes (McDonald et al., 2020). Reparably, in the face of varying degrees of disownment by one’s own family, participants constructed it as helpful to look to and find sanctuary in the more-accepting families of other queers (McDermott et al., 2021).

Thirdly, “Exile and Home” explored how various kinds of representation of queerness, in media or in interpersonal communications, impacted (and continue to impact) participants’ senses of self (McDermott, 2021; McInroy & Craig, 2020). While an absence of queer representation/naming growing up was constructed as necessarily meaning a gap in their self-understanding and -acceptance (Nicholas, 2019), the presence of it was not construed as automatically helpful. Negative images of the queer self in the social were narrated as intersectionally myopic, pain- or wrongness-locked, tied to a warped, suspicious notion of “gay agenda”, and constructing the queer as hypersexual (McInroy & Craig, 2020; Nadal et al., 2016). An initial group disagreement on relations to sexual intimacy (committal over non-committal) was resolved through the understanding that some queers can break away from sexual practice norms without condemning those who choose behaviours that seem to support those norms (Hammack et al., 2015; McDermott, 2021). Positive representations, beyond those undoing the problems of the above media depictions, meant finding “home” in shared identification/relationality with another queer, concomitant with finding “belonging” in the world at large (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Participants also constructed interdependence as doing gender journeying together, whether narrating this in a life experience or demonstrating it in focus group actions themselves (Lugones, 2010).

In their interview reflections on how they experienced the focus groups, participants firstly co-interpreted the dialogical effects that took place therein. It appeared that by holding the differences between them, participants tended to hold off falling into antagonistic

disagreements (Shotter & Billig, 1998). Conflict emerged, however, when participants came to the space with different orientations to what the conversation represented for them (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011). Moreover, the dialogical elsewhere – or memory of interactions gone on before – meant that participants anticipated certain utterances would spark conflict, and hence chose not to express them (Skinner et al., 2001). Finally, their felt “sameness and difference” with co-participants appeared to be influenced by many factors. While the number and nature of these are/were ultimately unidentifiable, here at least two factors were highlighted: whether pairs engaged in direct dialogue, and how more passive participants influenced the feeling of the discursive space (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008).

As for the experience of participating itself, participants described a sense of coming out of isolation in that feelings/experiences previously thought of as belonging only to them were found to be in common with others (Wilkinson, 1998). A sense of community was thus rendered more tangible and real. The group experience also entailed intersubjective learning (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011; Lugones, 2010). It validated and emboldened the queer self while shining a light on areas prompting greater humility and gratitude, and it also meant learning of non-shared experiences, which guarded against homogenising tales of (sub)groups (Mavuso et al., 2019) and even inspired some participants to help other queers in the outside world. Freedom in dialogue, or the ability to share and listen without judgement via mainly participant-led discussion, was tied to these positive take-aways (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Wagaman et al., 2018). Participants also described, to their own surprise, relating across differences in racial and economic position, thereby destabilising hard identity-to-power equations (Cohen, 1997; Judge, 2018; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). At the same time, having a “matched” pair in these positions was voiced as needed across all focus groups. Finally, another methodological request for improvement had to do with the queer researcher’s insider-outsider status: to bring more of my own experiences to the

conversational table, so as to be a more overt self inside the social of dialoguing with participants (Gore, 2018; Matutu, 2019).

In sum, and through the lens of the research question and sub-questions, the diverse groups of queer-identified people in this study experienced the collective dialogue as a worthwhile if not necessary encounter for strengthening connections between, or shining a stronger light of awareness on, the self and the social (Brown, 2009; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Muñoz, 2009; Riggs, 2010). Notwithstanding the various kinds of "queer" identity they narrated, participants also constructed themselves as open to learning and averse to imposing on (or being imposed upon by) others. The interactional dynamics that emphasised holding multiplicities contributed to the participants accommodating each other's differences without falling into (irreparable) fomentation. These orientations supported a self that is not static but dynamic, in continual process of if not revising one's self-understandings, then learning to improve behaviours and perspectives towards diverse (queer) Others. With this potential to foster a grounded, experiential strengthening of "community", queer theorists and researchers on sexuality and gender are encouraged to focus further on in-person interaction and relationality in their development of relevant theories and interventions. In dialogues such as those that have gone on here lie the possibility of meaningful political coalescence, wherein we can negotiate with an empathic awareness of the stakes a play for one another which social norms and structures to tackle, and how, so as to enhance the liveability of LGBTQIA+/queer people.

Significance

This study met the call (by, e.g., Ghaziani et al., 2016) to examine how queers in the global South negotiate "sameness and difference" with the cis-hetero majority – and expanded that to include "sameness and difference" with other queers. It is also, to my knowledge, the first of its kind to read queer identity and relationality through Bakhtinian

dialogism (cf., Francis, 2012; Mkhize, 2004). The participatory, discursive space that this study created has shone a light on how inclusive conversations work to resist coloniality (Epprecht, 2013; Lugones, 2010). Quotidian micro-aggressions which web together spectacles of greater queerphobic violence (Judge, 2018) were identified. Discovering shared experience of these interactional grievances raised some participants' awareness of being able to relate across racial and economic divisions (Cohen, 1997; Judge, 2018; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012). By serving to highlight interdependence (Brown, 2009; Oswin, 2005), this kind of conversational space was narrated by participants as necessary to have not merely as a tool for research, but as a social site in which queer world-making projects can be discussed and negotiated (Muñoz, 2009; Wagaman et al., 2018).

Limitations

Besides the shortcomings mentioned above (i.e., my not quite being a co-participant and the relative racial and economic homogeneity of certain groups), participants also voiced the need for an extended, more intentional debriefing so as to recalibrate going back into the world after the conversational space. Other limitations included the age distribution of the study's sample: all but one participant were below 35 years old, and so certain explorations (e.g., cross-generational perspectives, child rearing, or aging while queer; Fabbre, 2015) were possibly precluded. Another researcher limitation was my English monolingualism: it meant I could not engage participants who were non-native English-speakers in their preferred language such as isiXhosa or Afrikaans (Swartz & Drennan, 2000). Due to the COVID-19 conditions during participation, wearing face masks meant at times that voices were muffled (Yi et al., 2021) and hence resulted in "[inaudible]" entries in the transcript. Face masks (*material*) may also have interfered in the interpersonal dynamics, since they tend to impede the recognition of emotions in facial expression, and thereby enlarge the opportunities for miscommunication (Mheidly et al., 2020). Finally, being the only researcher who analysed

the transcripts perhaps meant certain interpretations were unchecked by a co-analyst (Pope et al., 2000).

Future Directions

Beyond aiming to correct this study's identified limitations, future research is encouraged to address a matter that arose from participants' reflections: South Africans' experiences of "sameness and difference" in racial identification and/or economic position (and perhaps other social dimensions) – whether connected to queerness or not (Kiguwa, 2004). Replication of the present project in other sections of South Africa – and indeed, Africa and the world at large – is also encouraged not only to glean experiences, dialogues, and insights not captured here, but to examine the utility of the conversational space both for making queer social worlds and for building political/activistic coalitions therein (Epprecht, 2013). Moreover, researchers of sexuality and gender are encouraged to facilitate inclusive conversations on experiencing "sameness and difference" among cis-heterosexual people as well – whether exclusively or with queer co-participants. Fostering gender criticality and reflexivity in the dominant population has the potential to enhance empathising across difference and to reduce the tendency to hierarchise the self and the Other (hooks, 2000; Nicholas, 2019). I contend that a project such as this has the potential to benefit not just LGBTQIA+ or sexually and gender-diverse people, but all people (Butler, 1993b; Nicholas, 2019). In the words of hooks (2000, p. 12), a project like this offers a means by which we can transform "the enemy within" before moving to "confront the enemy outside". That enemy is the normative, prescriptive, violent ideology of cis-hetero monoglossia, able to be enacted by anyone. If we come together regardless of our sexed/sexual/gendered identifications (in and beyond the "rainbow nation" of South Africa) and explore in ongoing dialogue how to undo this monoglossia's monopoly on the social and structural world, we may demonstrate a way to take the project of queer world-making from the ideal to the real.

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Appendix A

Participants' Summary and "How to Read" Guide

Dear Participant,

You may want to know what the research project that you participated in was really all about, what the other people who participated discussed, and what the overall point of those discussions was for the existing psychological research out there. You might also want to have these answers given concisely and in plain language, not in the academic writing of the long official report. This guide offers you that simplified summary.

Each of the main sections in the full report addresses a particular question you may have about the research project. You can find short summaries of the answers to those questions here, using this table of contents. Click on the section in the table to go to it.

Sections	Questions Answered
Literature Review	Why was this research done?
Aims and Objectives	What was this research looking for?
Theoretical Framework	What assumptions about how people's minds work guided this research project?
Methods	How was this research done, and why?
Ethical Considerations	How did the project respect what is ethical about participating in this research?
Analysis and Discussion	What did all the participants say, and what does that mean in the bigger picture of things?
Conclusion	So what? Where to from here?

Of course, if you have any questions about anything in this guide or in the main report, I am happy to set aside some time to discuss them with you. Thank you once again for participating, and happy reading.

Tyler

Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness and Difference" in "Queer" Identification

The introduction of the report – that is, the first few pages between the Table of Contents and the Literature Review – is actually a summary of that Literature Review. Here is a similar summary, in clearer language.

Literature Review

Identities are, among other things, stories about who we are and who we aren't. So, what are the stories about queer or LGBTQIA+ identity in present-day South Africa? On the one hand, LGBTQIA+ life should be great since our constitution protects the human rights of queers. On the other hand, many local queers don't feel those protections happening in reality. Most still experience some form of queerphobia today. At the same time, there are mainstream, "official" stories that are specific about what counts as queerphobic violence, who tends to be the victim and perpetrator, and why that is the case. These stories contain some problems.

LGBTQIA+ South Africa: Ongoing Historical Problems

What often counts as queerphobic violence is a "spectacle" event: a hate crime that is extreme or shocking like physical assault, rape, and murder. These things do happen, but what about "smaller" or "everyday" kinds of hatred, like offensive speech or rejections from social circles? If these aren't treated as a kind of queerphobic violence, then it is almost like they are "normal" behaviours that we should learn to live with. And since that is "normal", it might send a message that, to an extent, queerphobia is "right". That can then encourage some people to commit violent hate crimes.

