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Independent project

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project overview

My independent project investigates the link between religious upbringing and LGBTQ+ identity through practical research and choreographic practice. This project focuses on the psychological impact and emotional stress of navigating a faith system that often shows exclusion towards the queer community. My choreographic piece explores four main parts of the religious conflict: from being devoted to starting to question your faith, then moving into where your faith is entirely broken, leaning into the more angry side of expression and finally releasing from your faith and finding a new community among those with similar viewpoints to you.

The outcome of this research is a movement-based short film that conveys abstract, raw emotions such as guilt, confusion and eventually liberation through physical movement. The choreography is inspired by personal and observed experiences to create an authentic narrative in order for the watcher to feel more connected throughout. Alongside this, the written dissertation takes this work into wider academic discussions surrounding religion, expression and LGBTQ+ identity. By combining creative work and practical research development, I aim to create a multi-dimensional exploration of a personal yet relevant subject.

1.2 Research aims and creative aims

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how religious beliefs can influence LGBTQ+ identity and the psychological development of young minds. It also aims to explore the internalised emotions surrounding religious trauma and the stigma of questioning your faith. Additionally, this research seeks to contribute to existing academic discussions surrounding religious trauma and identity, whilst also adding a new viewpoint to this. It also aims to contribute to discussions within the performance world by showcasing how dance and film can be used as tools for expressing complex narratives and emotions.

The creative aim of this project is to develop a choreographic film that communicates the entire journey of slowly removing yourself from your faith and the conflicts that come with that complex time. The work aims to evoke feelings of tension, isolation and eventual release in the audience, so they are enveloped in the atmosphere and feel they are truly experiencing it alongside the dancers. Through movement, space and performance, the piece intends to symbolise restriction and also resonate with audiences on a reflective level to encourage empathy and awareness of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who are raised in religious settings.

1.3 Research methods

This project uses a combination of theoretical research and practice-based exploration. The literature review involves analysing books, journal articles and theories related to religion as well as queer theory. Key themes explored include

religious trauma, internalised homophobia, conversion therapy and having identity conflicts alongside strict religious surroundings. This research, along with relevant case studies, helps to provide a theoretical foundation for the project and forms the basis of this analysis.

A practice-as-research approach is used to explore the ideas and themes through movement, which means that the creative process itself becomes a form of research and generates knowledge for the project. Through movement exploration, it allows the body to express the emotional complexities seen in the literature in a way that cannot be articulated through written analysis alone.

Workshops and rehearsals are used to develop the material and explore extending the choreography in ways I wouldn't have originally thought. This includes improvisation and creating motifs which can be used throughout the entire filming and be continuously developed, helping with the emotional narrative. These sessions allow for experimentation and discovery. The process is documented through video recordings and reflective notes, which help to keep track of new ideas and how far the movement has come from the original concept and also inform creative decisions.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured to combine both theoretical and practical components of the research. Following this introduction, there will be the literature review, which examines the research I have found and also identifies the key themes found throughout the research and links them to the gaps that I have identified. After this, there will be a section discussing the development of the practical element of this dissertation and how my research informed my choices throughout. Following this, there will be the practical choice where I will be discussing how I felt it went and the positives and negatives of the outcome. Finally, there will be a conclusion for the overall dissertation.

2.Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores research surrounding the relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and being in religious settings, specifically, it focuses on the long-term psychological effects it has on young minds and how it is damaging to their development whilst going through the turmoil of questioning their sexuality and religious beliefs. This topic is significant as studies have found that 46.2% of the population in England and Wales described themselves as Christian (Ekstrom, 2026), which means that religious teachings and believers are still relevant in the modern age, along with a quarter of primary schools in England being Church of England schools (The Church of England, n.d.). This suggests that many children are exposed to religious teachings before developing an independent belief system. Previous research has highlighted that people who grew up surrounded by religion

and now identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community have now completely separated themselves from their faith due to denominational teachings around same-sex attractions (Dahl and Galliher, 2012). Despite this, there remain debates about young children following religion and if it's entirely negative for them to be taught about faith, as there are some positive views. This literature review aims to identify the positives and negatives surrounding religious teachings at a young age and look into the effects this has on young LGBTQ+ members growing up. It also aims to help bridge the gap in knowledge of the psychology surrounding internalised homophobia and the late development of self-expression from the negative attitudes towards the community in religion.