As for who are involved in the spectacles of violence, it is often reported that both the victim and the perpetrator are Black South Africans, especially from lower socioeconomic backgrounds like townships. A lot of violence (not just the queerphobic kind) does tend to happen in these difficult environments. *However,* we need to be careful about how we interpret that. Problematically, some people read this as "poor Black people are the problem". Considering our history of apartheid and slavery, you can see why this idea is dangerous. It also suggests that people of other races and higher socioeconomic backgrounds *don't* experience queerphobic violence. It invalidates the queerphobia that

these people might experience (even if it is not as extreme). It also suggests that trying to live a White, middle-class life is "the solution" to queerphobic violence.

Some scholars explain that these messages are a sign of "coloniality". Coloniality refers to ideas, behaviours, and structures of power from the time of colonisation that still work on society today. One key colonial idea makes it okay to dominate others: the idea that some people are human, and others are less-than-human. Racism works this way (Black people are treated as lesser humans than White people), classism works this way (poor people are treated as lesser humans than rich people), and queerphobia works this way (queer people are treated as lesser humans than cis-straight people). Seeing someone as less-than-human means we don't have to (perhaps can't) empathise with them, since they are more an object than a person who has feelings to consider. It is therefore "okay" to be violent to them. So, we need to watch out for this vertical binary (superior vs inferior) in people's everyday thoughts and behaviours.

Psychologists also need to be careful, when researching LGBTQIA+ people and asking about what queer life is like, of focusing mainly on queerphobia, the risk for violence, and experiences of pain. Of course, these things are important to talk about, but it is also important to talk about the more positive stuff as well. Focusing on (and maybe repeating) the message that "if you're queer, your life is just hard and sad" is not very helpful.

Meaning Duels in (Relations with) "Queer" Identification

We need to look for ways out of the "blackwashing homophobia" messages above, and out of thinking about different social identities as almost different "species" of humans. We might look at a collection of scholarship called queer theory for these ways out. This is because queer theory views identity categories as problems when:

- they claim to capture *exactly* who people are (they often don't, or fall short)
- people who use the same category are expected/supposed to be the same as each other in most ways (this isn't the case; we all have individual differences)
- people from different categories are expected *not* to be able to share experiences or ways of being (this also isn't the case; we can bond and relate with people not from our same identity categories), and
- they suggest that people cannot change categories over time (they can)

Queer theory also views it as a problem to arrange identities as binaries or opposites. Sexuality is not just "straight or gay" and gender is not just "man or woman"; there are many other sexual orientations and genders. It is not just that we must recognise other options; we must also be careful because other ideas of "opposites" (either/or) can be used to evaluate identities: some categories are "good or bad", "normal or abnormal", "human or less-than-human".

So, maybe queer theory can show us how to step out of the trap of coloniality, of vertical binaries based on these "strict" (and false) ideas about identities. But it's not so easy to find those answers, because queer theory also shows battles between binary ideas about what "queer" means. There are battles between:

- identification ("queer" is like any other "I am" label) and counter-/disidentification ("queer" is not like other labels; it is more "I am *not*")
- relationism ("queer" is about belonging to a collective) and anti-relationism ("queer" is about being a very unique individual)
- homonormativity ("queer" needs to become accepted by and blend into the existing structures of society) and anti-normativity ("queer" needs to fight against and break down those structures)

Critical research shows that one side of these battles is not always superior to the other. Also, when we consider more intersectionally marginal queers (i.e., queers who also have disadvantaged positions of race, class status, ability, etc.), it often seems like each side has faults and doesn't serve them well. Perhaps this is because a lot of these concepts are based mainly on experiences of White, middle-class queers from the global North. So, we need to see how these concepts work with lived experiences of more diverse kinds of queers in countries from the global South (like South Africa).

Repairing Simultaneities and Surfing Moebius Strips

When we think of identity in different ways, we might step out of these binary battles. Many critical, queer, feminist, and postcolonial scholars think of identity as a verb, not a noun – a process, not a thing. This is also important to consider because of intersectionality: how our various social identities (our race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.) make up who we are. We are always all of these things, but in some contexts, our social power works

differently. Put differently, we are like a Moebius strip: a shape that has one side, but from some angles looks like it has more than one.

Furian, P. H. (2016). *Blue Moebius strip or Moebius band* [Image]. iStock. https://www.istockphoto.com/vector/blue-moebius-strip-or-moebius-band-gm585291060-100346791

For example, if I meet a stranger, and that stranger is Black, then the person with more social power in our racial pairing is me, because I am White. But what if that Black person is a straight and cisgender male? On the sexuality and gender dimension, they have more social power than me, a gay and non-binary person. Now which of us has more power overall? We can't easily provide answers to that question. What we need to do is actually pay attention to how we behave with each other. Each of us could speak or act in problematic ways, and that will show us how power is working between us, more than what collection of identity labels we each have. So, we should look to processes of interaction to see how identities "work" on each other.

This also means we should view binaries not as a choice (an "either/or"), but a simultaneity or dialectic (an "and"). A "dialectic" is a term to describe a pair of things that look like two separate opposites (e.g., "good" and "bad"), but that actually rely on each other to exist. What is bad? Not good. What is good? Not bad. Try explaining one side without referring to the other – it is kind of impossible. Appreciating dialectics means that we mustn't classify coins as either a tails coin or a heads coin. A coin always has both sides; we just have to see which side is more dominant each time we flip it.

In the intersectionality example, I may be both privileged (White) and disadvantaged (queer), and the other person may also be privileged (cisgender, heterosexual) and disadvantaged (Black). Of course, our "boths" may not look the same as each other, but they do show us that contradiction is not only possible, but to be expected, and therefore tolerable. We should still pay attention to how our contradictions work, however, because some can be positive while others can be negative.

A key dialectic or contradiction to look at: we are always "the same as" each other in some ways and "different from" each other in others. If we ask a diverse group of queer people to come together and discuss experiences of those general feelings of relating – "sameness *and* difference", not "sameness *or* difference" – maybe we can see which contradictions or simultaneities are productive and unproductive for coming together to build community and strengthen queer South African life.

Dialogism: Analytic Augmentation to Queer Dialectics

Identities are also influenced by interactions. Queer theory is criticised for not paying a lot of attention to interaction, so we need to look to another theory that does. That is Mikhail Bakthin's theory of dialogism. Simply explained, dialogism believes that your mind is made up of your internal voice interacting with the voices of others that you have encountered in your life. Its idea, "the Other is part of the Self", complements *ubuntu,* an African idea of identity that "I am because you are". Dialogism recognises that we are responsible to one another, we rely on each other for who we are, and the individual and the social are not completely separate things.

Dialogism also suggests that, perhaps because of these different voices influencing our thoughts, a self can do contrary things simultaneously: we can feel, speak, and act with a "yes but". This also applies to language: there are common understandings of words or phrases, and also meanings that are divergent, carrying specific, individual associations for us because of interactions we've had before.

According to dialogism, there are many dialectical forces happening in speech:

- centripetal (agreeing force) and centrifugal (disagreeing force)
- expression (what is said) and repression (what is not said)
- monoglossia (a single, surface-level meaning) and heteroglossia (multiple meanings happening at deeper levels)

Dialogism is therefore quite useful for looking at "sameness and difference" between queer individuals in conversation with each other. If we create a space where the dialectic, the simultaneity, is allowed, then maybe we can see how people think outside of binaries, especially the vertical binary of superior/inferior, or human/less-than-human. Maybe this

will show us how to help create a meaningful solidarity of diverse queers, so that we can improve LGBTQIA+ "community" and life in South Africa.

Aims and Objectives

The research question is actually two in one: (a) What stories do diverse groups of queer/LGBTQIA+ people tell about their personal experiences of "sameness and difference" with others? and (b) What do they report experiencing about sharing these stories with each other?

More specifically, I wanted to know:

1.1. How do participants narrate their identifications and experiences of "sameness and difference"?

1.2. How do the interactions in the focus groups seem to affect what gets told?

1.3. What do these stories and interactions seem to do for participants' senses of "community" with each other?

1.4. What does this mean for knowledge, research, and activism for LGBTQIA+ people?

1.5. What potential might this have for ways of making the world more equal?

Theoretical Framework

In this project, the main assumption from queer theory about how minds work is that feelings, experiences, and behaviours that seem opposite (an "either/or") can work together (a "both"). You can feel like you partially belong *and* don't belong to queer community. You can feel like you are being *and* becoming your "true" queer self. You can feel that labels are useful *and* limited for talking about your identity. You can behave in ways that work with *and* against power, depending on many situational factors and choices. Different contexts and interactions can make one side of these binaries stronger or weaker, so we hold that minds are allowed to be "inconsistent". A related assumption is that you can counter-identify – or say, "I'm *not* that" – without having to (or being able to!) identify – to say, "I am this". At a young age, many queer people can sense their "difference" from the cis-hetero majority without really being able to name it or explain why.

The main assumption from dialogism is that communication with other people can affect how we understand ourselves and the world. When you talk with people in the moment, you may anticipate what their responses might be before you say something – and that anticipation can be based on what you've seen with them so far, or what you've learnt from interactions you've had with *other* people *before* this interaction. So, there are many voices at work in these conversations – the voices of people who are talking in the present setting, and the voices of other people *in your head* that you have heard from times and places in the past. Of course, although you are influenced by others' voices, you are still an agent yourself, and you get to decide what to think or do when you "hear" them. And even though we can be inconsistent because of these voices, we can also feel consistent over time. Dialogism explains that feeling consistent is because there is agreement with the voices and signs in the world with which you in particular may interact. At the same time, new contexts, voices, and signs can be taken in and result in changes to the way you think and act. Therefore, dialogue is useful for changing the way queer people interact with each other, and even for the way cis-hetero people interact with queers.

Methods

Design: This research is qualitative, focusing on what stories people tell about their lives through language. It is not quantitative (focusing on what statistical analyses tell us). It is also critical, in the sense that it tries to be cautious about how it creates knowledge on queer people. Psychology has a history of making queerness a pathology – for example, homosexuality was officially considered a mental disorder until 1973. So, as a researcher, I had to continually ask myself what I am saying in this research, who it is really for, and what the implications of these findings for LGBTQIA+ people are or will be, so that I minimise the risk of reproducing something problematic.

Recruitment: I sent out the research advert (which you saw) to several LGBTQIA+ organisations or groups, and these ones agreed to share it: Triangle Project, UCT Rainbow Society, PWR Project, and The Outgoers. Together, these establishments serve a variety of LGBTQIA+ people from various walks of life, so I assumed there would be a relatively well-represented sample of people from the general population who participated in this study. Because smaller focus groups can make sharing personal experiences more comfortable, and because they were safer from a COVID-19 health risk perspective, I sought to have

groups of 4-6 participants each. I also sought to have at least 3 groups, so that there would be "theoretical saturation", meaning there would be common-enough findings across the groups so that having another group wouldn't throw off the general picture of the results.

Participants: There were 21 people who participated in one of four groups. From the demographic information survey that you completed before the focus group, the following data was provided:

- Age: 14 people were 18-25 years old; 6 people were 25-34 years old, and 1 person was 35-44 years old.
- Employment: 13 people were university students, 3 people were full-time employed, and 5 were unemployed.
- Race: 8 participants identified as "White", 7 as "Black", and 6 as "Coloured" or "Mixed".

Because identity labels mean different things to individuals, and these differences were explored in the group (while other labels, like racial ones, weren't explored), I don't want to say a certain number of people used "the same" sexuality or gender term. However, I can provide the labels offered in this project:

- Sexuality: Participants identified as "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual", "pansexual", "asexual", "queer", "toric", "androsexual", and "heterosexual".
- Gender: Participants identified as "cis man", "cis woman", "trans man", "trans woman", "genderqueer", "gender-neutral", "fluid", and "non-binary".

I put participants into the same group according to the order in which they responded to me. For example, the first 6 to respond formed group 1, and the next 4 to respond formed group 2. I did not use any other criterion for organising the focus groups. Perhaps, according to some participants' feedback (which you'll see later), I should have.

Focus Groups: When moderating the focus groups, I used a strategy called "self-managed groups". This meant I introduced the nature of the group space, set some ground rules for how to engage with each other, and then handed over most of the control of the conversation to the participants. This was so that you could speak about what *you* decided was important to discuss, instead of me imposing what *I* thought was important. It was also

so that I could see your social interactions without me trying to "make" certain interactions happen. I did step in at times, of course. For example, I asked some of you to provide a lived example experience of "sameness and difference", instead of giving intellectual or general opinions about it.

Interviews: For follow-up interviews, I followed a semi-structured strategy. This meant I had the same set of general questions for everyone, but I was also flexible and asked certain individuals some more specific questions about their group and invited you to share whatever else you wanted to share in the interview. In a way, I treated you as "co-interpreters" of what went on in the groups. I also had to remember that the interview was a social encounter – between me and you – as much as the focus group was between you and your group members. So, I reflected on how some things about who I am and how I behaved or appeared to you might have affected your interview answers.

Transcription: I transcribed the audio and video recordings of both the focus group and the interview myself, so that I could get very familiar with the conversations. In the report, I "cleaned up" the transcripts of "messy" speech, such as when we stumble over words or say "uhm" while thinking. When you see "[…]", it means I have cut some section of speech out in order to save space. I made sure, though, that the meaning of what was being said stayed unchanged. When you see "(=Name:)", it means that that person began speaking at the same time as the other speaker's previous word.

Data Analysis: I used two methods of analysis: Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis (DINA) for the "what" of the content, and a Bakhtinian-dialogical analysis for the "how" of the content.

- **DINA Phase 1: Thematic Narrative Analysis:** In this stage, I looked at what stories were common and uncommon in the group, and across all the groups in the study. I looked for themes in these stories (e.g., what type of story was told, how they unfolded from beginning to end, and what emotions they featured). I also used input from the interviews to add to these themes if it was relevant.
- **Dialogical Analysis:** I considered what kinds of dialogue were happening in these themes. There are:

- *external dialogues*: dialogue happening between participants, and where people show they are anticipating each other's reactions (e.g., "I don't want to step on anyone's toes, but...")
- *internal dialogues:* dialogues happening between what participants are saying and what messages exist out there in the world (e.g., "It's like when people say there's a gay agenda…"), and
- *autodialogue:* speech that shows dialogue between the voices "inside" one participant's head that point in different directions (e.g., "There are people who are like this – well, I suppose I was like this too at some stage, too").

There are also forces of agreement and disagreement, expression and repression, and singular or multiple perspectives happening in these conversations. They point to different spaces or "dimensions" of the social self:

- the *personal* dimension refers to your subjective internal experience
- the *interpersonal* dimension refers to the relationships between you and other individuals
- the *transpersonal* dimension refers to the relationships between you and groups of people, like communities, and
- the *impersonal* dimension refers to the relationship between you and formal institutions, or places that make and maintain laws and regulations of behaviour (e.g., governmental offices, schools, hospitals, airports)

Finally, a dialogical reading asks me to consider the material and contextual factors that influence the dialogue. For example, how does the space of the focus group itself, in that building and in at that time, affect the talk? What does the group represent for each participant in their minds – a group counselling session, an academic seminar, a chat amongst friends? Did all participants get to hear each other's input, or were some people late or on a bathroom break when others were talking?

- **DINA Phase 2, 3, and 4: Discursive Analysis and Meta-Narrating:** Then, the next phases of DINA meant reading the above themes and their dialogical features for how they work to support power (2nd phase) or resist power (3rd phase):

- 2nd phase example questions: how did these stories and interactions strengthen homophobia, racism, classism, sexism, ableism, etc.? How did they reinforce the vertical binary between human and less-than-human?
- 3rd phase example questions: how did these stories and interactions demonstrate the breaking down of the vertical binary? How did they call for queer allyship, anti-racism, anti-classism, feminism, etc.? How did they create new meanings which open up the possibilities for how to transform the political and social world?

The 4th phase of DINA meant taking the answers to all the above readings, finding research that helps make sense of them, checking my reflexions for how I interpret them, and then writing a "meta-narrative". The "meta-narrative" is one large story that weaves together all of the stories in the study. It is written as the Analysis and Discussion section. In the main report, this is where I have quoted participants.

Reflexivity: I also had to pay attention to my interpretations for many reasons. As mentioned, there is my own social position and the variety of identities (and their privileges and disadvantages) that I have, which may influence how I interpret participants and how participants interpret and respond to me. Listening to participants' stories also evoked some emotions in me, and prompted me to revisit my own lived experiences, which then also might have influenced the interpretations I made. Even though I didn't really get to share my own personal experiences, opinions, and interpretations with you in the moment, I made sure I had a conversation *with myself* about them. I journaled my thoughts and feelings and looked over these many times to consider what I was really going to write in the meta-narrative.

Ethical Considerations

There were other moves I made to "do right by" you as someone participating in psychological research. These ethical considerations included:

- Following COVID-19 health and safety guidelines
- Providing you with informed consent forms and checking if you had questions about anything in them
- Asking you to agree to respect each other's confidentiality

- Asking my research assistant to also respect your confidentiality
- Explaining what would happen with the recordings and the data
- Taking steps to protect your identities (e.g., using a pseudonym and not your real name)
- Giving you opportunity to check the transcripts in case you wanted any of your input removed
- Compensating you for providing your personal stories to research (which benefits me), and
- Providing you with affordable counselling service contact details.

Analysis and Discussion

The Conclusion of the report summarises the "grand story" of the Analysis and Discussion. Here is that summary in clearer language. The story is divided in two broad parts: (a) what participants discussed in the focus groups, and (b) what the experience of the discussion was like, according to interviews.

Focus Group Explorations

For what was discussed in the groups, I identified/created three main themes:

- "Singular" and "plural" ways (personal and collective; monoglossic and heteroglossic) of identifying as queer,
- Facing everyday queerphobia from "strange" (not well known) and "intimate" people (family members), and
- Finding "exile" (no images or negative images) and "home" (positive images) when looking for examples of queer people in the social world.

In the conversational space of the focus groups, we were open to holding many different truths. We were also hesitant to evaluate those truths as either right or wrong. So, a lot of the dialogues demonstrated surfing binaries, or seeing/talking about both sides ("and"/ "yes but") of things usually considered opposite ("either/or").

Singular and Plural: "Queer" (Dis)Identificatory Logics

In the opening conversations about how you identified, there was the dialectical theme of singular and multiple meanings attached to identity labels and how to relate to them. Participants described themselves in ways of identification ("I am this"), counter-identification ("I am not that"), and/or disidentification ("I am only somewhat this"). Some people described choosing certain labels mainly because of how they felt inside themselves, while other participants described choosing certain labels mainly because of how other people understood them.

Some monoglossic ideas about queer identities ("it *only* means this"; "this is the *real* way to be queer") were described as responsible for the vertical binary inside the queer community. This restrictive norm, or "supposed to", creates "good and bad", "right or wrong", "valid or invalid" queers. Discussing the problem with this way of thinking, participants seemed to agree that what the community really needs to do is to respect and validate everyone's individuality. Whichever ways a person relates to, acts out, and describes their own queerness is just as valid as another person's ways.

This theme was also about alternative logics of identifying. Some participants described feeling bad about not experiencing time in ways it was "supposed to" be experienced, for example:

- the trans-normative idea that you "always knew" you were trans (some participants only realised this later in life, but that doesn't make them "less valid" trans people), and
- the idea that time only goes forward in a progressive way (some participants described questioning who they are, like most humans do during puberty, two or more times later in life. Others described feeling "out of sync" with their partners who were in a different phase of coming out and self-acceptance than them. "Backwards" feelings of time like these are okay when the world is not set up to benefit queers).

Another alternative identifying logic was reclaiming slurs. Some participants felt cool using slurs (e.g., "dyke", "faggot") for themselves and very close friends, taking what is "supposed to" be an insult, and instead using it to feel good or powerful. Some slurs (e.g., "moffie") were described as harder to reclaim. Just like "regular" terms to describe your identity,

some participants didn't like using slurs for themselves at all. All these positions are also fine.

Similarly changing the way that we relate to negative feelings, some trans participants resisted that dysphoria defines the trans experience. This is important since a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria (which the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders considers to be a mental condition) is often needed to allow trans people to get gender-affirming healthcare. But, as some participants explained, you don't have to hate yourself first in order to be "trans enough".