2.2 Theoretical and contextual framework

This section outlines the theoretical perspectives and contextual background that underpin the analysis of religion and LGBTQ+ identities. The theories I have looked into are religious doctrine, which is the set of teachings or principles of a faith that guide beliefs, moral framework and practices of its followers, which can help identify the hardships people come across when trying to separate themselves from faith as it becomes their way of life and how they get through their day-to-day rather than just something they are taught. Another theory I have looked into is the minority stress theory, which looks into the social, psychological and structural factors accounting for mental health inequalities facing sexual minority populations. In simpler terms, it looks into the stigma behind the sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+ community) and how this stigma affects their psychology and well-being. This theory will help understand the mental stress LGBTQ+ identifying individuals face due to the negative teachings and views towards them, and how this further affects their psychology behind accepting themselves, further linking religious practices and how they actively constrain the development of self-expression. Together, these frameworks highlight the links between structured belief systems and stigma being created around certain viewpoints, further helping understand why LGBTQ+ individuals feel demonised and excluded from their faith systems.

Overtime there have been many positive cultural shifts regarding acceptance of the community but there are still the same discrimination and homophobia in the modern day, I have looked into hate crimes in the UK and research shows there has been a significant increase of reported hate crimes over the last five years with hate crimes based on sexual orientations increasing by 20% and those based on trans identity increasing by 50% (Stonewall, 2024) this helps showcase the shifts in mindsets but still puts in place the homophobia and isolation that's happening to this day emphasising the out of place feeling that can come from the general population as well as religious communities. With Christianity being the majority of the religious demographic in the UK, that is the religion I have decided to focus on throughout this review. It is important to note that the UK is a multi-cultural country; however, Christianity or being part of a Church of England school, where they practice Christian views, are the most popular demographics. Through a questionnaire form I sent out, I got 32 responses, and from that, 41.2% of participants grew up Christian, and 35.3% grew up with no religion, adding to my reason to focus on Christianity/Church of England religion. Even though same-sex marriage has been legalised since 2013, LGBTQ+ couples are still not legally

allowed to get married in a church, as the church's doctrine of marriage remains unchanged and still says it is between one man and one woman (Harwood-Baynes, 2023). This shows that even if some Christians are accepting of the LGBTQ+ community their church laws they abide by are still discriminatory and isolating.

2.3 Thematic review of literature

This section critically examines literature relating to the psychological effects of religion on young LGBTQ+ individuals (specifically, adolescents and young adults). The review is organised thematically, focusing on 1. Religious teachings and internalised stigma 2. Identity conflict and psychological distress 3. Social environment and community influence and 4. Coping mechanisms and resilience. These themes highlight the complex relationship between religious environments and LGBTQ+ self-perception whilst analysing the root cause of the isolating viewpoints and how this affects the LGBTQ+ community throughout their journey in leaving religion.

A key theme throughout the literature is the role of religious teachings in shaping internalised stigma among LGBTQ+ youth. Research has shown that religious texts can be interpreted in many ways. This suggests that different religious groups and denominations have distinct perspectives, which in turn leads to varying levels of acceptance or rejection in their communities (Conrad, 2023). For example, a psychological exploration paper by Liboro argues that the rigid views surrounding homosexuality being a sin from religions such as Catholicism and Christianity is the main cause of discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community and the rise in psychological issues (Liboro, 2014), highlighting how the Christian doctrine mindset that is laid out in churches is one of the main factors in why people in the community feel they aren't accepted by God and their fellow church members. Similarly, some scholars argue that internalised homophobia and stigma are social phenomena originating from sexual prejudice and heterosexism (Gill and Randhawa, 2021). This theory is also explained through the minority stress theory, which states that sexual minorities are isolated due to the social stress and stigma they face in everyday life. These perspectives suggest that internalised homophobia and the stigma caused for LGBTQ+ members come from societal norms and are then emphasised through religious views and bible teachings when entering a church community setting. However, some scholars argue that it is the conservative Christians who hold the olden negative mindsets towards the LGBTQ+ community and more modern Christians are learning that the passages in the bible that are against inclusion are from a historical time and culture settings that are vastly different from today's time (First Plymouth Church, 2024), this research contrasts others scholars looked at and suggests that it is up to the mindset of the person if they are against the community or not and how they personally view the bible passages. Overall, this body of research indicates that whether it has started from the bible teachings themselves or how the person views the teachings, the LGBTQ+ community are subject to negativity, which further adds to their own negative viewpoints and internalised stigma around their self-expression.