There was also an idea from one participant that you can relate to things that are more than "masculine or feminine". They asked: "what does my gender feel like, smell like, taste like, etc.?". They answered: their gender is like an abandoned mansion with overgrown gardens. How interesting that some of us can identify with things outside of the borders of what gender is "supposed to" be! Yet, some participants tried this exercise after the group but didn't really feel they were able to identify in that way. This is also fine.

Strange and Intimate: Cis-hetero Enactments of Monoglossia

This theme focused on how both strangers and family members try to enforce gender and sexuality "monoglossia". This "single voice" of gender and sexuality, a "supposed to" voice, represents very narrow ideas which are (a) false and (b) harmful for queers. These ideas include:

- gender is only man or woman
- sex is only male or female
- gender and sex map onto each other neatly (male is man; female is woman)
- it is impossible to change from woman to man, or vice versa
- a third option (or more) is not possible
- sexuality is "supposed to" be hetero
- the only other option is homo
- a person is one or the other sexuality for their whole life

Because people are taught that this is how gender and sexuality work, and because the existence of queer people threatens these ideas, queers can make some cis-hetero people

very uncomfortable with what they think they know about the world (and even about themselves). They can then react by treating queer people (not their ideas) as the problem.

Participants talked about how strangers, or people who don't know them very well, tend to ask very invasive questions about their gender and sexuality. They don't ask these questions from a position of wanting to learn; they rather try to force queers to explain themselves through the above *flawed logic* of gender and sexuality. Of course, queers are set up to fail at that task, and therefore to feel like they don't make sense.

Some participants also spoke about how, no matter what else was positive between them and their parents, being queer created a big hole or distance in their parent-child relationship. What used to be an intimate relationship therefore became an estranged one. A few people even described having been disowned. Fortunately, after many years, some families came around and are now accepting of these participants. Other people described their families as more accepting and felt quite lucky or privileged in that sense. Those with non-accepting families described it as helpful to visit queers with more accepting families, or to hear in the focus group that not all queer kids are kicked out or disapproved of.

Some harmful contradictions were spoken about in this theme. For example, while invalidatory questioning was a problem, some participants described silence (e.g., not being included in conversations about relationships or having children) as also problematic. There was also the matter of language that looks like acceptance on the surface, but actually implies non-acceptance below it. Consider "I love you regardless" (meaning "I love you despite this negative thing that you are"), or "hate the sin but love the sinner" (meaning "it's fine if you're gay, just never act on that desire").

Trans participants also described the double-edged sword of physical transitioning. On the one hand, it affirms their gender to feel more comfortable in their bodies. On the other, it means facing sexism from the public, and/or scrutiny from institutions. For example, a trans woman participant never used to get harassed when she presented as man, but now that she presents as woman, she does. She and other participants also described having anxiety when using public bathrooms or moving through airports when their ID photo might not match how they present in person.

There was a moment of disagreement about coming out in one group. One participant insisted queers should not come out, and for good reasons: straight people don't have to come out; it is a tiring, never-ending process; people often ask further personal/invasive questions when she declares her gender/sexuality. However, for other participants – such as one who was outed at school and to her parents – disclosing her queer identity, or being able to choose to do that, is important. The matter seemed to be resolved by distinguishing between "having to" come out versus "choosing to" come out, and to whom (straight people or fellow queers). The incident also seemed to imply respect for individual choices for self-disclosure, like for choices of identity labels.

Exile and Home: Images of Queer Self in the Social

This theme explored how representation of queerness – seen in media or heard in conversations with others – influenced participants' senses of self while growing up. Not having representation was a big thing: some participants described feeling "different" as a kid but not knowing that homosexuality was a real option for people to be. So, they had a hard time understanding why they felt different and what their adulthood might look like. This was described as causing a lot of distress, prompting them to think "maybe something is wrong with me".

When participants did finally come across queer representation, some of it was unhelpful. For example, it was intersectionally limited. The main image of a queer person in media was described as tending to be White and slender/toned, and especially an androgynous male-assigned person. Not seeing other kinds of queers meant participants who are, for example, Black and/or fat felt like they didn't belong in the queer community. Other unhelpful representations of queerness were those that also focused very heavily on trauma and pain. These were stories that were mainly about the struggle of self-acceptance, facing rejection and disownment, and experiencing queerphobia. Better stories were described as ones that made being queer a positive thing, and/or just a neutral, "normal" thing.

Participants described facing another problematic idea of what being gay means: "the gay agenda". This is the idea that gays are trying to "turn" straight people gay, and that they can do so just by being around those straight people. Participants agreed that this is nonsense.

After all, they had grown up all around straight people (and even faced a pressure to be straight), so why did they not turn out that way?

Another problematic message related to the gay agenda is that queer people are hypersexual: they have an unbridled, wild, excessive sexuality. So, some parents object to their children being taught acceptance of LGBTQIA+ life because they (falsely) assume that the teacher is encouraging uncontrolled, rampant sexual activity in their children.

Relatedly, there was a discussion in one group about sexual practice norms in the gay male community, and this contained an initial disagreement. Some participants took issue with what they experienced of this community as encouraging casual sex. They preferred sexual intimacy with people they were romantically committed to – a kind of relationship which the casual sex norm made it hard to find. However, other participants in the group expressed that we should be careful to view non-committal sex, or casual hook-ups, as inherently bad. Sex is not “less important” to people who have casual hook-ups; they might just view sex in a different light. The group seemed to resolve the issue by returning to the matter of individual choice, and not evaluating others’ choices as either right or wrong.

Positive representations of queerness were described by some participants as finding “home”. Recognising themselves in other queers helped them feel like they were okay, that they belonged in the world just as they were. Some of these representations took the form of seeing a queer person in an online platform (e.g., YouTube). Other representations were meeting another queer person who, for the first time, described their sexuality and gender in very similar ways to that participant.

For gender-variant participants, doing a gender journey with someone else was also narrated as important. They described it as very helpful to have a romantic partner (a) who was also a gender-variant person and could therefore guide them or go through the gender transition steps with them, or (b) who was cisgender but could support them and stick by their side through their gender transition. One group also demonstrated interdependence - or relying on one another – for gender affirmation in another way. In it, one participant wished to know how to go about getting affordable gender-affirming healthcare. Their group members who had gone through this healthcare gave them some tips and contact details.

Reflective Interview Co-Interpretations

This part, based on the follow-up interviews, is divided into two sections: (1) what dialogical effects were going on in the focus group and (2) how participants reported experiencing the focus group.

Dialogical Effects

In the interview, I asked participants (a) what they felt their group tended to agree and disagree on, (b) how they felt about what they expressed and if they wanted to clarify or add anything, and what things they might not have said but wanted to, and (c) which group members they felt sameness and difference with. These are the dialogical effects (agreement-disagreement, expression-repression, and sameness-difference) that are explored here.

There were different perspectives within each group about what agreements and disagreements there were. In fact, a few participants across the groups stated that there weren't actually disagreements in their groups. Instead, they stated that there were actually just different experiences being spoken about. Even when there were experiences that they couldn't relate to, it didn't cause conflict. Holding multiple truths and not evaluating them as right or wrong seemed to help prevent this conflict. Tense moments did happen, however, when participants came to the space with a different interpretation of what it meant. For example, an emotionally difficult subject – rape – was spoken about in a hypothetical manner by one participant. That person seemed to view the focus group as something like an academic seminar, where they could talk with emotional distance. For other participants, of course, the focus group was about lived experiences, and so talking about rape in that way was resisted.

As for expression-repression, the "dialogical elsewhere" – that is, remembering interactions from the past – affected how participants spoke (or didn't speak) in the focus group. Certain participants remembered that past others had told them that they don't watch their tongue and can come across as mean/insensitive. So, they described being very careful about what they said in the focus group and how. Other participants remembered getting (or hearing about) very poor reactions from other LGBTQIA+ people when certain matters were

discussed. Not wanting to experience that (again), they chose not to share certain stories in the group but did so in the interview.

Feeling sameness and difference with co-participants seemed to be influenced by many factors. In some groups, one factor was whether a pair had had decent conversations directly. When they had spoken directly, each person reported feeling "the same as" the other in their interview. When they hadn't spoken directly, their interviews didn't match, with one person reporting they felt "different" from the other (who reported feeling "sameness" with them). However, that pattern didn't seem to be the case for all groups. Despite one pair having spoken directly in what seemed to be good ways, one of them described feeling "different from" his co-participant, but also not really knowing why. There was a rather quiet participant in this group, and the person who felt "different" described thinking he should maybe stop having that direct conversation in order to let this quieter person speak. So, it seems like having passive participants in some groups also affected who people felt "sameness and difference" with.

Encounter Experiences

In the interview, I also asked participants about (a) their experience of the group in general, (b) how they felt about their queerness afterwards, (c) how they felt about me as the moderator and interviewer, (d) if they had any feedback on improving the group, and (e) if they had any final thoughts on the experience of participating. From the answers to these questions, I created themes about how they experienced participating in the groups.

One theme that emerged was a feeling of coming-out-of-isolation. Participants described discovering that things they previously thought were only experienced by them were also experienced by others. This made the sense of "community", or common experience, more real.

Another theme was that participants described having learnt from each other. Not only did people report learning about what life is like for other kinds of queer people, but also that the experience encouraged them to reflect on themselves. For many people, this reflection was validating and gave them a stronger sense that they are okay. One participant even described that hearing her group members' stories encouraged her to help other queers in the outside world.

A third theme was that the focus group provided freedom in expression. People could share and be listened to without judgement, which they said was quite a rare thing. One of the reasons for this freedom was the ground rule of not evaluating input as right or wrong. Another reason was that I was not a very controlling moderator and I let participants speak about what they wanted to.

Participants also described, in an almost surprising way, relating to people of different intersectional identities (e.g., race, class). At the same time, some people felt a bit uncomfortable being the only person from their socioeconomic and racial background in a group, so future organisers of these kinds of focus groups should ensure that at least two people "match" in these ways.

Some participants expressed that they would have liked to hear more about my own personal experiences and feelings, since I was another queer person at the table. A part of me wished I had shared this stuff, while the "professional" part of me didn't want my personal views (which were not protected by a pseudonym) to bias or influence the group's talk. It's a tricky position to navigate, being an "insider" because I'm also queer but being an "outsider" because I was not a participant like everyone else. This is something for me to think about when doing more research like this in future.