Another prominent theme is the conflict between religious identity and LGBTQ+ identity. This tension is often described as confusion on if you can have a religious

identity at the same time as accepting your LGBTQ+ identity due to the conflicting religious beliefs, from a survey I conducted (see appendix A) majority of the participants stated that they had conflict between their faith and LGBTQ+ identity and the only ones that didn't had already left their religion before coming to terms with their LGBTQ+ identity (Perkins, 2026). This aligns with a research article surrounding religion, spirituality and LGBTQ identity integration, where it states many participants left formal religions and experienced disconnection from their bodies (Beagan and Hattie, 2015), further showing the harmful results of identity conflict and emphasising the cause being religious teachings. Such conflict has been linked to psychological outcomes, including feelings of loss of purpose in life and self-acceptance (Streib, 2021). However, some studies suggest that there is a code of silence surrounding discussions and even the acknowledgement of the LGBTQ+ community in religious contexts (Block, 2023) and keeping LGBTQ+ identities hidden or ignored further emphasises the heterosexist culture surrounding Christianity. Therefore, the literature demonstrates that keeping LGBTQ+ identities silenced within communities increases the isolation felt by those questioning their sexual identity and means that when people choose to leave their faith, they feel the need to fully separate themselves, even if it causes emotional distress.

The social context of religion also plays a significant role in shaping LGBTQ+ experiences. Religious communities (e.g. churches and religious family units) often function as a unit and create a community that you rely on in day-to-day life and create deep connections with; this can result in a herd mentality and members feeling that having conflicting views with their peers will mean being fully isolated from their community that they have known their whole life. The family unit side of religious communities can be seen as being harder to have opposing views to, as you have the extended connection of being associated with your entire life and having the already in place expectations of following your family values. Research by Seungju Kim highlights this research point and suggests that sexual minorities raised in religious households often face strong familial pressures to express their gender and sexuality in a heteronormative way (Kim, S., Tyler Lefevor and Skidmore, 2024). In contrast, a book focussing on positive psychology in religious communities it states that religious communities have a greater positive impact on people's wellbeing as they are known for providing rich instrumental social support along with emotion focused social support (Wang et al., 2022), this shows a second perspective on religious communities and shows the range of views people can have however this perspective was from a general view rather than LGBTQ+ focussed. This indicates that religious communities have varying effects on their members, with a more positive view coming from the heteronormative members and the negative effects being seen from the LGBTQ+ community, meaning the community acts as either a source of support or psychological harm depending on their identity.

While much of the literature highlights negative psychological impacts, another theme centres on coping and resilience. Studies show that LGBTQ+ individuals respond to religious conflict by stepping out of their religion or religious places and finding community within people similar to them and separating their religious

identity from their self-identity. For instance, it is shown that LGBTQ+ members who want to leave their faith sometimes find themselves able to separate their faith from the Christians who hurt them (Orit Avishai et al., 2024). Being able to separate their trauma from their religion is a less common coping mechanism when it comes to leaving faith, as the trauma can be difficult to separate from their beliefs. Other studies suggest that activism and raising awareness for change can impact resilience in a positive manner and help the LGBTQ+ community strengthen their well-being by finding like-minded communities (Scheidler et al., 2022). These strategies demonstrate that there can still be positive sides to leaving religion, and it can mean LGBTQ+ members find new communities that are still associated with faith without the isolation and discrimination, although they do not fully eliminate the emotional and mental damage religious teachings have put on them.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that religion can significantly influence the psychological well-being of young LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly through isolation and causing negative self-talk due to certain religious teachings. Across the themes, common issues include discrimination due to old biblical views and conservative Christians, while factors such as Christians moving along with the culture changes in the world and seeing the bible as historical rather than factual can mediate these experiences. However, there remains a gap in research regarding the journey of leaving your faith and research into the mental and emotional process of that journey. This highlights the need for further exploration into psychology and personal experiences of the LGBTQ+ community leaving their faith, which this study aims to address.