Conclusion

Answering the main research question, the people in this study reported experiencing the group dialogue as worthwhile. It seemed to strengthen the connections between, or bring people's attention to, the self-in-the-social and social-in-the-self. Answering the sub-questions:

1.1. Participants constructed their relationships to identity in many ways. They also tended to position themselves as open to learning, and not wanting to force their ideas on others.

1.2. Holding multiple truths meant that, in general, participants accommodated each other's differences without that leading to conflicts (or ones that couldn't be resolved).

1.3. These interactions showed that our "selves" are not fixed things but are in continuous processes of learning. If participants didn't learn new things or consider new perspectives

about themselves, they learnt about other queers. This may impact how they interact with members of their community in the outside world.

1.4. Because this kind of focus group can make the sense of "community" more real, queer theorists are encouraged to keep focusing on in-person interactions when developing their theories and interventions.

1.5. Since these dialogues demonstrated the possibility of respecting differences, relating across many different identities, and having agreeable conversations, they might represent a way of bringing diverse South African queers together to form a meaningful solidarity. That solidary could make a big difference to the conditions of living life while queer in our country.

Significance: This may be the first study to look at queer identity through Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. It demonstrated how inclusive conversations help people to think beyond coloniality and vertical binaries. It explored the everyday, smaller acts of queerphobia that can support a culture in which very violent hate crimes happen. Perhaps if we look at how to intervene at this level, over time fewer of those hate crimes may happen. The study also allowed participants to see what they had in common with people they might have assumed were very different from them. Several participants also spoke about how it's difficult to meet new queer people outside of clubs, bars, and other night-life spaces. This focus group was therefore also valuable as a sober, daytime space for meeting other queers and discussing how to improve LGBTQIA+ community.

Limitations: I could have helped end the focus group in a slower way, talking through how to deal with returning to a world that is a not always great to queers. The majority of the participants were fairly young; 20 out of 21 people were below 35 years old. This maybe meant that certain topics, like differences between queer generations, or being a queer parent, weren't given space to discuss. The fact that I only speak English meant I had to ask everyone to speak English, even if they would have preferred using another language (e.g., isiXhosa or Afrikaans). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to wear face masks the whole time, and that might have made it harder to hear each other and interpret facial expressions. I was also the only person who analysed the transcripts, so my interpretations were not thoroughly double-checked by someone else.

Future Directions: Future research should look at how experiences of “sameness and difference” are spoken about for different social dimensions, such as racial identity or economic background. Researchers should also try to repeat a study like this in different locations. What stories would come up then, and how similar or different would they be to the stories in this study? How would those participants report experiencing the groups? Would they have the same potential for strengthening community, in the same ways? I also encourage researchers to explore experiences of “sameness and difference” with cisgender, heterosexual people. It is important that all people explore how the “monoglossia” of gender and sexuality can harm *everyone*, not just LGBTQIA+ people. Maybe if they had that kind of exploration, it would encourage them to be better to LGBTQIA+ people, too.

Appendix B

Research Advertisements

Two versions of the same advertisement were created: Version A (here) was one page in length and thus fitted viewing via email or as a printed document, and Version B (next page) was split across two pages and was thus more legible if shared via social media posts. The PWR Project chair who agreed to distribute the advert did so via an Instagram post, and elected to create a 'cover page' for Version B in order to do so. That cover page appears after Version B here.

Version A:

Department of Psychology

Are you a queer/LGBTQIA+ person living in or around Cape Town? Are you over the age of 18? We are looking for adults who *broadly identify* as "queer" and/or "LGBTQIA+" to participate in a study:

Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" in "Queer" Identification

We know that being "queer" or "LGBTQIA+" can mean different things to different people of sexual and gender diversity. We also know that people experience feeling "the same as" or "different from" another person in many ways. We are interested in *your* meanings: what being queer/LGBTQIA+ means to *you*, and what relational experiences have been significant to *your* lives, whether related to your queerness or not.

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS: You will be asked to **share your personal experiences** about what being queer/LGBTQIA+ means to you, and what moments of "sameness" and "difference" have been important to you. Participation involves **a single 90- to 120-minute focus group,** in which you share and converse with other participants, followed by **a single 30-minute interview** at a later date in which you reflect on the focus group. Participation is **completely voluntary,** and you will be **free to withdraw** from participating at any point. Strict **COVID-19 safety protocols** will be obeyed at the site of the focus groups (and interview if held in person). Note that the principal researcher who conducts the focus group and interview also identifies as queer/LGBTQIA+.

BENEFITS: You may feel empowered to tell your stories, and you might even make meaningful connections with other participants. You will also help improve research and theory on what being "queer"/"LGBTQIA+" means in the South African context, and this may enhance psychological engagement with sexually and gender diverse individuals and communities.

REMUNERATION: *For participating*, you will receive a R100 digital voucher for Shoprite/Checkers. This is split in two: R50 after the focus group and R50 after the interview. *For transportation/access,* you will also be compensated up to R100 in travel costs to the focus group venue, plus R100 either in travel or data costs for the interview, depending on if you request it to be done in person or remotely.

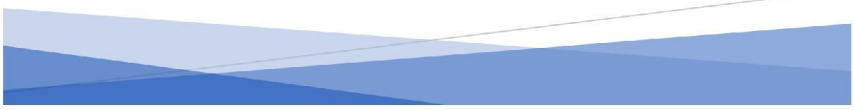
GET IN TOUCH: To volunteer for the study, or to find more information about it, please contact:

Tyler Phillips (Principal Researcher) - Email: PHLTYL001@myuct.ac.za

Or alternatively, Dr Maxine Spedding (Research Supervisor) - maxine.spedding@uct.ac.za

The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee within UCT's Psychology Department.

To talk to the Chair of the Ethics Committee you can contact Rosalind Adams at rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za or 021 650 3417



Version B:

Are you a queer/LGBTQIA+ person living in or around Cape Town?

Are you over the age of 18?

We are looking for adults who broadly identify as "queer" and/or "LGBTQIA+" to participate in a study:

Department of Psychology

Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" in "Queer" Identification

We know that being "queer" or "LGBTQIA+" can mean different things to different people of sexual and gender diversity. We also know that people experience feeling "the same as" or "different from" another person in many ways. We are interested in *your* meanings: what being queer/LGBTQIA+ means to *you*, and what relational experiences have been significant to *your* lives, whether related to your queerness or not.

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS:

- You will be asked to **share your personal experiences** about what being queer/LGBTQIA+ means to you, and what moments of "sameness" and "difference" with others have been important to you.
- Participation involves **a single 90- to 120-minute focus group**, in which you share and converse with other participants, followed by **a single 30-minute interview** at a later date in which you reflect on the focus group.
- Participation is **completely voluntary**, and you will be **free to withdraw** from participating at any point.
- Strict **COVID-19 safety protocols** will be obeyed at the site of the focus group (and interview if held in person).
- Note that the principal researcher who conducts the focus group and interview also identifies as queer/LGBTQIA+.

BENEFITS: You may feel empowered to tell your stories, and you might even make meaningful connections with other participants. You will also help improve research on what living as "queer"/"LGBTQIA+" means in the South African context, and this may enhance psychological engagement with sexually and gender diverse individuals and communities.

REMUNERATION:

- *For participating*, you will receive a R100 digital voucher for Shoprite/Checkers. This is split in two: R50 after the focus group and R50 after the interview.
- *For transportation/access*, you will also be compensated up to R100 in travel costs to the focus group venue, plus R100 either in travel or data costs for the interview, depending on if you request it to be done in person or remotely.

GET IN CONTACT:

To volunteer for the study or find more information about it, please contact:

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The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee within UCT's Psychology Department.

To talk to the Chair of the Ethics Committee you can contact Rosalind Adams at rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za or 021 650 3417

PWR Project Cover Page:

Appendix C

Demographic Information Survey

Participant Demographic Information

Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" in "Queer" Identification

Information Request: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study!

We would like you to provide some of your demographic information, so that we can see how accessible and relevant this study is across a range of social characteristics.

This information will be kept confidential (only the researcher will have access to this document), and you will not be identified using these characteristics in the research report.

Please could you answer the following questions:

* 1. Please provide the email address you used to contact the researcher.

* 2. What other terms do you have, if any, for your sexual orientation?

* 3. What other terms do you have, if any, for your gender identity?

* 4. What are your pronouns?

* 5. What is your racial background?

- ◯ Asian
- ◯ Black
- ◯ Coloured
- ◯ Indian
- ◯ White
- ◯ I'd prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

* 6. What is your age range?

- ◯ 18-24
- ◯ 25-34
- ◯ 35-44
- ◯ 45-54
- ◯ 55-64
- ◯ 65+
- ◯ I'd prefer not to say

* 7. What is your current occupation? (If you do not have one, please specify this.)

* 8. Which area do you currently live in?

* 9. Are you comfortable having a conversation in English?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Done

Appendix D

Focus Group Facilitation Schedule

1. Ice Breakers [5-10 min]

"Let's go around introducing ourselves. Tell us a bit about what you do for fun, what fun thing you've been missing out on thanks to the pandemic, and perhaps if you've found a new thing to do because of lockdown."

2. The Purpose and Ground Rules [5 min]

The main purpose of this group is for a mix of queer/LGBTQIA+ people like you to come together and share those two things I asked you to think about: (1) how you would describe the way you identify, and (2) your experiences of feeling 'sameness and difference' with others. Others can be queer and non-queer people, friends, family, peers, colleagues, strangers, etc. Both of these things are quite personal, and also quite open to interpretation. That means two things: firstly, that there are no right or wrong answers to describe either the way you identify or your experiences of 'sameness and difference' with others, and secondly, that we want to hear from everybody, since there are potentially many perspectives here.

As for my role, I will not be an interview with a list of questions. The discussion will be amongst all of you, and I will be less involved than you are. I'll be listening and watching, and I will jump in if I'd like someone to explain a little further – which you are also welcome to do with each other. I'll also jump in if the conversation goes way off topic, and if it's necessary, to ensure the space remains comfortable, safe and respectful for everyone. We are all experts on our own lives, and so we should treat each other as such. That also goes for if we are feeling uncomfortable saying more about something if someone asks us to; if that's the case, please say so, and the rest of us will accept it and move on.

Are there any questions? Is there anything else anyone would like to add to the ground rules?

Though I won't be asking many questions, the first question I'd like us to consider is:

3. "Queer" Labels [10-30 min]

What does being 'queer' or 'LGBTIAQ+' mean to you? How would you describe how you identify?

4. Key Question: Sameness and Difference [45 min - 1 hour]

Now let’s get into the main part of the discussion: sharing our important moments of experiencing sameness and difference with others. Anyone can begin, with any kind of moment, and we’ll let the conversation develop from there.

5. Wrapping up [5 – 10 min]

Now that we’re nearing the end of the session, I’d like to know if there are final thoughts or experiences anyone would like to share?

What are you taking away from this session? What’s been an important part of it for you?

Debrief

- Thank you all so much for your time and for sharing such important personal experiences here.
- [Compensation]
- [Counselling referral]
- [Inform: Will be in contract to arrange a follow-up interview, either via video-call or here again.]
- [Inform: Will get back in contact when final report is ready]
- Be sure to contact me at any point if you have questions or concerns about this study.
- Any questions?

Appendix E

Interview Question Schedule

1. **General Impression**
   1.1. How did you feel about the focus group discussion?

2. **Focus Group Interactions**
   2.1. Did you feel "the same as" anyone in the group in a significant way? If so, who?
   Prompt: Why did you feel "the same as" them?
   2.2. Did you feel "different from" anyone in the group in a significant way? If so, who?
   Prompt: Why did you feel "different from" them?
   2.3. To what extent do you feel your group members agreed with each other?
   Prompt: What did your group members tend to agree about?
   2.4. To what extent do you feel your group members disagreed with each other?
   Prompt: What did your group members tend to disagree about?

3. **Expression and Repression:**
   3.1. How do you feel about what you expressed in the group?
   Prompt: Do you want to change or clarify anything you said?
   3.2. Is there anything you wanted to say in the group, but didn't?
   Prompt (if so): Why didn't you express this in the group?

4. **Queer Identification**
   4.1.Has your understanding of being queer/LGBTQIA+ changed after the focus group?

5. **Perception of the Research(er):**
   5.1. How do you feel about me as the moderator and interviewer?
   5.2. Do you feel the focus group could be improved in any way?

6. **Closing Questions:**
   6.1. Is there anything more you would like to discuss that you feel is important?
   6.2. Any questions?

Debrief:

- Check: Counselling service referral list
- Inform: Be back in touch once transcription is done, and then when report is written

Appendix F

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS FIELDWORK CHECKLIST

Researchers wanting to take part in field work that involves human participants off campus are required to complete this check list and to obtain the approval of their HoD and thereafter their Dean, prior to embarking on the fieldwork. Please provide supporting documentation to this completed checklist listed below.

Researcher's Names and Department at UCT : Tyler Phillips (PHLTYL001), MA in Psychological Research, Department of Psychology

CHECKLIST ITEM	Y/N or NA	COMMENTS (comment on reasons why NA or N)
1) Have alternatives to face to face options been explored? If No please discuss alternatives with your HOD. If Yes please complete this checklist	Y	A significantly large amount of interactive data would be lost without face-to-face field work.
2) H&S Risk Assessment completed to evaluate hazards and risks: a) trip route (travel arrangements across provincial and magisterial districts) b) COVID-19 hotspots c) site to be visited d) tasks to be performed e) policy and procedures in case of damage to property (field workers, internal & external UCT parties), vehicle breakdowns, accidents f) emergency situations such as fires, COVID-19 breakout g) accommodation and related subsistence arrangements h) transport of participants and or staff to facilities	N/A / Y	(a) participants make their own way to the venue; all are based in and around Cape Town. (b) Because participants are based in and around Cape Town (in various suburbs), it can only be assumed that they have average risk of Capetonians. (c) site is Observatory Community Recreation Centre (Rawson Street, Observatory, Cape Town). (d) focus groups are to be held at this centre. (e) participants arrange their own transport and therefore breakdowns/accidents are at

		their own risk; all are independently liable for damage to the centre property. (f) Centre has fire-containment equipment (extinguishers and hoses); evacuation route is clear (g) not applicable as contact is only for 3 hours max. (h) own arrangements.
3) Strategies, plans and precautionary measures put in place and arrangements made: a) Address results/profile of individual team members health risk assessment b) PPE to wear c) Physical and other barriers to put in place d) promotion of ventilation such as natural/fresh air e.g. opening of windows e) Decontamination/cleaning of potentially contaminated site? (e.g Wiping surfaces down after each participant?)	Y	(a) I will postpone focus groups if I feel symptomatic or determine myself to have been exposed. Participants must sign in with contact details, have their temperature checked, and declare if they have symptoms, upon entry to the Centre. (b) Sanitizer is provided at entrance but I will bring additional sanitizer for in-room. Masks are mandatory on site; I will provide ones if participants fail to bring their own. (c) The room (6x6m) is large enough to create a circle with distancing of 2m between participants. (d) room is well-ventilated with 4 large windows facing the outside. (e) Centre rooms are cleaned daily; I will wipe down chairs and tables with sanitizer before participants arrive.
4) Form/record completed by all field workers to include: a) medical aid details (if available) b) medical practitioner's details c) Contact details	Y	My medical aid details: Discovery Health, number: 706652371. I do not have an assigned practitioner. My contact number is 0655150609.
5) Before persons may attend a field trip it is vital they have completed the Personal Health Risk and Medical Vulnerabilities Assessment and may only be allowed to	N/A	This research is not to be held on UCT campus.

	join the field trip if: a) They have received clearance by the Occupational Health Services to return to UCT/Research b) Received a Letter of Authority from the Faculty / Department to return to campus.		
6)	Programme/information pack handed out to field workers include info: a) Fieldwork programme: dates/times/time slots b) Trip route c) Route rest stops d) Areas to visit (descriptions of spaces to be accessed, eg building site offices etc) e) Accommodation/dining places names and arrangements f) Name & contact details of H&S persons on trip if applicable: i. first aiders ii. COVID-19 Compliance Officer or SHE Rep g) COVID-19 rules & protocols h) Emergency/incident reporting procedures	N/A	(a) times have yet to be decided as it depends on participant availability. (b) participants are travelling from their own homes to the site; routes vary. (c) indeterminable (d) Observatory Community Recreation Centre (Rawson St., Observatory, Cape Town). The building is large and spacious, and the groups will be held in one $36m^2$ room. Participants can access a small kitchen with a water boiler and a bathroom/toilet. Participants need not make contact with anyone else in the building other than the security guard when signing in. (e) not applicable. (f) not applicable. (g) Centre mandates signing in with contact details, temperature checks, sanitizing, declaring if symptoms are present, and wearing a mask at all times. (h) the space organizer (Desire: heartofobs@gmail.com) will be available on site; otherwise emergency services are contactable.
7)	Copies of UCT issued fieldwork authorisation letters (as issued by the Faculty Deanery). Original/copy should be with field team members at all times, especially important for areas that might still be off limits if still closed due to lockdown.	N/A	Not applied for; Faculty ethical approval granted nonetheless.

8)	Permission evidence/letter (whether on private, parastatal or government sites) obtained from sites where fieldwork is to be conducted.	N/A	The space organizer (Desire: heartofobs@gmail.com) and I have been in contact privately to arrange this space usage.
9)	Evidence/records that field trip training/induction completed by each fieldwork attendee before leaving on trip.	N/A	No training necessary for this fieldwork.
10)	Health & COVID-19 symptom screening procedures in place e.g. completing HigherHealth App every morning - available at https://healthcheck.higherhealth.ac.za/	Y	I will download this app and encourage my participants to do so. Otherwise, screening at the entrance to the Centre (explained previously) is mandatory
11)	Procedure to follow (paper exercise) if symptom screening cannot be completed via a cellphone or online.	Y	At entrance to Centre, all are screened by checking temperature and asking for declaration of particular symptom experience.
12)	Reporting procedure of ill health or COVID-19 symptoms: a) who to report symptoms to b) procedures to follow if an attendee displays COVID-19 symptoms c) isolating/quarantining area procedures of symptomatic person d) procedures of keeping others safe from infection	N/A	If participants are (thought to be) symptomatic, they will be asked not to attend that day's session. They can attend a session at a later time if symptoms have cleared.
13)	Biological disposal drum/container lined with biohazardous red bag for soiled/contaminated first aid items, masks, gloves, tissue papers.	Y	Waste disposal areas are present at the Centre.
14)	COVID-19 incident procedures in place: a) reporting procedure on field trip b) ceasing fieldwork c) wearing of surgical/KN95 mask/shields? d) isolation procedures e) isolation area.	N/A	Since fieldwork is brief (3 hours at one time, different individuals every time), and since those thought to be symptomatic are turned away, these conditions are not applicable.
15)	UCT COVID-19 reporting contact details – for staff as well as students.	Y	Student Wellness Services at UCT: 021 650 5620
16)	Local/nearest clinic/hospital or medical practitioner's contact details and/or location/s at all the field trip's stops	Y	Groote Schuur is the nearest hospital to the field site.
17)	Contact details of local emergency services – ambulance, fire brigade, police	Y	Nearest fire station: Salt River - 021 650 5620 Ambulance from Groote Schuur Hospital: 021 404 9111