2.4 Synthesis and identification of gaps

Collectively, the literature suggests that the issues the LGBTQ+ identifying people are facing with their religious conflict aren't from the religion itself but from the Christians still practising the historical biblical views without following the cultural change that has happened over time. A recurring theme across the research is the psychological aftermath of leaving faith and feeling disconnected from oneself and the internal conflict it creates, leaving people with stunted development in their self-identity. While many scholars agree that religious teachings are harmful to the LGBTQ+ community, there is less consensus around the solution to these problems and what people within these communities need to change to become more inclusive and accepting of varying sexual minorities. Existing research gives significant attention to broad discussions on religious identity conflicting with LGBTQ+ identity, as well as the aftermath of leaving and certain decisions those leaving their faith chose to make, but limited focus is given to the emotional turmoil throughout trying to make this decision and the effect it has mentally to leave behind an entire community while trying to find a new place to be accepted. This reveals a gap in relation to the psychology behind the decisions made and a gap in research in lived experiences, as well as how these conflicts are embodied and expressed. Therefore, this project responds to this gap by focusing on telling the stories of lived experiences through survey research and showing these as a journey expressed through physical movement, which will emphasise the emotional turmoil and focus on the process rather than the outcome, whether it be leaving faith entirely or separating yourself from the isolating community, but still believing.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review has explored many themes surrounding the LGBTQ+ community being brought up surrounded by faith and religious communities, but has focused on the psychological impact of navigating faith within non-affirming religious environments. It has examined key themes surrounding identity conflict, internalised shame and the long-term emotional effects of exclusionary belief systems. Overall, the literature demonstrates that there are many reasons someone of a sexual minority may choose to separate themselves from their beliefs, but the main reason is usually to do with trauma caused by religious leaders and fellow peers from the religious community, causing isolation. Collectively, the literature highlights the lasting impact of this conflict on self-perception, emotional well-being, and identity development. These perspectives provide an important foundation for further research to be conducted in order to help those struggling with their conflicting identities and will also help religious communities that still carry the historical biblical views to become more open-minded in their acceptance. They also establish both the social relevance and emotional complexity of the subject. These findings inform the methodological and creative approaches adopted within this project, supporting the use of choreographic practice as a means of exploring and expressing the embodied experience of religious conflict. The following chapter will outline the methodical approach used to investigate these themes through both research and creative practice.

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3. Development, collaboration and exploration

3.1 Overview of the creative development

My initial concept for my ten-minute piece was a live dance performance; I felt a live performance would help audience members feel the atmosphere of emotions that I am trying to evoke. I knew I wanted to mainly use choreographic elements, as different styles of dance can showcase a variety of emotions, which could be used to showcase the turmoil and process of someone questioning their faith due to isolation. The piece started as the journey of faith being broken down over the ten minutes and showing the emotional aftereffects of religious trauma using music and choreographic styles to showcase this change. This was inspired by my research on personal stories of people leaving their faith and the processes they went through. In the early stages, the focus was on using movement to show the negative psychological aftermath; however, as the project developed and further research was conducted, the direction shifted towards a cinematic documentary focusing on the journey of leaving faith as a whole over a live performance. The reasoning for this is that I could still include all the choreographic and music elements I had initially thought of, and I could also include video clips from interviews to further showcase the findings from the research. Once this shift had taken place, the project then developed into a four-section cinematic documentary, which meant I could also add videos from outside sources I have found to further emphasise the reasoning why the community want to leave their faith. Another shift that took place in the early stages of development was leaving the project more open-ended and up to interpretation, originally I was going to have a clear ending which showed the cast had left their faith entirely and no longer associated themselves with what they used to believe in however research I had found shifted my idea to become open due to studies on LGBTQ+ members being able to separate their faith from the church members that hurt them. Overall, the creative process progressed from a dance piece focusing on the aftereffects of leaving your faith to a cinematic documentary showing the entire journey from devotion to releasing from faith, reflecting a deeper exploration of the mental process as a whole rather than just the aftermath.

3.2 Research-informed exploration

This section explores how the research and literature found informed the practical development of my project. With this being a choreographic documentary that was split into four sections (devotion, fracture, rupture and release), I knew I needed to convey the emotions felt through that journey through the movement and themes I found in the literature. Key themes identified in the literature included repression of

emotions and the 'code of silence', feeling lost within oneself, isolation from the entire community and finding the separation from one's religious identity and LGBTQ+ identity. These themes were translated into movement through having a key feeling for each section/phase of leaving faith. I started with devotion and kept the choreography all on the knees and mainly arm movements that were structured and the same for each dancer to convey the conformity that non-heteronormative people feel they have to abide by when in a faith community. In fracture, the main theme I took for this section was the start of isolation, doubt and discrimination from the church community, whilst adding in the 'code of silence'. Since the choreography started on the knees in the first phase, the movements for the second phase were all sitting on a sofa and slowly rising to help emphasise the slow change in mindset of the dancers. The feelings of doubt were prominent throughout this section and were shown through slumped actions and keeping everything flowing compared to a sharp, structured motif. Partner work and physical theatre became a key way of emphasising the themes for this section, as in the literature it was found that those leaving their community found outside communities separate from faith, emphasising the theme of how LGBTQ+ people deal with the isolation. At the end of the section, movement from phase 1 was repeated but adapted slightly to show the devotion still being present in their minds and further emphasising the theme of doubt from the literature. Phase 3 was the biggest phase movement-wise; this was rupture, where I took the themes of religious trauma and the psychological toll on the LGBTQ+ members to inform the choreography. These themes translated into larger movements with some being sharper and on the beats of the music whilst using less unison like in previous sections to show the dancers changing views and following their own views more, the partner work was maintained throughout to explain the theme of community outside of religious settings and show the theme of LGBTQ+ members being able to find likeminded people outside of the communities they grew up around. The final phase was focusing on the theme of the aftermath of separating yourself from religion and showing the dancers in their free expression, and no longer confined to the harmful communities. Using improvisation in this section was prominent in showing the freedom as the dancers could do whatever they felt expressed their release. Throughout the entire exploration, levels became significant in showing themes as it helped with the narrative of the journey by going from kneeling in a prayer like position to slowly standing in phase 3 and with the final phase being free to do whatever the dancers pleased, another prominent factor was the motif from phase 1 being repeated throughout each phase and slightly altered to again emphasise the slow change of mindset.

3.3 Practical investigations

The first choices I made for this project were the music and making sure they fit each section. I spent some time researching various genres and artists who focused on religious music, whether it was worship music or the darker side of religion. Originally, for phase 1, it was going to be a worship song or a spoken word piece of the lord's prayer; however, I found that a lot of the worship songs were more positive and didn't fit with the atmosphere I was hoping to create. After further research, I found a slower contemporary song whose lyrics fit with the theme of devotion. Continuing with the sound and music investigations, I wanted to use church bells in

the documentary, and I explored putting them in different places and sometimes overlapping with the music. When putting it on top of the music and choreography, I felt it lost the impact I was going for, so I decided to keep them at the start without any other sound and showed videos of churches around Cardiff as the visual on top. This helped create a more eerie atmosphere for the start of the piece. Another challenge I ran into with sound design choices was using YouTube videos and interviews throughout the documentary. I started by just using the sound from these videos in the sections I wanted; however, I found using the full videos gave the viewers more visual stimulation and a harder impact of the sound as they could see who was saying the negative points. Choreography for these sections was mainly explored through workshoping with the two dancers I had during the rehearsal and filming day, and using their skills to enhance my choreography. The choice to keep the style mainly contemporary and lyrical-focused was made before starting rehearsals, as I felt this would be the best style to fit the atmosphere I wanted to create. The location for choreography filming was limited as I needed enough space for the dancers to move, but I wanted to keep it minimalistic for the dance sections, so I decided to use the theatre in my university building, which worked well with my lighting choices of a white wash (highlighting purity and the 'white light' of God). I also wanted some off-location filming for phase 4 and used the outside of a church for this, but ran into issues with lighting then and needed to film around shadows and other people outside as well (see Appendix D).