		Nearest police station: Mowbray - 021 680 9580
18) Procedure how injured, ill, COVID-19 + person/s to be transported to clinic, hospital, back to campus.	Y	If needing medical attention, an ambulance will be called using above number. Otherwise, participants leave the site using their own transportation (for which I provide compensation).
19) COVID-19 procedures for other fieldwork team members to follow after incident (high or low risk incident).	Y	If an exposure incident occurs, the session is cancelled, and all (myself included) are to isolate at home and contact a medical service.
20) Field trip incident investigation procedure: a) access to HS02 forms b) completion procedure c) keeping of record d) to whom at UCT to send it to.	Y	I have access to the HS02 form and contact details of UCT's SHE staff.
21) Procedure in place to log of each day's activities e.g. to be recorded in a shared folder such as google or dropbox. The log to include: a) places visited b) persons closely or at length interacted with external to UCT members on trip c) locations samples taken d) public or private venues accessed or visited e) personnel at venue that were in attendance f) any operation anomalies that may have occurred requiring assistance from persons outside the field crew (e.g. vehicle problems).	Y	I will keep such a log and share it with my supervisor, who will help me determine if such information should be shared at any point with UCT SHE staff.
22) Social and physical distancing as well as de-densifying plan: a) dividing into smaller field teams - no more than 2 - 4 members b) teams to work separate from one another c) minimising staff/students on-site by using rotation/shift work d) only 2 persons per vehicle with FCMs on at all times e) only one person per room f) 2m distancing kept between field workers/teams, community, shop or site members/staff etc).	N/A (a-e); Y (f)	I am the only UCT field worker on this project; I do not have a team.
23) COVID-19 etiquette and rules set up for field trip and an induction completed:	Y	(a) face masks mandatory for all participants

a) wearing of face cloth masks (FCMs) b) social distancing c) use of physical barriers d) reporting of COVID-19 symptoms e) persons per vehicle f) promotion of ventilation in vehicles, rooms g) protocol to use toilets/bathrooms procedures (on and off site) h) hand washing and sanitising procedures i) disinfecting procedures (how frequent, when and what) j) how, when to dispose of biological & cleaning/disinfecting waste k) doffing & donning of FCMs l) donning & doffing of face shields and when to wear these - e.g. together with FCM when need to be in close contact for >15min; <1m m) cleaning or disinfecting of PPE n) rules of engagement and interactions with society - purchase of food supplies and fuel o) minimise interactions with local individuals/community members. p) No sharing of food, water bottles and any eating or drinking utensils		(b) social distancing encouraged and measured to arrange furniture with sufficient space (c) furniture arrangements with sufficient space. (d) Asked before the day, and on the day at entrance to centre; individuals with symptoms will be asked not to attend, to isolate, and to seek medical attention. (f) indeterminable; participants travel independently (g) participants may use the bathroom on site at their discretion; I supply toilet paper, soap, and sanitizer. (h) sanitizer present on site. (i) I disinfect pens used to fill in forms every time a new participants uses one; I clean table and chair surfaces; (j) disposed of in bins on site. (k and l) see (a) (m) any shields worn will be provided with sanitizer to be cleaned at user's own discretion. (n) social distancing and frequent sanitizing encouraged (o) participants have no need to interact with anyone on site who is not in the focus group. (p) this is discouraged; disposable cups will be provided.
24) Procedures and resources for promotion of personal hygiene (ensure adequate soap, water, sanitizer and wipes for hand sanitising, toilet paper).	Y	I have planned to provide these on the days.
25) Protocol for enhanced cleaning/disinfection of shared bathrooms, kitchen facilities, or equipment	Y	I can request site organizer to ensure these facilities are cleaned at the start of each day of

		fieldwork.
26) Disposal procedures of general, chemical and biological waste.	Y	Bins on site.
27) Procedure/protocol of when and how must fieldwork equipment be used, disinfected and stored.	Y	Only I will handle video/audio recording equipment, and will disinfect after each use in the field space.
28) Water/liquids and food - each member to bring enough for themselves on trip and/or to site. Clearly labelled bottles and containers – prepared and brought from home if possible.	Y	
29) Extra water resources provided/planned by field trip organisers.	Y	I will bring water
Optional provisions dependent on faculty specific regulations		
30) First aider/s appointed for trip and trained in what to do in case of a COVID-19 symptomatic person.	N/A	Participants will be turned away if they present with symptoms.
31) First aid kit contains all the legal minimum required items, but also include: a) Appropriate cloth/surgical or KN95 masks (enough for first aider & those possibly infected on trip in case of a possible COVID-19+ incident) b) face shields for first aider and possible COVID-19+ patient c) a thermometer d) blanket (in case of chills)	N/A	Masks are mandatory; thermometer present at security desk/entrance.

Supporting documents to attach

1. Up to date ethical approval for the study (**Attached)**
2. Recommencement approval of research activities from HREC or REC **(N/A – not returning to campus)**
3. Study protocol with relevant amendments for safe recommencement of research activities. (**Attached)**
4. Study synopsis for the research to be conducted for this application **(Attached below)**
5. Health and Safety risk assessment IF RELEVENT (**Not relevant)**

Signatures

(Kevin G. F. Thomas)

Research Supervisor (for post-grad students)

Head of Department

Deputy Dean/Dean

DVC sign off

Study Synopsis

Please provide no more than 1.5 pages of information on the key details of the research to be conducted. Use the following guidelines to do so.

a) Justification for why face-to-face research is needed;
b) Details on the nature of the research,
c) Number of researchers and their risk profiles
d) Discuss the risks associated with the research and the benefits of the research.
e) Describe where the research will also take place, i.e. the field
f) The number of participants and their risk profile
g) The community risk profile sites to be visited
h) What community engagement has taken place regarding research recommencement plans
i) Where and what PPE has been obtained
j) What other infection measures are in place and whether sufficient resources are in place for the duration of testing
k) Where in the whole project continuum the work currently proposed fits.
l) What training students and field workers will undergo prior to commencement of fieldwork and how competency will be determined

a) Face-to-face research is needed because the primary mode of data collection is focus groups, and a key unit of analysis is dynamics of interaction among participants. The natural flow of interaction, and non-verbal forms of communication (e.g. body language) would be lost if these groups were held over video conferencing. Turn-taking would be stiff, signal glitches/lags would demand a lot of repetition, etc. The entire picture of literature already reviewed for my topic points to group interaction as the key mode of investigation – it makes less sense to proceed with a different data collection method (e.g. only one-on-one interviews or surveys).

b) The research is in the realm of social, qualitative psychology. It is concerned with queer-identified individuals, and their significant lived experiences of feeling ‘sameness and difference’ with others, queer-identified of not. This ‘sameness and difference’ could mean belonging and non-belonging, recognition and misrecognition, understanding and misunderstanding, etc. Participants are asked to form a group and share these experiences

with each other. A conversation is meant to develop in which they compare and contrast these experiences, seeing the commonalities and dissimilarities amongst their experiences.

c) I (Tyler Phillips, PHLTYL001) am the primary investigator. I am the only party conducting this research (excluding supervision), and I will be the only researcher organizing and holding these focus groups. I have a low risk profile – I mainly work from home most of the time, and I follow standard COVID-19 etiquette (mask-wearing, frequent sanitising, social distancing) whenever I venture out. I have not been exposed as of yet.

d) Risks related to COVID-19 are that participants might expose each other to the virus. Safety measures in place to prevent this are: sanitising at site, mandatory wearing of masks, measured furniture placement to ensure social distancing of those sitting in the focus group, temperature measurements, and declaration of symptom presence or not, with those thought to be symptomatic asked not to join that day. Risks in data collection are potential conflictual engagement, and potential confidentiality breaches thereafter. To mitigate this, I set ground rules for engagement and ask participants to sign a confidentiality-upholding declaration. Benefits include sharing personal stories one might not get to express; potentially forming new social connections in focus group peers; improving knowledge on queer lives in South Africa.

e) The site is Observatory Community Recreation Centre (Rawson St., Observatory, Cape Town). I have arranged with the organiser of the space to reserve one private room in which to hold the focus groups. Standard H&S protocols are in place at this venue. Participants need not interact with any other parties at this location, besides the security guard when checking in.

f) Participants are expected to total between 18 and 24 individuals; but only 6 to 8 individuals will be in one focus group, on one day, at a time. The individuals are varied in terms of their demographic characteristics and location of residence, other than the general area of Cape Town and surrounds.

g) There is no information on the specific risk profile of Observatory or Observatory Community Recreation Centre; it can be assumed it has the average risk profile of any (regularly cleaned and sanitised) public venue in Cape Town.

h) I have arranged with the organiser of the Centre to hold focus groups. I have met with this organizer to inspect the premises to ensure that they are suitable. I have yet to begin recruiting participants, due to the necessary completion of this form beforehand.

i) PPE to be obtained includes disposable face masks and sanitiser. These are readily available at, for example, Dischem or Takealot.

j) These will be in sufficient supply throughout the focus group procedures. Other measures are not in place.

k) This is the data collection work for my MA Minor Dissertation, due in full at the end of 2021. Data collection should therefore commence soon (February/March/April).

l) I do not believe training is necessary. I will ensure I set aside ample time to disinfect the room under use, including its equipment. I will ensure to have incident forms (HS02) and contact details for emergency services on hand on each day of a focus group session.

Study Protocol

On the day of focus groups:

1. Having provided participants with the location of and directions to the Centre, they will arrive at the entrance and encounter the security guard. This guard will take down their contact details, ensure they are wearing a mask, provide sanitiser, and ask if they have been symptomatic. The participant can then ask for Tyler/ The Yoga Room (the name of the room we are using in the Centre), and the guard will direct them to it.

2. Once participants find me/the room, I will greet them and doubly check that they are not feeling symptomatic. I will then provide them with forms and a (disinfected) pen to complete RE informed consent, etc. Once papers are complete, I will inform participants of where to locate the bathroom and kitchenette, and indicate that toilet paper and disposable cups are provided. I will also provide participants the option of using a new mask.

3. After these preliminaries, the focus group discussion will commence, with participants seated in chairs 2 metres apart from each other, arranged in a circle. Audio/video recording equipment is set to record throughout.

4. After the session ends, I will provide participants each with debriefing forms and compensation for travel and time provided. I will also request that if anyone feels symptomatic in the following 2 weeks, that they contact me so that I may contact the others who have been present. Participants are then encouraged to leave the premises. I will not leave until all participants have left.

Appendix G

Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa
Telephone (021) 650 3417
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

01 June 2020

Tyler Phillips
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Tyler

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" in "Queer" Identification.* The reference number is PSY2020-017.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Ward
Professor
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

Faculty of Humanities
Postgraduate Administration
University of Cape Town

Room 110, Beattie Building
Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 2067
E-mail: Ibtishaam.Jacobs@uct.ac.za
Website:http://www.humanities.uct.ac.za/hum/postgraduate/studies/aboutus/overview

19 June 2020

Mr Tyler Phillips
E-mail: PHLTYL001@MYUCT.AC.ZA
Student no: PHLTYL001

Dear Mr Tyler Phillips

ACCEPTANCE OF MASTERS PROPOSAL BY HUMANITIES FACULTY BOARD

I have pleasure in advising that your research proposal as detailed below has been approved by the department, and the Faculty of Humanities in the Dean's Circular HUM 03/2020.

Kind regards
Ibtishaam.Jacobs@uct.ac.za
Miss Ibtishaam Jacobs
Faculty of Humanities: Postgraduate office

cc Supervisor: Dr Maxine Spedding

CANDIDATE	STUDENT NO.	DEPT	SUPERVISOR	CO-SUPERVISOR	TITLE
Phillips, T	PHLTYL001	Psychology	Dr M Spedding		Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" in "Queer" Identification

Appendix H

Informed Consent Form for Focus Group

Title of research project: Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" and "Queer" Identification

Name of Principle Researcher: Tyler Phillips **Email:** PHLTYL001@myuct.ac.za

Name of Research Supervisor: Dr Maxine Spedding **Tel:** 021 650 3425

Department Address: P. D. Hahn Psychology Building, Chemistry Road, UCT, Rondebosch

If you wish, the Chair of the Ethic committee can be contacted via Rosalind Adams at Rosalind.Adams@uct.ac.za or 021 650 3417.

Participation in the Focus Group:

Involvement: Individuals who identity as queer and/or LGBTQIA+ are invited to form a focus group. In it, each of you will be asked to share your stories about what being queer and / or LGBTIAQ+ means to you, and what experiences of "sameness" and "difference" have been important for you. You will be able to have a conversation with your group members to see if and how you relate to each other in your experiences. The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded by the researcher. Participation is completely voluntary.

Risks: There is low risk of harm to participants in this study. This means that there should be no more psychological risk than that of an ordinary conversation in daily life. While what you share is your choice, we will not urge you to speak about negative experiences or to argue with others. We try to create a safe sharing environment, but any participant who feels discomfort or distress may withdraw at any point without penalisation. Those who choose to withdraw will be asked permission for us to include their recorded input; if refused, this input will be wiped from our records. Please also note the limits to confidentiality: by participating in this focus group, your identities will not be anonymous to other group members. While we ask all participants to sign a confidentiality undertaking, agreeing to protect each other's privacy after the focus group, we cannot guarantee that they will honour this undertaking.

Benefits: You will help improve understandings of what being queer/LGBTQIA+ means in the South African context. This may contribute to making psychological disciplines better at engaging with queer/LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities and the realities that shape your lives. You may also feel empowered for sharing your stories and you might make meaningful connections with other participants.

Costs: You are asked to give a maximum of 2.5 hours of your time to participate in the full study. For today, that means a maximum of 2 hours for this focus group. (A follow-up interview, to be scheduled for a different day, will last an additional 30 minutes at maximum).

Remuneration: Participating in this focus group is thanked by providing you with a R50.00 digital grocery voucher for Shoprite/Checkers. You will receive another R50 voucher for participating in the later interview. You may also be compensated up to R100.00 for travelling to the focus group, and a further R100.00 for travelling to/using data for the interview.

Declaration of consent to participate:

- I agree to participate in this focus group.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about it.
- I understand that I am not obliged to participate in this study.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any stage.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Chosen Name (Pseudonym) of Participant: _____

Signature of Primary Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Declaration of consent to be recorded confidentially:

- I understand that the researcher will audio-record this focus group.
- I understand that the recording will be transcribed, and afterwards, that the recording will be destroyed.
- I understand that identifying information in these transcripts will be removed, and that I will be referred to by my pseudonym.
- I agree to my responses being recorded and used for education and research, on condition that my privacy and confidentiality is respected.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Primary Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix I

Informed Consent Form for Interview

Title of research project: Dialogical Selves: Exploring "Sameness" and "Difference" and "Queer" Identification

Name of Principle Researcher: Tyler Phillips **Email:** PHLTYL001@myuct.ac.za

Name of Research Supervisor: Dr Maxine Spedding **Tel:** 021 650 3425

Department Address: P. D. Hahn Psychology Building, Chemistry Road, UCT, Rondebosch

If you wish, the Chair of the Ethic committee can be contacted via Rosalind Adams at Rosalind.Adams@uct.ac.za or 021 650 3417.

Participation in the Follow-up Interview:

Involvement: Previously, you participated in a focus group in which you and other participants shared your stories about what being queer / LGBTIAQ+ means to you, and what experiences of "sameness" and "difference" have been important for you. Today, you will have an interview with the focus group moderator, to reflect on your experiences of the focus group. You will be asked to share how you felt about what was shared, and how you felt about your focus group partners. This interview will be audio-recorded by the researcher. Participation is completely voluntary.

Risks: There is minimal risk of harm to participants in this study. This means that there should be no more psychological risk than that of an ordinary conversation in daily life. That being said, if you feel discomfort or distress about this interview, you may withdraw at any point without penalisation. If you withdraw, you will be asked if this research can keep your already-recorded input; if you refuse this, your input will be wiped from the records.

Benefits: You will help improve understandings of what being queer / LGBTIAQ+ means in the South African context. You will also help us evaluate group discussions as a method for exploring social identities. This may contribute to making psychological disciplines better at engaging with queer / LGBTIAQ+ individuals and communities and the realities that shape your lives.

Costs: You are asked to give a maximum of 2.5 hours of your time to participate in the full study. For today, that means a maximum of 30 minutes (0.5 hour) for the interview.

Remuneration: Participating in this interview is thanked by providing you with a R50 grocery voucher for Shoprite/Checkers. You may also be compensated up to R100.00 for travelling to the interview, or for data costs if having the interview remotely.

Declaration of consent to participate:

- I agree to participate in this interview.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about it.
- I understand that I am not obliged to participate in this study.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any stage.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Chosen Name (Pseudonym) of Participant: _____

Signature of Primary Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Declaration of consent to be recorded confidentially:

- I understand that the researcher will audio-record this interview.
- I understand that the recording will be transcribed, and afterwards, that the recording will be destroyed.
- I understand that identifying information in these transcripts will be removed, and that I will be referred to by my pseudonym.
- I agree to my responses being recorded and used for education and research, on condition that my privacy and confidentiality is respected.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Primary Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix J

Participant Confidentiality Undertaking

The Need to Respect Confidentiality

As researchers, we agree to keep all identifying information that you provide to us private and confidential, so that no one who reads the research report will be able to identify *you* as being someone who participated.

While we are bound by the University of Cape Town's Ethics Review Board to uphold participant confidentiality, we also realise that ensuring it is not only our responsibility. It is also the responsibility of all those who participate in the focus group.

You will engage with co-participants in this focus group, whom you may recognise out in the world afterwards, but who also wish to remain confidential. **We kindly and seriously request that you do not reveal any identifying information about other participants, or any information that they discussed, to people who did not participate in this study**.

It is important to remember the mutual and fair nature of the respect for everyone's privacy that we are asking for. If you wish for your own confidentiality to be upheld by other participants, you should do your part to uphold theirs.

Declaration of understanding:

- I understand the above request about keeping other participants' information confidential.
- I have had an opportunity to ask the researcher questions about this request.
- I agree to the terms set out in the request.

Signature of Participant: _____

Chosen name (pseudonym) of Participant: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Appendix K

Focus Group Assistant Ethical Undertaking

Upholding Confidentiality

As a psychology student, we expect you to be aware of the strict ethical requirement to uphold the confidentiality of research participants throughout and beyond the research process. To this end, if you agree to be an assistant to the primary researcher of this study, it is imperative that, firstly, you do not disclose at any point in time the identifying details of the participants to anyone who was not involved in the particular focus group you assist facilitating.

Secondly, to keep the personal/private information disclosed by participants as secure as possible, the researcher requests that you do not sit in on the focus group discussions themselves. You are asked to remain outside the private room, but still on the premises should the researcher require your assistance at any point in the session. Further, you will not have access to the audio/video recordings of the group session, or 'raw data' of the research. Should you wish to read about the findings of the study, the researcher can provide you with a copy of the final report.

Note that the principal researcher is bound by the University of Cape Town's Ethics Review Board to uphold these protocols, and that, by extension, you have the responsibility of upholding your part of it.

COVID-19 Safety and Prevention

Strict COVID-19 safety protocols are also to be followed by the assistant. At the venue, you are to wear a mask at all times, and sanitize frequently. Your temperature will be checked at the entrance, where you will sign in your contact details in the event that exposure tracing is necessary.

Importantly, if at any point in the 2 weeks leading up to a focus group session, you suspect that you have been exposed to COVID-19 or that you may be experiencing its symptoms, you must notify the researcher. You will not be permitted to assist with facilitating that session, otherwise the virus may spread to the researcher, participants, or other occupants of the building. This isolation protocol applies fairly to the researcher and participants as well; the researcher will postpone a group in case they become infected, and exposed/infected participants will be asked not to participate (until their infections have cleared, time permitting).

Declaration of understanding and agreement:

- I understand and agree to the above request about keeping participants' identifying information confidential.
- I understand and agree that I will not sit in on the focus groups.
- I understand that I will not have access to any form of focus group raw data.
- I understand and agree to the COVID-19 safety protocols outlined above.
- I have had an opportunity to ask the researcher questions about anything on this document.

Signature of Assistant: _____

Name of Assistant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix L

Counselling Services

In case you feel the need to speak to a psychological counsellor because of what you discussed in this interview, here are some organisations that you can contact:

Triangle Project:

(an NGO for LGBTIAQ+ people or people of sexual and gender diversity)

Counselling rates are tailored to what you can afford. Counselling sessions are booked by appointments, but an emergency line is available.

Counselling appointment line: 021 422 0255 Helpline: 021 712 6699

Email: info@triangle.org.za Website: www.triangle.org.za

The Counselling Hub:

(an affordable counselling service provider)

Counselling rates are R50 / session, booking of appointments is required, and counselling sessions can happen over the phone.

Counselling booking: 021 462 3902 Website: www.counsellinghub.org.za

Lifeline Western Cape:

(over-the-phone counselling service provider)

Counselling is not charged; the cost of the call is the only charge.

Phone number: 021 813 6878 WhatsApp Call Number: 063 709 2620

Website: www.lifelinewc.org.za

SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group):

(an organisation offering mental health services)

A variety of emergency mental health lines is available on their home page. Some of these lines operate 24/7 and are not charged. Visit the website to find these call lines.

Website: www.sadag.org

PLAGIARISM

DECLARATION

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and to pretend that it is one's own.
2. I have used the *American Psychological Association (APA)* convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this essay / report / project / from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has cited and referenced.
3. This essay /report /project / is my own work.
4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing if off as his or her own work.
5. I acknowledge that copying someone else's assignment or essay, or part of it, is wrong, and declare that this is my own work.

SIGNATURE …… Signed by candidate