3.4 Collaboration

Over the course of creating and developing this documentary, collaboration was a major part of the process. Using two dancers whose skills lay in the contemporary style helped with the choreography of the documentary, being able to let the dancers use their creative freedom in some of the phases and tailoring the choreography to their skillsets helped them feel comfortable throughout the pieces, which in turn allowed their acting to shine through, further showing the storyline and emotions I was trying to evoke. Directing the dancers was an easy process as they were open to any ideas I threw at them and fully engaged with any experiments I wanted to try out. This created an open and creative environment, allowing for everyone's opinions to be heard and a trusting space to be developed. I also set a task for them to create their own backstory of their character and develop their own narrative to follow throughout the phases. This allowed them to dig deeper emotionally and connect to the story that was being told. During this process I also had to take on a producer role and was in charge of filming, lighting etc which is something new to me, I communicated this with the dancers and they were incredibly receptive to multiple takes of the routines trying out different angles and lighting areas and open to working in a trial and error fashion which was greatly appreciated and allowed me to work more freely in the space without added stress. Finally, we did come across some challenges throughout the filming process, but these were easily overcome with negotiation and creative conversations. A main part of the choreography was partner work, which included some lifts. We tested various lifts and learnt what was comfortable for the dancers, which ended up changing my original plan for the lift section. This proved beneficial to the development process as the lift we chose worked better for the camera and lighting

effects I wanted to use, and was an integral part of phase 3 and helped develop the atmosphere I hoped to portray.

3.4 Production planning

To start this project, I first cast the dancers for the choreography element of the documentary. I knew I wanted strong contemporary dancers who would also be comfortable exploring an emotionally challenging topic. I originally was going to have just one dancer, but after going through the research and literature, I changed it to two dancers to show two different stories and narratives. Once I had the dancers cast, I created a schedule for rehearsals, filming and editing in order to keep everything within the time frame (see Appendix B). The rehearsal and filming time ended up taking place on one day, within five hours, due to the dancers' schedules not lining up. This wasn't what I originally planned, as I wanted to have rehearsals on one day to make sure the choreography was clean and have a separate filming day so I had enough time to do as many takes as needed. Having to change the schedule ended up becoming a positive progression, as I then dedicated more time to choreography and editing after the filming day and allowed me to focus on what I intended to capture rather than having to sift through many takes after production. Before the filming day, I made sure to have all of my music cut to where I needed it and had the YouTube videos I wanted saved to show the dancers what they would be reacting to within the choreography. I also set out my lighting plans and made notes of what I wanted each scene to look like. I planned to keep the set and lighting very minimalistic to add to the eerie atmosphere I wanted to develop. The only piece of set I decided on was a sofa for phase 2 to show the dancers being in a comfortable space that could be their house. Lighting wise, I chose to keep a white wash throughout the entire documentary and move the dancers around in different angles to change the effects of the lighting, having the lights in front of them and having the dancers as mainly shadows helped emphasise the 'purity' they were fighting with and having the lights directly in front of them for phase 2 further helped show the dancers being in a comfortable space as it created a "tv screen" effect.

3.5 Critical reflection on process

This process involved rehearsal-based choreography and research-informed planning, allowing the work to develop through exploration and refinement. A key strength of the process was repetition and discoveries during rehearsals. Using a motif throughout the choreography helped keep the narrative alive, and rehearsal discoveries worked well, as it helped develop the choreography in ways I wouldn't have been able to think of myself. This helped to emphasise various themes throughout the documentary and create a deeper emotional feeling for those watching. Another strength of this process was the storyline and narrative being shown clearly in the editing phase. Using separate titles for the phases was a part of keeping clarity for the viewer; however, the main strength in this was through the dancers' acting skills as well as the changes in levels through choreography. The decision of having slowly rising levels was made during the rehearsal day and wasn't an original plan, but appeared through the exploration. Levels are an important part

of any routine as they can help create a sense of drama, emotion and storytelling throughout, which further emphasised and strengthened the narrative of this project. However, challenges emerged in relation to emotional distress, as the topic that has been researched can be quite personal for certain participants. Before starting rehearsals, I explained the piece to the participants and made sure they were comfortable exploring this topic and addressed any issues they may have been facing. This was handled with maturity and allowed those involved to take breaks when needed and understand that they are allowed to express how they are feeling, and if they were ever uncomfortable, they were advised to leave the rehearsal room and come back when they felt ready. This challenge also could have been shown during the research process with a questionnaire I sent out, to bypass this, I made sure the questionnaire was anonymous so that the participants could speak freely without fear of being known and I also made the more emotionally heavy questions open-ended with no multiple choice as to keep away from any bias and let the participants express themselves as far as they felt comfortable. Another challenge I came across was a lack of rehearsal time; this wasn't through the fault of anyone; it was a case of schedules not lining up the majority of the time. This meant I had to schedule the rehearsal and filming all on one day, over five hours; however, there were both positives and negatives to this decision. The positives were the choreography being fresh in the dancer's mind, so they didn't have the stress of trying to remember the choreography, but the challenges were a lack of exploration time and time limitations. Luckily, the dancers picked up the choreography quickly, so we could do multiple takes of each phase, making sure I got every angle I wanted and lighting change, but I didn't have enough time to clean the choreography as much as I felt necessary, so some parts weren't as sharp as they could've been purely due to the time restrictions.

4. Practical choice

Link to documentary- <https://youtu.be/-ATley0M75U>

4.1 Overview of the practical piece

The ten-minute piece is a choreographic style documentary focusing on the psychological effects of religious teachings on young LGBTQ+ individuals and the mental effects of separating oneself from faith. Prominent themes throughout this piece include isolation, conforming to the norms you have been taught and community. This aims to communicate the negative psychological effects of religious communities and teachings, hoping to start productive conversations between church members and LGBTQ+ members. Structurally, the work progresses through four phases, each expressing different stages of leaving faith and the inner feelings throughout. Choreographic choices such as using motifs and repetition

were used to symbolise the back-and-forth struggle between religious identity and LGBTQ+ identity. Additional creative elements, including videos and voice-overs, helped to reinforce the real-life views of certain church members and communities to emphasise that this is a current issue people are facing. The work was directly informed by research surrounding religious communities as a whole, how the LGBTQ+ community is viewed in these communities, whether it be positive or negative and personal experiences from people who have decided to separate themselves from faith. Overall, the piece represents the real-world struggles of the LGBTQ+ community concerning their belief systems and how heteronormative views in religious communities become isolating and discriminatory towards LGBTQ+ members, affecting their self-discovery.

4.2 Artistic rationale

Throughout the ten-minute piece, the central message was how the process of separating yourself from faith due to feeling isolated for being part of the LGBTQ+ community is an emotionally challenging time, and I wanted the audience to fully understand and feel similar emotions to what people going through this situation feel, for empathy to be evoked. The choreography helps to emphasise the central message of the piece by using symbolism and restricted movement in the first two phases; these choices help further showcase the internal struggle and emotional turmoil felt. Keeping the staging for the choreographic elements minimalistic was a creative choice as it keeps the attention on the dancers and the movements, which in turn keeps the audience focused on the narrative the dancers are portraying. Another creative choice I made was keeping the lighting as a whitewash, as this adds to the symbolism of the 'white light' of heaven and represents purity in religion. These choices were made through the literature found during the research element, and the findings on the negative views towards LGBTQ+ members and how they are viewed as a sin and the religious view on being 'pure' and free of sin will get you into heaven.

4.3 Evaluation of the final outcomes

The outcome of this project was a choreographic style documentary that explored the psychological harm of separating oneself from religion as an LGBTQ+ member. After showing the choreographic documentary, I got feedback from some audience members in order to explore the strengths and weaknesses of this project and to see if the emotional impact I set out to achieve was achieved. Overall, the feedback was generally positive, and audience members stated the separation into phases helped the emotional impact for them as well as the choreographic motif being used throughout, making the emotional journey clearer and easier for them to understand. Overall, the work successfully achieved its aims relating to conveying emotions to the audience and the impact it had on the viewers. Particular strengths of the piece included keeping things factual alongside the choreographic elements, with the YouTube videos and quotes being used throughout the piece, which helped to communicate the visual storytelling and the true emotions of the dancers.

However, limitations emerged in relation to underdeveloped sections due to time restrictions. The final phase of the piece was release, which needed to show the theme of freedom from the isolation felt in the beginning. This section did convey the feelings of freedom; however, the editing could have been developed further with other videos or quotes to tie the entire story together and reference back to the beginning of the piece. Despite these challenges, the work effectively conveyed the themes found in the research and highlighted the importance of separating the historical biblical views from the cultural change that has happened since the bible was developed, and it also demonstrated opportunities for further development of the project in a more detailed documentary that could incorporate live interviews, being able to further showcase the real-world struggles.

4.4 Professional skills demonstrated

This project tested my skills as a professional in many ways, as I had to take on roles I hadn't experienced before, such as filming and production roles. Gaining new experience in those roles will help me in my future as a performer, as I understand the behind-the-scenes work of production in more depth now and can use this knowledge to expand where I can work. Other skills that were used throughout this project included communication, time management and leadership as I needed to be clear with the dancers what my expectations were for them and kept them on track throughout the process. Time management was key when it came to creating the documentary, as I needed to stay on top of what I wanted to achieve so I had enough time for editing after filming was complete, as well as taking any challenges that could arise into consideration. Overall, this project challenged me in positive ways as a performer and a creative, gaining new skills that I can bring forward into my professional career and expanding my skillsets in the industry is something I hold great value towards.

5. Conclusion

This dissertation explored the psychological effects of LGBTQ+ communities leaving or separating themselves from their faith. The research demonstrated that old biblical viewpoints are the main cause for isolation for LGBTQ+ members within church communities, and those that chose to leave their church communities either separate themselves completely or no longer believe, whilst some manage to separate their religious identity from the churches that affected them negatively. Key themes identified throughout the project included internalised stigma of LGBTQ+ members and how the isolation and code of silence around the LGBTQ+ community is the main cause of internalised homophobia, and what suppresses their self-discovery. Through the practical exploration, the project aimed to show the internal viewpoint of someone struggling with their LGBTQ+ identity and

religious identity and the entire emotional journey of separating oneself from faith, using choreographic elements as well as video interviews to communicate these ideas.

Overall, the project successfully achieved showing the internal conflict felt whilst going through an identity crisis surrounding religion and sexual identity, particularly through using videos and voiceovers to convey the real-world views certain religious individuals have against the community, which emphasised to the audience why this topic is important to be discussed, as it is still a problem in today's time. The project highlighted the importance of safe spaces being available for those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community with religious beliefs and demonstrated the potential of creative arts and theatre being used as a tool for exploring complex emotional and social experiences. Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to broader discussions surrounding the effects of harmful religious views on developing and questioning minds and provides opportunities for further exploration within personal stories of those who have separated from faith in order to provide further research into what is needed to care for those in emotionally distressing situations.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A- Questionnaire form

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdl33MpwsX3Gd28WWJe1h3sZveC91zzSQn31JmVKBUauixjHw/viewform?usp=header>

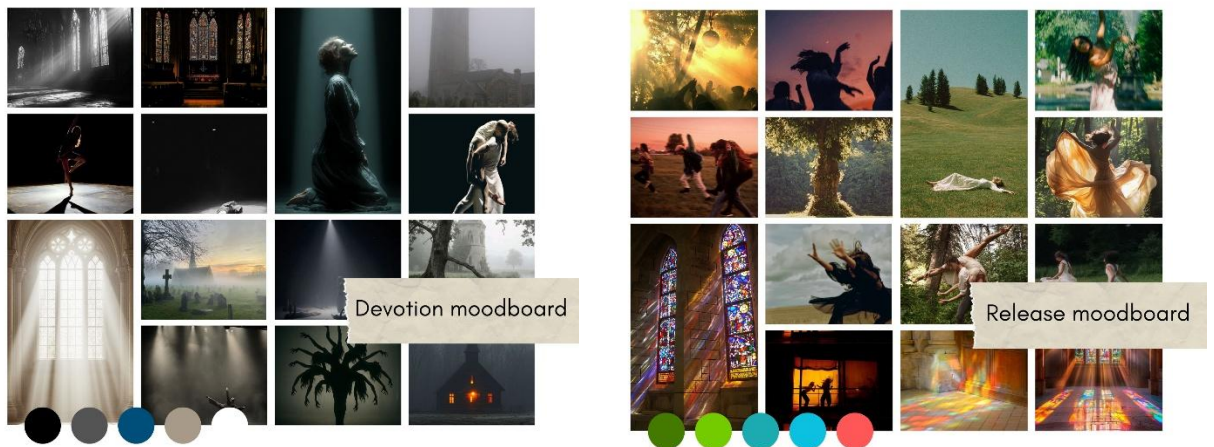
Appendix B- Rehearsal and workshop documentation

Rehearsal schedule sent to dancers:



Rehearsal
schedule.docx

Appendix C- Mood boards and planning materials



Appendix D- Rehearsal photos and process images

Staging and lighting exploration:



Outside staging exploration:

