



Personhoods and meanings of adolescent masculinities in a North- West secondary school

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DECLARATION

I, Tebogo Maribe hereby declare that this revised thesis is my own work. I further declare that: 1) the text and bibliography reflect the sources I have consulted, 2) where I have made reproductions of any literary or graphic work(s) from someone else, I have obtained the necessary prior written approval of the relevant author(s)/publisher(s)/creator(s) of such works and/or, where applicable, from the Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO) and 3) sections with no source referrals are my own ideas, arguments and/or conclusions.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides insight into what the data suggests can be understood as the stage of 'becoming' of five adolescent boys in their habitual spaces of learning and living as analysed through the theoretical lens of masculinity scholarship. The word *personhood* is used to encapsulate the *process* instead of the complete production known as identity. Accounts of this process were observed through the analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews with the main participants, their respective guardians and educators, informal conversations with all participants and extended participant-observation over five months – July 2021 to November 2021.

The thesis documents the ongoing, real-time observation of the fluidity and reconstructions of masculinity in formal and informal settings. It is an ethnographic analysis addressing part of the gap of what masculinities in a South African township environment are perceived to be in the media and existing scholarly anthropological research outputs.

The adolescent boys in this study are placed at the forefront of the discussions of their personhoods and agency through the collection of materials where they express their attitudes, the meanings of their choices and their perceptions of reality within their personal contexts. The research achieves its objectives of understanding the social and cultural needs with which boys work with to produce and reproduce masculine personhoods, the meanings constructed by those who care for and co-exist with them and the understanding of their cultural capital needs in a township secondary school setting.

The thesis draws on a mixed-method approach to ethnography and includes semi-structured qualitative interviews, school ethnography, digital ethnography, reflective journal writing by the learners and participant-observation in the homes of the adolescent boys. The study also explores how masculinities are negotiated and how educational practices are utilised and achieved by the boys through these negotiations.

The potential impact of this research is to guide policymakers and curricula designers with information on individual learning patterns and needs within a township setting. This guidance is also suitable to determine educational interventions and incentives within this specific context. It is also a South African contribution towards the scholarship of the anthropology of education.

Key terms: Adolescents, personhood, masculinities, school ethnography, rites of passage

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SAPS	South African Police Services
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
USD	United States Dollar
RZA	South African Rand
SASA	South African School Act
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SGB	School Governing Body
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
BEEI	Basic Education Employment Initiative
FAL	First Additional Language
FET	Further Education and Training (Grade 10 – 12)
DBE	Department of Basic Education
PSL	Premier Soccer League

1.1. Introduction

The introduction of this thesis discusses the background of the study, the problem statement and the purpose of the study. It also introduces the research site and participants. A summary of subsequent chapters and the implications of the research for policy and further enquiry are also included. The main research question of this study is: What are the meanings of personhood and masculinity among a group of adolescent boys and of at a North-West Province school?

This thesis draws on the ethnographic research on young boys in the township of Tlhabane and surrounding areas. It argues that in this context, the exposure to education, relationships, technologies; media and sport layers upon older practices of masculine initiation long practised in the region and by this community. Education in this instance comprises formal education and local knowledge. The aforementioned layering facilitates the emergence of new, urban and digitally engaged personhoods at the moment when young boys are on the cusp of becoming men. The boys in the study live their home lives and have set their moral compasses in making decisions around tenets of *botho*, a tenet of African personhood and what they have been taught to be 'good' masculinities. While they engage in technologies (the internet, gaming and social media), media and sport, they do so through interdependence and co-creation of meaning. Education (from school and from home) and media also offer the boys sites of imagination in constructing future goals, their desired masculinities and personhoods. The boys also find education attained from all their social environments (in their case, school, home and sport) as important parts of their preparation for the future. Schooling and sport are specifically seen by the boys in the study as more important aspects as they are emphasised by adults as boys' keys to upward economic and social mobility and security.

1.2. Background of the Study

A guiding theme in this study is the idea of personhood, which in simple terms is the answer to the question: 'What is a person?' Personhood is understood here as the entanglement of interactions, constructions and performances in the production of the person. Comaroff and Comaroff (2001), a married couple and scholars of anthropology, explore the meanings of personhood in their study of the lives of pre-colonial peoples of Southern Tswana (Mahikeng and Botswana). The Comaroffs' research gives insight into the historical context of the present study site.

Personhood for Batswana was attached to prominence in society (the accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital) and progress (maintenance of wealth through perseverance and hard work). For Batswana, personhood was not characterised as being a person but also as the continual process of becoming a person. Personhood in this context is therefore not something that can be achieved independently but is negotiated through social relationships.

'Becoming' in the philosophy of personhood was seen as a life-long process of 'person-construction' through working towards and hoping for the potential of the achievements of life goals that come with expected stages of life. Echoing this, is Mfecane (2018), who states that African personhood is a gradual process that occurs throughout a person's life. Social ranking is therefore attained through involvement in ceremonial rites that mark crossing over to approaching life stages. Among the list of these life stages are marriage, having children, obtaining inheritance from deceased elders and leaving a sufficient inheritance for one's children. This continual social process is a marker of existence; and if there is no moving forward through variously marked life stages, it is a sign of the lack of life and what the Comaroffs deem as 'social death' (2001: 274). This was demonstrated by the group's commitment to 'building themselves up' through *tiro* 'work/labour' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001: 273). Furthermore, *tiro* and building one's self up were seen as relational activities, whereby its worth was determined by the immediate community. According to the Comaroffs (2001: 274), work by Batswana, was defined as "the positive, relational aspect of human social activity; of the making of a person and others in the course of everyday life."

According to the Comaroffs (2001), in this context, if someone has a high level in the social hierarchy, it is not considered as having been built from independence but through interconnectedness with other members of society. Engagements of *tiro* 'labour' were, among others, pastoralism, cultivation, cooking, starting a family, marriage, politics and performing rituals. These engagements were the processes of the manufacturing and remanufacturing of personhood.

Personhood is reconstructed through the entanglement of doing, creating, becoming and the continual repetition of the cycle. According to Appuhamilage (2017), the understanding of personhood should not be seen as either individually or collectively constructed but as a partnership. How persons maintain this co-occurrence of multiplicity is embedded in the fluidity of the ambiguity of personhood as a product of this process.

As part of a broader exploration of contemporary masculinity in a contemporary South African township, this thesis answers the following questions:

- If any, which engagements do boys draw on and consume that aid in the construct of their social personhood?
- What and how do adolescent boys learn at this stage of their lives?
- What are the boys' dreams and aspirations?
- What is in and around them that makes them who they are as boys?
- Does education play a role in this?
- What do boys hold and carry in and with them in the process of becoming men?
- What is social personhood and how does it apply in this specific context?
- How do boys interchangeably interact with their contextual environments to produce their personhoods?
- What and how do boys want to learn in school?

1.3. Research Objectives

1. To gather information on the meanings of masculinity and personhoods as constructed by boys and the people who care for and co-exist with boys from the township.
2. Understanding the nature and originations of social and cultural capitals which boys access and work with to produce and reproduce personhoods in masculinity.
3. Understanding the social and cultural capital needs of boys in a setting where they spend most of their day (school setting).
4. Investigating the roles of informal (friends, mass media and parents) and formal education (school) in the construction of personhood and masculinity among adolescent boys in a township setting.

Men are currently at the centre of the conversation surrounding the ever-increasing cases of gender-based and intimate partner violence in South Africa (Abayomi & Olabode, 2013; Buiten & Naidoo, 2020; Cowling, 2023; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021; George, 2020; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Jewkes *et al.*, 2011; Jewkes *et al.*, 2015; Makkan *et al.*, 2022; Oparinde & Matteau Matsha, 2021; Pikoli, 2020; SAPS, 2018; Stats SA, 2020; Thobejane *et al.*, 2018; Ugowe, 2022).

Ugowe (2022:7) argues that gender-based violence against women in Africa is more prevalent in areas where attitudes regarding masculinity prioritise a 'patriarchal' family structure. In Nigeria, studies have shown that men are expected to have complete stewardship over the home and to make all choices regarding the home (Abayomi & Olabode, 2013; Ugowe, 2022). In a South African study conducted by Graaff & Heinecken (2017), most participants (30 men who were part

of the Sonke Gender One Man Can gender-transformation initiative) related masculinity to dominance and most said that violence is how masculinity is proven in their societies.

The South African Police Service 2017/2018 Annual Report (SAPS, 2018) reveals that 50% of the 272 incarcerated perpetrators committed violent crimes against women who were their partners (48,9%), former spouses (19,1%) and kin (6,6%) (SAPS, 2018:39). A report by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2020) states that approximately 50% of violence disclosed by women was perpetrated by men of which 22% were someone that they trusted, 15% an intimate partner, while the rest were strangers.

Enaifoghe *et al.* (2021) cite Pikoli's (2020) news analysis, which asserts that during the COVID-19 lockdown, there was a 37% growth from the 87 290 domestic abuse incidents that were reported in 2019. George (2020) reports that even though laws have been set in place against gender-based violence, between 1996 and 2020, the number of rape cases in South Africa only went down by 6%. In 2020, approximately 28% of men in South Africa who were accused of raping women and girls confessed their guilt; 46% of the men in question confessed to recidivism, while 7, 7% confessed to having had more than ten victims (George, 2020).

According to Cowling (2023) from Statista, an international statistics and data analysis company, these high numbers were not isolated only to the lockdown period. She reports that between 2022 and 2023, 67358 South African women were victims of violent crimes – 34% were gender-based abuse incidents. Buiten and Naidoo (2020:64) state that “most, but not all violence against women is gender-based and that not all gender-based violence is against women only”.

Oparinde and Matteau Matsha (2021) argue that there should be a turn from assuming that gender-based violence only victimises women to also being aware that men have been victims too. Citing Thobejane *et al.* (2018), Oparinde and Matteau Matsha (2021) add that in the cases of gender-based violence (in both cases of either women or men being the perpetrators), men rarely vocalise their experiences with gender-based violence. Furthermore, Makkan *et al.* (2022) present evidence that men who experienced hostile behaviour at home while growing up as boys have a greater likelihood of engaging in gender-based violence; Jewkes *et al.* (2015) concur. A study conducted with men between the ages of 18 and 49 in South Africa has also reported a connection between a painful early life and upbringing and gender-based violence (Jewkes *et al.*, 2011).

The questions addressed in this thesis create a space to understand the subjective realities of boys who are at the stage of becoming men. Ammann and Staudacher (2021) state that the dynamic daily occurrences in Africa require an exploration of what makes the complicated realities

and depictions of masculinities differ from one another. Makkan *et al.* (2022:6) suggest that working with boys during early adolescence might assist in addressing gender-based violence. Understanding how boys and those who share spaces with them make sense of their social environments, notions of masculinities and personhood may assist in framing questions surrounding men's roles in gender-based and intimate partner violence. Ammann and Staudacher (2021) also argue that there should be more focus on how masculinities transform throughout the lifespan of a man. Qambela (2022:45), citing Groth (2007) says

'Despite the existence of many different cultural contexts where there are initiation rites that seek to eliminate boyhood, the boy remains important to men. Importantly, this lingering boy in the lives of men continues even in manhood to exert influence not only on other men but further on women and the larger society.'

Outside of the trope of violent masculinities, there is a gradual development of research and literature on sensitive, nurturing and non-aggressive masculinities in South Africa. Men in a study about single parent fathers (Kabongo & Malose, 2023) disassociated with the narrative that men are absent fathers. They also discouraged notions that men are free to leave the mother with the child without taking responsibility. Clowes, Ratele and Shefer (2013) state that fatherhood should be a practice that can be practiced by all men, whether they are biologically related to the child or not. In their assertions to challenge conceptions of hegemonic and violent masculinities, they advocate for the inclusion of conviviality and sensitivity in the masculinity construction and identity rhetoric. Gunner (2014) also makes a highlight of the 'soft' masculinities as portrayed in the anti-violence music of *isicathamiya*. The acapella male groups' music features lyrics addressing social issues including xenophobia, gender based violence and it being okay for men to cry. This research paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of work on non-violent masculinities.

Kapp (2012) studied how first-year students from township schools in South Africa navigated high school before university. Homes and school environments were mostly characterised as under-resourced and dysfunctional, but the students found ways to rise above these situations. This study relied on the subjective perceptions and meanings constructed by the learners in their reflections on high school.

In a similar study, Theron (2020) undertook a comparative analysis of what adolescents in disadvantaged settings viewed as tools for resilience and how adults' perceptions of these were within the same locale. With a special focus on masculinity and personhood in this study, the works of these studies are extended towards understanding the highs and lows of the township adolescent boy's journey through secondary school education. The achievements that need to be celebrated in the lives of adolescent boys from the township are also observed.

The theoretical approach that guides the discussions in this paper is based on social constructivism and is informed by anthropological scholarship on adolescence, masculinity and education, amongst others (Fleury & Garrison, 2014; Langa, 2020; Mfecane, 2018; Qambela, 2021; Qambela, 2022; Turner, 1969; Van Genep, 1960).

1.4. Historical Background of South African Township School Education

This section discusses the history of South African education and contextualises it to the main research site of the study by exploring literature that discusses education and schooling within the township setting.

“The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within his own community, however, all doors are open” (Politics Web, 2016: para. 18). On 7 June 1954, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, who would later become Prime Minister in 1958, was speaking as the Minister of Native Affairs at the time of this speech and was introducing the thoughts behind the imagined education for black people living in segregated townships in South Africa –Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Politics Web, 2016).

In *Politics in the Union of South Africa*, Macdonald (1953) adds that the educational policies for European Africans were different from those of Native Africans. School attendance was compulsory for the latter and there was a lack of importance pressed on attendance. A statistical breakdown of African education in South Africa by Weeks (1967) posits that in 1964, an annual amount of \$16, 83 was invested in one Black African learner per annum, while an amount of \$215 was invested in that of the European African learner per annum.

If this scenario were to be explored in the present day (2023) currency, in which one United States dollar (USD) is 18, 35 South African rands (ZAR), R308, 77 South African rands were allocated to one Black African learner and R3 944,44 were allocated to one European African learner. According to Soudien (2023:5), “At the height of the apartheid period in the 1960s, per capita annual expenditure on African students was R12.46. For whites, it was R144.57.” There has been a major expansion in the Education budget post-apartheid allocated towards each black student (McKay, 2015: 99). The acquisition of free-market policies in the form of budget cuts from 1995 to 1998 (McKay, 2015) resulted in meticulous spending at a time when the reconstruction of underprivileged schools was required. Although this was addressed and more money is allocated, some underprovided schools are still left out. The Department of Basic Education Annual Report 2021/2022 presented that DBE spent R27 171 241 over the 2021/2022 financial year (DBE, 2022). The amount per learner cannot be easily calculated as the budget was divided

into departmental Operations, employee compensations, school infrastructure, Learners with Profound Disability, National School Nutrition Programme, HIV and Allocation Grants, Education Infrastructure, provincial grants towards Mathematics, Science and Technology and 'other transfers' (DBE, 2022:26). 'Other transfers' refers to contributions made towards the household upkeep of ex-employees (DBE, 2022:279), and it is not mentioned whether this includes pension contributions. According to McKay (2015:99), the focus of the budget on quantity instead of quality (trying to standardize finances across sites and not focusing on individual school needs) has not been helpful in redressing inequalities in education, especially in underprivileged schools. The school where this research was conducted, still struggles in terms of resources that are necessary for teaching, learning and administration (shortage of furniture and textbooks, little to no laboratory equipment, limited computers for educators to work on, and no computers for learners).

For a century, before the apartheid government took over, schools were managed by missionaries who came to South Africa in the 1800s. The government of South Africa, which was then called the Union of South Africa, assisted these schools with funds and assisted in paying the salaries of the teachers. As Blamires (1955) explains in his study of the then newly introduced Bantu Education Act of 1953, things changed severely thereafter for these missionary schools. The objective then was to separate Black African education from European African education, to dismantle the partnership with missionary schooling and for the government to gain autonomy in realising the goals of its apartheid policies.

In the words of Verwoerd (Harvey, n.d: 16), "...the economic structure of our country of course, results in large numbers of Natives having to earn their living in the service of Europeans". In Hyslop's (1988) account of the *State Education Policy and the Social Reproduction of the Urban African Working Class in the former Southern Transvaal* (now Gauteng Province of South Africa) *Between 1955 and 1976*, he identifies that the then-government of the Union of South Africa came up with Bantu Education as a contingency plan against the 'crisis' of the social order being threatened. This threat came from expeditious urbanisation, crashes in agronomical production and stock and skilled labour deficiencies in national industrialisation.

Township formation, homelands and Bantu education were ways to attain urban control (Smith, 2005). MacCarthy's section on local and regional government in Smith's (2005) book *The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanisation and Social Change in South Africa* provides an outline of issues in expeditious urbanisation. Enforced by the then-Union of South Africa, the Group Areas Act of 1950 was implemented to create separation between European Africans, Coloured

Africans, Asian Africans and Black Africans. Towns and cities were divided in terms of ownership and occupation of property assigned to the racial groups, respectively.

Bantu education also had the purpose of limiting skilled labour among Black Africans, their forced removal from locations near the city also posed a problem for the government. The emphasis in Bantu education was based on the four first grades of schooling and was said to provide the Black African learner with enough semi-skills, limited numeracy skills and just enough labour ethic to contribute to the blue-collar labour market (Gool, 1966). Minister of Bantu Education, W.A. Maree, stated that the first four grades of schools would be enough to read, write, count and know two languages, in a 1964 parliament debate (Gool, 1966). The focus on alleviating dropping out was only on primary school learners (Hyslop, 1988). This aim was also reflected in the building of new primary schools but using old buildings for middle and high schooling (Hyslop, 1988). Issues of dropping out were also observed because of these imposed infrastructures. Weeks (1967) reports that of the 212 000 Black African learners who enrolled in school in 1951, only less than 10% managed to go to high school in 1958. Only 0, 5% of this cohort completed high school and 299 completed their Form 4 (Grade 12) with university entrance.

Spaull (2013:44) speaks of “a tale of two schools”, which remains a legacy of the apartheid era. Spaull’s research shows that the basic education system in South Africa caters differently to township schools and schools that are in more suburban areas; the former struggles to educate, while the latter continues to improve in functionality. Ndimande (2012) states that schools in township areas are still experiencing inequalities as learners are crowded into standard-sized classrooms and educators are overworked. Despite interventions within the Department of Basic Education post-apartheid, schooling in South Africa continues to be severely unequal.

1.5. Contextual Background

Please note that for the anonymity of the school and all participants, the school research site will be referred to as *The School* and that all participant names will be pseudonyms for the entirety of the document. However, the township name itself has not been changed.

1.5.1. Tlhabane Township

Tlhabane, previously known as Oukassie (Old Location) is a township located 6,5km from Rustenburg which is a part of the Bojanala District of the North-West province (Figure 1). Rustenburg is 140 km from Johannesburg (Ditsele & Hurst, 2016) and is a historical mining town which falls within what is known as the South African platinum belt (land with an abundance of platinum in the North-West and Limpopo provinces). The main language spoken in Tlhabane is

Setswana but because of the influx of people from other provinces coming to the mine and for other economic opportunities, it has become multilingual with people speaking isiZulu, Xitsonga, isiXhosa and IsiShona.

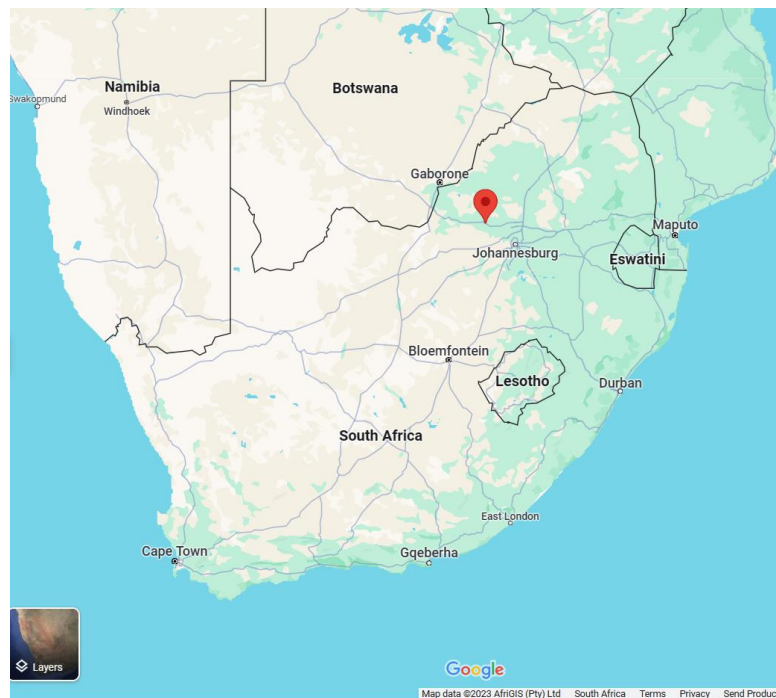


Figure 1 Location of Tlhabane in South Africa

Tlhabane was founded in the 1900s and became inhabited residentially when labourers were forcibly moved there (due to the segregation policies of the apartheid government) from Bethlehem which was a small town where the coloured descendants of slave Boers from Lydenburg were brought for labour (SAHO, 2011).

According to Jele (2019), who wrote a biography of Tlhabane, *Tlhabane ya Makgoa* 'The White Man's Tlhabane', the inhabitants of Bethlehem built their homes independent of government aid. While they were settling into their new homes in the 1930s, they were vacated to what the government called Toekomsrus, bringing in more Afrikaans-speaking¹ coloured people. Toekomsrus was renamed Tlhabane shortly after the relocation as it became part of the Batswana Homeland called Bophuthatswana from 1977 to 1994 (Jele, 2019). Some of the coloured people came from Sophiatown in Johannesburg when they were forcibly removed by the then-apartheid

¹Race and language is referred to because the township still has different sections known by which language they speak. Oukasie specifically still has sections with a lot of coloured people residing there.

government, and this move to urban areas which provided a nexus of former homelands and townships occurred as part of the 1913 Land Act (Jele, 2019).

The designs of the houses, according to Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2015:15) were built as “labour dormitories” that resembled matchboxes. The labourers were brought to work as housekeepers, to work in local government and as low-level labour on industrial sites (Cook, 2008). According to Cook (1999), who conducted extensive research on language and identity in Tlhabane and the neighbouring village, the GG section, which extends towards Phokeng, was established in the 1950s. Sections such as Fox Lake and Bester followed in 1991 under the Bophuthatswana regime (Figure 2).

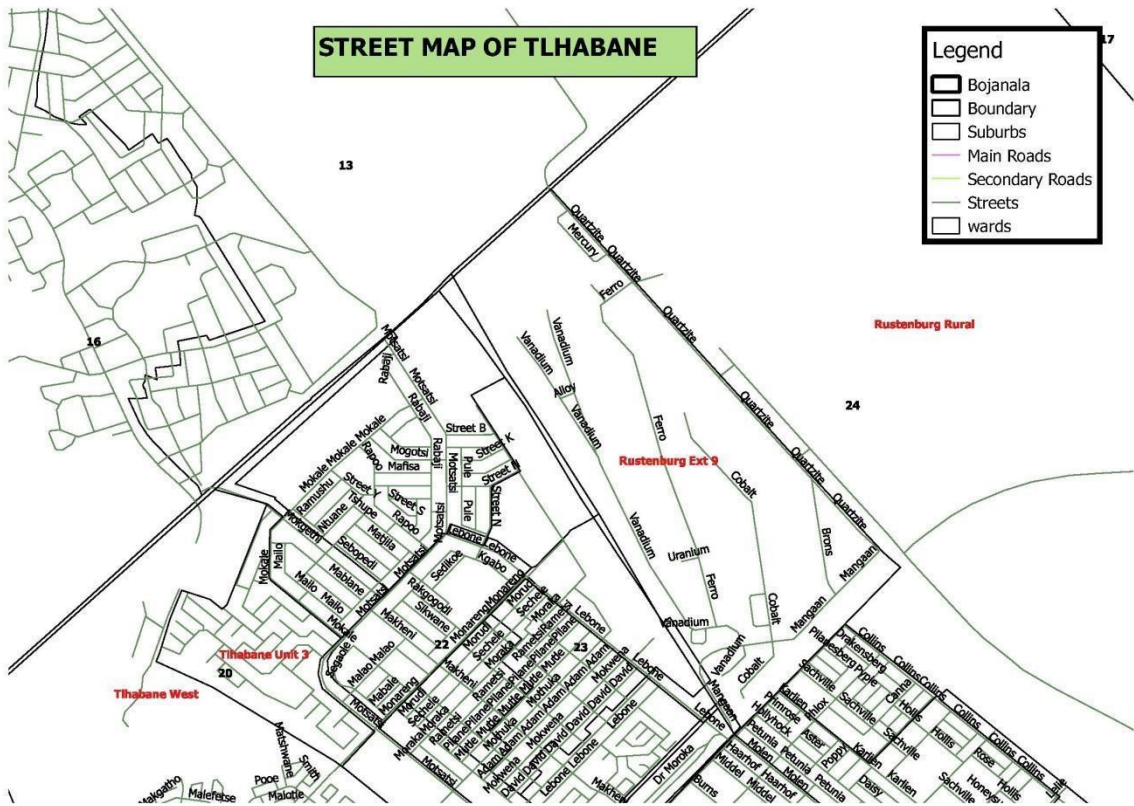


Figure 2 Street Map of Tlhabane

According to Jele (2019), due to the influx of more labourers during the forced removals and even more migrant people seeking work in the surrounding platinum mines, Tlhabane struggles with overstretched infrastructure. The backyard room/*letikiri* ‘corrugated iron house’ rental system became a lucrative source of income in the early 90s and now there are yards with ten rooms being served by single-home water/sewage and electricity systems. Outside of these challenges,

Tlhabane is a vibrant township with people from diverse backgrounds who make a life and thrive through the spirit of communality as is demonstrated in the discussion chapters of this paper.

1.5.2. The School

The School is a high school in Tlhabane Township. There are currently 1 122 learners in The School. Learners at The School are predominantly from Tlhabane, with about 30% from surrounding townships such as Sunrise Park, Lefaragatlhe and Boitekong. The medium of instruction at The School is Setswana and English. The information below was provided by the principal of The School. Each grade has an average of 150 learners, with 25 learners in each class. Eighty percent (80%) of the learners in The School are Setswana speakers, while the rest of the learners are first-language IsiShona speakers, also typically fluent in English and Setswana, and Sesotho-speakers; while a small percentage are IsiXhosa and isiZulu speakers (also fluent in Setswana).

The School's staff consists of 45 members (85% Setswana speakers) of which 30 are permanent teaching staff (70% Setswana speakers). Ten educator assistants were hired in December 2020 as part of the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) to assist the teaching staff with making copies, typing, marking and other classroom administration duties.

This school was chosen because the researcher was acquainted with the principal who had shown an interest in his school being a part of this study. The principal also shared the diversity of the learners' socio-economic backgrounds with the researcher in a conversation about education because The School is situated in a township locale. The researcher had desired to work with a school with such variation to accomplish a layered output of information so had thought that working with this school would be interesting and appropriate.

1.5.3 Participants

The following section provides an outline of each of the main participants (learners) of the study.

1.5.3.1 Lesego

During the data collection period, Lesego was a 15-year-old learner in Grade 9 who lived in a village about 1 km from Tlhabane called Lefaragatlhe. Lesego was inquisitive in the classroom setting (would lift his hand whenever he did not understand what was being said or what to do) and interacted with those who sat near him. He stayed with his grandmother, grandfather, older sister and a 6-year-old nephew. Their house was a three-bedroom home which had a large yard from which they let out an off-house room as a tuck-shop to a Pakistani family. Large pieces of

land are provided to all Bafokeng residents by the Bafokeng Tribal Council as a standard procedure in Bafokeng villages such as Lefaragatlhe, Phokeng, Luka and Kanana.

Lesego was a fan of soccer, and it was his most treasured hobby as he spent most of his afternoons playing street soccer with his neighbourhood friends. His career plans were anything within the Science, Technology and Mathematics fields but he also had a dream of pursuing a soccer career. Mirriam, his mother, described Lesego as follows:

'A child who listens. A good child. When he makes a mistake and I tell him where he went wrong, he corrects it happily. He's all about training (gym) and soccer. Ga se ngwana wa strata, ga tlatlala. He is not a child of the streets. He does not like gallivanting the streets. He only goes out to our cousins' house and watches movies with his cousins. He is at home most of the time.'

1.5.3.2 Thebe

During the data collection phase of this study, Thebe was an 18-year-old learner in Grade 9 who lived in Rustenburg-Noord, which is 2.4 km from Tlhabane. He had originally stated that he was 16 years old during sampling; it seemed that he really wanted to be a part of this research. He was a reserved, brave and ever-smiling young man who, although he had faced difficulties, remained positive and eager to learn. He had a stroke at the age of nine and, thereafter, developed learning challenges; one of his legs did not have full functionality. He loved drawing, particularly pencil sketching, and used it as a form of expression.

Thebe had a group of friends at school and home who were equally soft-spoken and mannerly with whom he spent time. He lived with his older sister, mother, grandmother, niece and nephew. Thebe unfortunately had to leave The School at the end of 2021 (after fieldwork had ended) because of learning challenges. He is however currently trying out for an online art-based institution; the family aims not only to harness his talent for drawing as a visual art but also to assist him in learning other subjects through art as a form of literacy. This is how Thebe's guardian, Monica, described him:

'O boikobo 'he's obedient'. I'm not sure if I should say that he is shy or respectful because he's very quiet. Some people who have come to visit sometimes ask if he can speak because he's so quiet. He is very respectful but sometimes he gets impatient. When he is angry, he explodes. I am most and very proud of him; that he is 18 years old and is respectful. That is one quality that most boys his age do not have.'

1.5.3.3 Thapelo

During the data collection phase of this study, Thapelo was a 15-year-old learner in Grade 9, a quiet boy who enjoyed laughing. He was good friends with Thebe and he would sometimes speak on his behalf in class and was a good support structure for his friend. Thapelo resided in Sunrise Park, a township located close to Ramochana Correctional Services, 8, 5 km from Tlhabane and 5km from the Rustenburg central business district (CBD). He lived with his mother, father, younger brother and younger sister in a beautiful house in the government reconstruction and development programme (RDP) homes section. Thapelo was also a member of a local soccer club at Sunrise Park which met on weekdays and challenged teams from surrounding townships on Saturdays. Thapelo's grandmother and grandfather, who resided at a village in Zeerust visited them on some weekends and on some weekdays. The following was how Thapelo's mother, Oumakie described him:

'He listens. When I tell him to do something he does it. He does not like friends. He's a good boy.'

1.5.3.4 Kagiso

During the data collection phase of this study, Kagiso was a 16-year-old learner in Grade 8 who was an outgoing, excitable adolescent boy. He lived in Seraleng, a newly built and developed government-subsidised township situated just outside Zinniaville, an industrial area which lies 7,1 km from Tlhabane Township. He travelled to school by public transport and resided with his mother and his two younger brothers. Kagiso was popular with his classmates and was constantly in motion throughout lessons, sitting wherever there was an empty seat and making his classmates laugh. He had many future goals, including working in mechanical engineering, becoming a musician, being a businessman and becoming a professional soccer player or an athlete. He enjoyed drawing for comedic purposes and soap operas on television and advocated for drinking alcohol as a fun and relaxing way for youth to be themselves.

Kagiso had little respect for authority when the researcher met him but, as time went on, the researcher discovered that he wanted to earn his elders' respect. The researcher learned this from statements coming from his and his guardian's interview and from getting to know him over a longer period. He also responded well to classroom activities if he was taken through them and when he was validated. Kagiso was charismatic and his behaviour influenced the behaviours of his close friendship group members in a striking way, which made him assume a distinct leadership and power role among his peers. Christina, his mother, described him this way:

'He talks and thinks like a grownup; some say that he's forward. They say that there is no other child that is as respectable as him. This one time, I found a group of men holding a meeting and talking about him; they didn't know that he was my son. They said that they would remain praying for him so that he does not go astray. I always ask God to never let him go astray. I ask that God gives him wisdom.'

1.5.3.5 Bandile

During the data collection phase of this study, Bandile was a 17-year-old (16-year-old during sampling) Grade 9 learner who lived in Tlhabane, in the Oukassie section. He lived with his mother and older sister in a rented *letikiri* 'corrugated iron house' that was situated within a larger yard, sharing the space with the main brick house and other *matikiri* 'corrugated iron houses'. Bandile was a well-mannered, talkative boy who was curious, studious and hard-working. He had plans to study mechanical engineering and was doing an unofficial tyre technician apprenticeship at a local vehicle tyre workshop, where he worked for a stipend on alternating weekdays after school. He assisted the main tyre technician with rethreading, changing tyres, fixing slow-punctures on new tyres and mag-wheel (magnesium wheel) refurbishment. Bandile was also involved in a local soccer club and attended training on days when he was not working at the workshop and on Saturdays. This is how his mother, Ruth, described her son:

'O boikobo 'he is obedient'. O a laolega 'he is manageable'. He is honest. Likes making jokes, honest, gets hurt easily, prides himself with popularity, impressionable and he is respectful towards his elders.'

1.6. Problem Statement

In most studies on masculinity (including black township masculinity), much attention has been paid to violence. Most of these studies are within the context of gender-based and intimate partner violence. As important as these studies are, the problem is that such studies reduce something as fluid and complex as masculinity into the collapsible categories of violence and hegemony without considering other characteristics that may be explored in the study of masculinity.

As stated by Medich *et al.* (2018), achieving superior masculinity towards women in modern township spaces is frequently based on antagonistic associations with women and competition for power and rank among male counterparts. Citing Wood and Jewkes (2001), Medich *et al.* (2018) report that aggression towards women and maintaining dominance in intimate relationships is welcomed as a 'male right' in the township space.

In a qualitative study on discourses of masculinity in Cape Town, South Africa, Van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2016:280) reported participants' (men's) justification of manners in which "physical abuse could be normalised and thus permitted". Van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2016) associate this with the fragments of South Africa's social and political history and its relationship with the normalisation of brutality (the former apartheid police brutality). Some of the participants in the study claimed that "violence is the only alternative and a 'solution' to conflict and earning others' respect" (Van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2016:280). Bhana *et al.* (2021) explore *amaphara* 'parasite' masculinities and traditional stick fighting in a Durban township high school. Their study's findings are that traditional practices and socio-economic challenges can give rise to violence against girls at school.

Other works on masculinity and violence include those of Bantjes and Nieuwoudt (2014), Bhana and Chen (2020), Edelstein (2018), Gqola (2007), Jewkes *et al.* (2010) and Wood, Lambert and Jewkes (2008), as cited by Gerber, Le Berre and Buiten (2023). In their review of South African literature that explores the production of violence through masculinity. They include work by Ratele, Shefer & Clowes (2012) in their study of men's reflections on fatherhood and found that pressures for men (who are also fathers) to assert traditional roles of being the main provider and decision-maker in the home created worries and a lack of self-confidence. They also found that under these pressures, the result in some cases was brutality towards others or intimidation/threatening to harm others.

Lindsay Clowes, Kopano Ratele & Tamara Shefer (2013) go on to add that it is in these traditional roles where violence is validated through the man exerting power over his family and they recommend that traditional roles that perpetuate violence be challenged. Pyke (2022) echoes this notion by suggesting that what must also be considered in the study of masculinity are the socio-political factors and expectations imposed on men by their contextual environments (intersectionality). Pyke (2022) also suggests that the subjective day-to-day experiences of men require more focus in this field of study. The knowledge gap identified for this thesis is thus the nuances that can be found in the day-to-day experiences of boyhood and in the process of becoming men outside the trope of the performance of violence.

In this thesis, the researcher shows how each boy's subjective experience of the transitional stage of adolescence constructs their personhoods using specific tools in their social environments while taking into consideration how the existing cultural prescriptions for manhood inform these constructions. This study shows that there is more to boys than violence. It shows that boys have deep feelings; they love and cherish their families and are loved in return. Some boys are sensitive, some grapple with being bullied and some have learning challenges. Boys choose to

work on their passions; they laugh, make others laugh and use humour to get through tough days. Boys do fight but they make up. Boys, in this study, protect girls and are protected by others. They dream and share their aspirations with their families and friends.

1.7. Sub-questions

The following are the sub-questions that support the main research question:

- How do adolescent boys in the township interact with their social environments and how do they produce their personhoods at home, at school and online?
- What are the interests, values, fears, failures and achievements of adolescent boys from the township?
- What meanings do guardians, educators and fellow learners attach to adolescent township boys' productions of personhood and masculinities?
- How do educators' and guardians' experiences and performances of masculinity affect the masculinity of adolescent boys from the township?

1.8. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 provides the background of the study and the historical background of education in South Africa. The chapter goes on to describe the contextual background of the research site and lists the participants with detailed descriptions. A discussion of the problem statement follows and, thereafter, an overview of the literature and conceptual framework is provided. The research questions are then outlined.

In Chapter 2, details on the available literature on the anthropology of education, masculinity and rites of passage are provided. The terms and concepts that are used within the fields of anthropology and education are outlined. A theoretical framework, that includes the theory that most applies to the research topic and is integral in the exploration of the research problem, is presented. It is in this chapter that social constructivism and habitus are identified as central to the methodology and the discussion of the analysis of the data.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methods that were employed during the fieldwork process of this study. How rapport was made is explained and an outline of events during fieldwork and the sampling strategies that were used are presented. The methods used and the literature that discusses their validity for this specific study is also discussed. A discussion of how the data were analysed, the limitations of the study and an outline of the ethical considerations are presented.

In Chapter 4, the data that were collected at The School site and the participants' homes are discussed. The data, including the literature with which the data correlates are discussed. A discussion of school ethnography and the observations that were made during the home visits ensues. Within the discussions, the concepts and terms that were introduced in the literature review according to how they relate to the findings from the data are included.

Chapter 5 discusses the data with special attention paid to the concept of liminality in the experience of adolescence, the path towards adulthood and the construction of masculinity. The classroom ethnography of the events that were observed at The School is provided and discussed alongside relevant literature. A digital ethnography and the individual meanings of everyday life made by the boys within the imagined stage of liminality are presented.

1.9. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, the research site and the main participants of this study were introduced. The main concepts that make up the overall content of this thesis were emphasised. For masculinity to be understood, studies in the contextual everyday life of adolescent boys need to be explored more. A summary of the methodology that was utilised in the data collection process of the study was also provided.

2.1 Introduction

This literature review chapter outlines the main themes of the thesis and explores how these themes manifest in existing academic literature. The relevance of the anthropology of education as a suitable discipline for the nature of this study's enquiry is discussed. Thereafter, the discussion turns to the theoretical framework used and the approaches that were consulted in determining the findings. Subsequently, the terms and concepts that are central to the discussion are defined and explained. The chapter concludes by synthesising the outcomes of each conclusion made from the review of the literature.

This literature review contributed insight into the problem statement of this thesis and the research objectives. The research question is as follows: What are the meanings of personhood and masculinity among a group of adolescent boys at a North-West Province school? The problem statement identified a gap in how society and school within the contextual site of this study prepare boys for adulthood and for becoming men. To address this gap, an investigation of the day-to-day learning experiences of the boys and the social meanings of the people under whose care they are needed to be undertaken. The researcher chose to work within the scope of the anthropology of education – a field of inquiry that is concerned with the relationships between education and socio-cultural phenomena.

2.2. Anthropology of Education

This section details how the anthropology of education or what has recently come to be called came about. It also discusses the ethnographic work in this field that informed this study in addressing the problem statement and the research questions.

2.2.1 Foundations of anthropology and education

The anthropology of education was integrated into the field of anthropology through a series of events that will be detailed in this section. According to Comitas and Dolgin (1978), the earliest involvement that the field of anthropology had with education in the United States of America (USA) was in 1892. This was when the first doctorate was awarded for a thesis with the title 'Is Simplified Spelling Feasible' (author not mentioned). Comitas and Dolgin (1978:167) also mention that Boas (1901) developed an interest in and developed work on "the importance of learning and experience' at the onset of the twentieth century". Though Boas's work was centred on the relationship between race and being human, it gravitated towards how different people learn in

different social environments. In his work *The Mind of the Primitive*, Boas (1901: 282) says the following:

“... the organization of mind is practically identical among all races of man; that mental activity follows the same laws everywhere, but that its manifestations depend upon the character of individual experience that is subjected to the action of these laws.”

It is worth noting that although education was not yet fully developed as a theme in anthropology during this era, elements of learning, teaching and schooling were becoming topics in anthropological inquiry. The language used by scholars at this time should also be understood in its historical context, particularly terms like ‘primitive’ which would be unacceptable if used today.

It was also during that era in Italy that Montessori (1913: vii) published the book *Pedagogic Anthropology*, wherein she asserts that pedagogic anthropology should take the form of “philosophic conceptions regarding the *future destiny* of man from the biological point of view” (emphasis in the original). Montessori imagined the duty of the educator as the training of the values and morals of future generations. She was also concerned with whether the schooling system and the approaches that they employed were in alignment with such developments. Montessori identified the school environment as a good site for anthropologists and educators to understand how human beings learn at the early stages of their development.

Macdonald (1922), a USA anthropologist, had similar views to Montessori as his work focused on how habits taught in schools influenced reasoning and brain development. Within a US anthropology scholarship, Boaz (1929) had a chapter on education in his book *Anthropology and Modern Life*. This chapter deals with the growth and development of children within different economic and social classes. He also investigates concerns that educators may have regarding the “prediction of the development of learners” and whether the understanding thereof will assist them in finding teaching solutions that would be ideal for the individual student (Boaz, 1929:183).

Mead’s (1928) work *Coming of Age in Samoa*, as reported by Eddy (1985:85), compared American civilisation with “simpler societies” to illuminate North American methods of education. Works connecting anthropology to education between the 1930s and 1940s are not well-documented. Benedict’s (1948) assertions about cultural sensitivity in her book *Patterns of Culture* later afforded educational anthropologists funding to study education among oppressed groups. Yon (2003) reports that in 1949, anthropologist Mead organised a conference where the challenges of education among disregarded communities were outlined and reflexivity in doing ethnography in research was highlighted. The outcome of this conference was educational research that became more focused on inequalities in educational research in the US. Mead’s

(1951) book *The School in American Culture* focuses on schooling in the US, its past and the study of culture in the field of education.

Anthropologists, Spindler and his wife hosted a conference with the theme *The Anthropology of Education* in 1954 (Eddy, 1985; Levinson & Pollack, 2011; Yon, 2003); focused mainly on the development and maintenance of collaborative work between education professionals and anthropologists (Comitas & Dolgin, 1978). Between 1954 and 1975, the Council of Anthropology and Education and the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* journal series were developed thanks to the 1954 conference at Stanford University (Eddy, 1985).

Anderson-Levitt (2011), in her book *A Companion to the Anthropology of Education*, states that the US and the United Kingdom historically controlled most of the publishing in the collaborative works of anthropology and education. Eddy (1985) also related this dominance to the financial contributions towards the expansion of social sciences departments in the US and social anthropology departments in Britain made by US foundation agencies such as Rockefeller, Carnegie and Macy after 1920. There is therefore little known about other published works (that are not written in English) in these fields before the early 1960s. The recollections of anthropology and education and the anthropology of education detailed above are therefore not exhaustive, but they provide a general overview of the international scholarship within this field of inquiry.

2.2.2. Studies in anthropology and education

Research through participation-observation in school environments has contributed greatly to the understanding of the cultural and social elements of schools and the schooling system. They have provided insight into the relationships between members of school staff and learners/students and between learners, the subjective experiences of teaching and learning of teaching staff and learners and have provided details on power dynamics in schools and schooling systems.

Hopes in Friction: Schooling, Health and Everyday Life in Uganda by Meinert (2009) is an ethnography that observes the universal primary education system in Uganda through the rich description of participant observation in schooling and home environments in the country. She details what she calls gendered appropriation, “the ideas and hopes of education and health do not only differ between policymakers and pupils, they also differ between boys and girls” (Meinert, 2009:9) and its role in the consideration of health.

Meinert (2009) also establishes that the activities and aspirations of children and their families are influenced by the intersections between politics, schooling and health education. In the current study, the corroboration in building preparedness for adulthood and for being men between

educators and guardians is existent but silent. While the curriculum aims to get the students educated and ready for further studies and the job market, educators and guardians are preparing them for other social realities such as coping amid challenges, working with their hands and morals to keep them from trouble with the law.

The 'digital revolution' according to Kalolo (2019) is the increased use of digital technologies that started in the 1980s and continues to progress in everyday activities in the present day. Kajee (2016) points out that this revolution has altered how the exploration and procurement of knowledge is achieved. This has therefore given rise to a growing body of work in the field of digital literacies. Mnyanda and Mbelani (2018:2) allude to the digital revolution as fostering a change in the landscape of literacy.

Due to the evident socio-economic inequalities in South Africa, the urgent matters and priority in research within social sciences and education research in this field are within the 'digital divide'. Van Dijk (2020:2) defines the digital divide as "divisions in the access to and use of four phases in the adoption of digital media: motivation, physical access, digital skills and usage". With the lowering of the cost of smartphones and data, digital literacies have increased over the years but not particularly in schools.

A classroom ethnography completed among Grade 9 learners in an underprivileged township and a rural area in Kings William Town by Mnyanda and Mbelani (2018) found that learners found ways to become digitally literate. Using low-cost social media sites and access to micro-data bundles, learners teach themselves how to use these technologies, sometimes only having access to one phone in the house. Learners were more digitally literate than their educators and had developed meaning-production skills through the analysis of memes and commentary on social media.

Digital Divisions: How Schools Create Inequalities in the Tech Era, a school ethnography by Rufalow (2020), also engages in the theme of digital divides. In this ethnography, Rufalow (2020) investigates how schools create different spaces for learning for students and outlines the disadvantages and advantages brought on by the use of technologies in everyday life at schools. His main finding was that 'disciplining play' was a way in which inequalities were created. In underprivileged schools, any prowess in digital technology was discouraged; in more affluent schools, time and effort were invested in harnessing students' technological knowledge (Rufalow, 2020).

In the school in which this ethnography was conducted, smartphones were seen by educators as intrusive because they created space for distraction. The lack of internet structures and time also

discouraged educators from engaging with the teaching and learning opportunities that could be introduced by learners' curiosities regarding digital literacies. One of the teachers also said that cell phones in the classroom could be either good or bad because when learners got assignments, they used Google for research. In the same breath, she shared that students used Facebook to make fun of other learners during school hours and that a lot of learners had been found watching adult content on their phones.

Another educator said the following:

'I do not allow the use of cell phones in my classroom. Learners use phones to copy during tests; they know how to find answers off the internet. I have caught some of them watching porn on their phones.'

She, however, believed that with the right guidance and time invested in making students aware of how they can use their digital literacies to enhance their learning experience, the learners might change their approach. She said:

'There was a time when I used to allow them to bring their phones so that we could do activities from educational sites. If they can be taught how to use their phones more to help them learn, it will be helpful.'

South African ethnographies that work with the relationships between education and socio-cultural elements are also explored in the following ethnographies:

Mayeza (2017) observed relationships and activities in a Durban township primary school playground in his study *'Girls Don't Play Soccer': Children Policing Gender on the Playground in a Township Primary School. South Africa*. The study's findings reflect on the playground as a "gendered site of learning" (Mayeza, 2017:477) wherein children police one another in terms of what are appropriate behaviours for their assigned genders. The study also found that the rules that are enforced on the playgrounds are social reproductions of the surrounding gendered community and teaching practices at the school.

Mayeza (2018) explores the meanings that children attach to sexualities through play in the study *'Charmer Boys' and 'Cream Girls': How Primary School Children Construct Themselves as Heterosexual Subjects Through Football*. This ethnography uses the school playground as its research site and finds that the power dynamics are complex as boys perform and girls evaluate performance. Mayeza (2018) proposes that life skills (called Life Orientation in the Senior Phase), should consider adding children's cultural and social understanding in conceptualising and facilitating lessons.

Love is Good Even When it is Bad: Competing Sexuality Discourses in a Township High School in South Africa is a school ethnography by Mathe (2014) which also investigates sexual culture among students in a KwaZulu-Natal township high school. According to Mathe (2014:78), "the gendered experiences of schooling are critical in understanding and engaging with the evolving sexual identities of teenagers".

Ferreira (2016), in her ethnography *'A Sort of Black and White Past and Present Thing': High School Students' Subject Positions on South Africa's Recent Past*, determines students' responses to pedagogy relating to South African history. Results within this mixed-race context show students as wanting to 'move forward' from the past and as "unaffected by and uninterested in the past, or as unaffected by but interested in the past" (Ferreira, 2016:1254).

Hunter (2019) presents a school ethnography named *Race for Education: Gender, White Tone, and Schooling in South Africa* that speaks to the state of post-apartheid education in South Africa. He examines schooling in three areas that differ in their historical and socio-economic situations in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. One of the research sites was Umlazi, a township that came about as part of the Groups Area Act in the 1960s when AmaZulu were forcefully moved out of central urban areas (Hunter, 2019:6). The other was Bluff, a semi-urban area that was a strictly English and Afrikaans speaker settlement in the 1960s. The third site was Upper-Berea Ridge, which has been long known by people of surrounding areas as being middle-class (Hunter, 2019:35).

During the research period of ethnography, Umlazi had 84 public schools, while Bluff and Berea had ten public schools each. Hunter (2019:3) works with the term the *marketisation* of schooling, which for his study's sake he defines as when public schools charge money and the increase of private schooling and competition between schools. He argues that marketisation further perpetuates racial, class and gender divisions and further observes that reforms in South African education post-apartheid have done little to uplift underprivileged schools (Hunter, 2019).

2.2.3. Education and Schooling in South Africa

Post-apartheid, the incoming South African government had a special focus on repealing the discrimination and disparities in the education system (Soudien, Reddy & Harvey, 2022). The government created the South African School Act (SASA) which was responsible for decolonization and transformation within the South African education system (Soudien, Reddy & Harvey, 2022). Though the programme was designed at a national level, accountability for implementing it was given to provincial departments (Soudien, Reddy & Harvey, 2022). SASA focused more on democratizing learners' guardians' involvement in school management

decisions in the form of SGBs (School Governing Bodies), and less on transforming previously disadvantaged schools (Sourdien, 2023). Sourdien (2023) states that even with SASA still in existence and functioning, previously disadvantaged schools still have problems of congested classrooms, learning outcomes that differ from those in private schools, and educator scarcity.

Hunter (2016: 3) argues that the implementation of educational tuition at public schools to not exclude private schools from the funding system created more inequalities. Private school infrastructures and equipment were already stable, and the high fees charged were sufficient to maintain structure (Hunter, 2016). On the other hand, some public schools, especially in townships, required more funding to refurbish structures and to maintain them (Hunter, 2016). For example, at the school that I collected data from, the school fee was R400 per year which was not sufficient to cover taking care of infrastructure, nor to buy educational equipment according to one of the educators.

Learners from economically disadvantaged schools have a lower chance of achieving good results and making significant advancements in their school careers according to Herrero Romero et al. (2018). Despite this, learners in under-resourced schools have 'high hopes and aspirations for the future' (Herrero Romero et al., 2018:3).

2.3. Defining Culture

In conceptualising culture, Ortner (2006) in her book *Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* first acknowledges that 'culture' is a heavily contested word in the field of social anthropology due to the essentialist use of the word in earlier scholarship which was invested in othering. Ortner's answer to how culture can be worked with differently is that anthropologists combine how people think and view the politics of daily life with the dynamic nature of social change. A key feature in her perspective of culture is the influence of globalisation, industrialisation and modernisation in the creation of inequalities. She describes culture as follows:

"Schemas through which people see and act upon the world and the (subjectivities through which people feel about themselves and the world) and the constant production, contestation, and transformation of public culture, of media and other representations of all kinds, embodying and seeking to shape old and new thoughts, feelings, and ideologies. (Ortner, 2006:18)"

In working with culture, Ortner (2001) uses practice theory which states that perceptions construct individuality and that individual action changes perception.

In a South African context, Ward and Kamsteeg (2006) take a similar stance and look at culture as an action. They assert that culture is what people practice and is produced and reproduced over time by actors individually and collectively. According to this view, by looking at the regulations put in place in activities (what is done, who does what and how it is required to be done), researchers can learn more about people in different contexts. Ward and Kamsteeg (2006) add that by observing activities and the rules that govern them, an analysis of how things and the arrangements of power can be made, and the experiences of actors can be understood better. Sharp (2006) also defines culture as the different manners in which individuals and groups understand and conceptualise the nature of the interactions and connections that they have with others.

Therefore, culture in this paper refers to the actions and perceptions that individuals and groups hold and the rules that govern them. It is also how the greater structure (the social environment) influences actions and perceptions and how actions and perceptions influence the social environment. Culture is therefore observed and understood through how social changes influence actions and perceptions and vice versa.

It is therefore important to note that the tensions that are produced by modernisation contribute to the production and reproduction of cultures that can be defined contextually over the specific temporalities in which they are practised. Throughout the rest of this chapter, how personhood is described, striven towards and constructed within the Rustenburg Setswana-speaking community using the lens of social theory in the productions and reproductions of culture is analysed.

2.4. What 'Ritual' Means in this Study

Bell (1992) refers to rituals as the substance that explains culture. Rituals, according to Bell, are important to the relationships and workings of culture and they are situated and occur during the point where conflicting social and cultural phenomena converge. The use of the term 'ritual dynamics' in Van Gennep's (1960) work on rites of passage is drawn towards the organisation and procedures of rituals which, according to Van Gennep, help researchers identify how and why rituals are arranged.

Beumer (2020) critiques the idea of referring to the dynamics of rituals only in speaking about rituals as this creates restrictions in understanding the motives as opposed to only looking at the structures that govern ritual practices. He uses the term 'drama', as also used by Turner (1979), to refer to the spontaneous and adaptability of ritual as human relationships transform over time. This also takes account of the assertions made by Sax, Quack and Weinhold (2010) that the effect of rituals should be considered beyond dichotomies of traditional versus modern and

mundane versus important but rather on their functions and efficacy within the contexts in which they serve. For this study, the observation of both the dynamics and the dramatic elements of ritual practice was found to be useful in reaching the findings in this chapter.

2.5. School and Culture

Deal and Peterson's (2016) approach to culture in their book *Shaping School Culture* corroborates the practice theory framework of culture, which is addressed in this thesis, with a slight expansion. They define culture as the "stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behaviour over time" (Deal & Peterson, 1990:7). They, therefore, describe school culture as "complex webs of stories, traditions, and rituals budding over time as students, teachers, parents and administrators work together and with crises and accomplishments" (Deal & Peterson, 2016:8). In this view, tacit regulations, habits, practices and expectancies are used as points of analysis in the understanding of school cultures wherein the "flow of beliefs and assumptions" (Deal & Peterson, 2016:8) emerge and how sense of everyday life is made.

Anthropologist Hoffman (2015), states that culture creates education and education creates culture. She also states that there are characteristics of school and classroom culture that are specific to each school setting and that the principles and laws that govern the space may differ; educators will each have their own distinct ways of teaching, learners will experience the school differently and content will differ across school environments.

While schools function under a broader school culture as co-existing with other school spaces, each classroom context should be considered significant in the production and reproduction of school and classroom cultures. Quantz (1999) views the school setting as a performance of culture, whereby all characters follow a script. Within these rituals, there are costumes, props and behaviours to observe that are normative to the virtues that are set out by the director, the producer and the production house in support of cultural actions.

One of the key ideas that the researcher considered and investigated in this work was the relationship between education and socio-cultural phenomena, the 'classrooms as culture'. Dixon, Frank, and Green (1999:4) define 'classrooms as culture' as "a way of discussing the knowledge that students and teachers have about life in classrooms". They also state that it is the results and opportunities that stem from activities in the everyday life of specific classroom spaces.

Social sciences disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and education have emphasised the importance of ethnography in the study of culture and it has been central in the observation and analysis of classroom cultures (Alam, 2020). Ethnography in the study of classroom cultures

reveals unseen patterns and everyday life habits. It also reveals power dynamics and provides insight into who has access to the command/knowledge of these patterns and habits.

In the study of classrooms as culture, ethnography also helps researchers to recognise the outcomes that prevail for individuals or groups that have access to this command/knowledge (Dixon & Frank, 1999). To understand how things operate in the classroom locale, one needs to have a background understanding of the individual cultural ideologies each individual has, the general culture of the school setting and the teaching and learning cultures. Saville-Troike (1978) states that even for an educator, knowing what cultural ideas have been instilled in individual learners can help teachers formulate pedagogies that can supplement that to which the learners are already accustomed.

2.6. Defining African Personhood

According to Ajedokun (2015), African personhood is the dependence of an individual on the community (the person's social environment) to sustain and support them and the individual's dedication to the community's moral ethics. In the view that Ajedokun (2015) presents, personhood cannot be achieved without the presence of social relationships. This idea is also demonstrated in Nyamnjoh's (2017) commentary on the concept of incompleteness, that one can only be complete through mutual exchanges with others – 'I am because you are', echoing the African philosopher, Mbiti (1990:106).

This description of African personhood relates to the definition of the Setswana/Sotho word, *botho*, which is extended as 'motho ke motho ka batho'. In Nguni languages, such as isiZulu and isiXhosa, it is termed *ubuntu* and extended as 'ubuntu ungu muntu ngabantu'. This is an African philosophy which Gareegope (2020) and Steyn (2012) translate as 'a person is a person because of other people'. Relationships were indeed extremely important for the young men who participated in this study.

Menkiti (1984) argues for this society-centred idea of personhood and identifies individualism as a defining factor for personhood as grounded in Western thought. His conceptualisation of African-centric personhood is that personhood is an ongoing process created from language, thought and values that individuals adapt from their social environment. Menkiti also states that a person's identity cannot be considered without considering the society that the person comes from – society/community being the determinant of the human person. According to Menkiti (1984:172), the process of the confluence of a person into society through "social and ritual transformation" is the apex where someone's "full complement of excellencies seen as truly definitive" of a person is accomplished.

Masolo (2010:155) advocates for this stance in his book *Self and Community in a Changing World* by stating the following:

“This process of depending on others for the tools that enable us to associate with them on a growing scale of competence is the process that makes us into persons. In other words, we become persons through acquiring and participating in the socially generated knowledge of norms and actions we learn to live by in order to impose humaneness on our humanness.”

Molefe (2019) also identifies that there are tensions between self-realisation and what society might expect from the individual in the communitarian concept of personhood. Molefe argues that what is passed on as ‘moral’ by a particular community ultimately becomes a choice by the individual, meaning that individuals may partake in rituals of incorporation but may choose to abandon the values passed down.

The researcher believes that the views expressed by Manzini and Molefe are not to be confused with the idea of individualism but are to be openly discussed to not only view the community as right and moral in relation to, and over the individual but to consider individual selves as equally important in understanding personhood. Furthermore, in Menkiti’s (2018:166) rebuttal to the critiques from the above-stated authors titled *Person and Community – a Retrospective Statement*, he emphasises that the transformative process requires work from individuals to keep the process going forward, not only for themselves but also for others.

Both views expressed by the communitarian and selfhood theorists are important in understanding the kind of personhood with which participants make meaning in this research study. For this paper, personhood is defined according to Okpalike (2020) in their philosophical definition of the Nigerian Igbo concept of *onweonye* ‘personhood and selfhood’. *Onweare*, the physical and metaphysical compositions of the self, and *onye* are the obligations that the individual has towards everyone and everything that exists outside of them. Therefore, personhood is equally divided between what is intrinsic to an individual and what he receives from the natural and social world.

Okpalike (2020) borrow this idea from Odimegwu (2008), who calls this integrative personhood, and understand it as the combination of the self, being conscious of who they are (which is fundamental in this perspective) and society concerning the self. Closely related to this notion is Gyekye’s (1997:76) idea of acknowledging the need for balance in the communitarianism and selfhood debate of personhood: “Moderate or restricted communitarianism accommodates communal values as well as values of individuality, social commitments as well as responsibilities to oneself”. This definition remains within the confines of *botho/ubuntu* as earlier described. *Motho*

ke motho ka batho, 'a person is a person through other people'; *motho* 'a person' comes first within the statement; as such, choice precedes the statement. Even so, the statement neither discards nor refutes the importance of relationships with others in the negotiation of selfhood.

2.7. Defining Masculinity

In his study of trafficking in men, Guttman (1997) conceptualises masculinity according to four ideas based on existing approaches in anthropology. The first is that masculinity is a combination of all the thoughts that men hold and the activities that they undertake. Next, he believes that masculinity comprises all the thoughts and activities in which men engage to be men. Furthermore, Guttman (1997:386) identifies that masculinity can refer to the ability of some men to be more "manly" than other men. The fourth perspective is that masculinity is considered as contrary to femininity and can therefore refer to everything that is not feminine.

According to Cornwall and Lindisfarne (2016), the conventional definitions of masculinity and maleness in anthropology are that it can be a commoditised object which can be accessed, owned, lost and measured. According to this definition, masculinity is also a gendered entity that depends on the acquisition of resources accessed from a social context. Masculinity, according to Cornwall and Lindisfarne (2016), can be a learnt behaviour stemming from anatomy and desire and expresses itself in sexuality and sexual orientation. In concluding their definition, they add that the interconnections between the biological, sexual and social meanings of masculinity make it concrete and universalised.

Within an interrogation of the social constructions of bodies, Bourdieu (2001) presents that historically, gender was associated with the divisions of things concerning their labour (their work and 'function'). These are divided into dichotomies as a form of association, a way to socially construct them and the making of sense in how things work, e.g., right versus left, light versus dark and inside versus outside. The biological differences made between 'male' and 'female' bodies are therefore set apart through their anatomies.

In a study on metaphors of masculinity in rural Andalusia, Brandes (1980) indicates that the presence of women is a contributing factor in how men negotiate, understand and make meanings of masculinity. Therefore, it is suggested that masculinity cannot be studied in isolation of the relationship between it and femininity.

Butler (2007), in her book *Gender Trouble*, states that gender should be discussed separately from sex because sex is a form of desire, choice and preference while gender is a performance. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (2016) suggest that because masculinity is treated as fluid and differs

according to context, the definitions and redefinitions thereof need to be studied in differing social contexts and settings. Butler (2009) presents an analogy of stage-acting in which the backdrop of what is considered the norm (what the actor knows is socially constructed as part of their gender act) of the specific gender, the actor, after going through the lines written for the specific gender performs the act.

Moynihan (1998:1073) relates to this idea by referring to gender as a fusion of social and historical factors that are not part of a person's nature. This adds to the social constructivist view which is that gender is constructed and governed by the self and social context and, therefore, is not something that humans "are", but what humans "do" in social interactions (Moynihan, 1998:1073).

In relevance to the relation studies between masculinity and personality in the thematic conceptualisation of this study, recent ideas on personhood suggest that social construction, interactions and performances entangle to produce the notion of personhood. Langa (2020), who conducted a ten-year research study of masculinities with a group of adolescent boys in a South African township through the medium of psychoanalysis, points out that the boys' masculinities were not set in stone and that each participant did not fit directly and neatly into a specific type of masculinity but shifted or made shifts following context.

2.7.1. South African Masculinity

Moolman (2013) suggests that South African masculinities be reconsidered according to existing intersections between race, class and gender. She not only suggests this from the view of the history of apartheid that caused marginalities but also from the changing socio-economic implications left by apartheid and the changes that have occurred since. Moolman (2013:96) further states that thinking of South African masculinities through intersectionality can assist scholars in understanding the complexities of relationships between masculinity and "history, power, ideology and material".

Moolman (2013:97) also speaks of the danger of looking at class alone in the study of masculinities as it is a result of the colonised legal and social landscape of South Africa and that 'not all black men are poor'; the political economy of South African masculinity should be looked at through a more multidimensional view. Gibbs *et al.* (2013) state that the 1970s and 1980s saw an escalation of 'traditional' masculinity that came about because of working-class labour markets taking form at the time. As men had more financial access than women and were the primary providers, this revived a masculinity that was patriarchal and oppressive. The main determinant of masculinity therefore became men's ability to provide for their families.

Malinga and Ratele (2016) discovered that isiXhosa and isiZulu-speaking men in their study saw emotional distance and coldness as a marker of authentic black masculinity. “Masculine anxieties” (Malinga & Ratele, 2016:112) are said to be caused by the need to model authentic masculinity around having money. The anxiety develops as a response to existing socio-economic problems and having to meet the cultural expectation of economic endowment.

In theorising African masculinity, Mfecane (2018) critiques the Western view of masculinity which claims that masculinity is solely an individual process that builds on the rest of societal masculinity (Kimmel, 1994; Rappaport, 1997). Mfecane (2018) posits that within an African context, African personhood is determined as created by all involved, including metaphysical/spiritual entities. As much as individual human beings are instrumental in the production of their masculinity, they do so together with other people and these unseen spiritual entities.

Within the study of South African masculinities, Everitt-Penhale and Ratele (2015) suggest that there should be a change in approaching the concept of traditional masculinity in a re-analysis of the term. They assert that traditional masculinity is constructed socially across sites, which means that the meaning changes across sites. Everitt-Penhale and Ratele (2015) critique the dichotomy that is made between modernity and tradition without considering that traditions have been and are constructed within modernity. They also argue that associating traditional masculinity with hegemony in all situations is problematic as this might not always apply contextually.

In this view, South African masculinity is seen as complex, multi-faceted, contextual, situational and transcending binary-based definitions. Furthermore, in emphasising the complexity of African masculinity, Ammann & Staudacher (2021) cite Fuh (2017: 238), when he states that “[m]en [in Africa] are troubled and their masculinities troubling”. They further elaborate that African men’s responses and views on these challenges are homogenous.

2.8 Anthropology and Adolescence

The psychologist Hall (1904) was one of the first people to enquire into the developmental stage of adolescence and he referred to it as a stormy and worrisome time (Korbin, 2011). With a descriptive account of six months living in Samoa and spending time with adolescent girls, Mead’s (1928) *Coming of Age in Samoa* contributed immensely to the discourse on youth and adolescence in anthropology. Mead outlines that the work of other disciplines like psychology and sociology had a common perception of problems like disobedience against the law, antagonism and grappling in the stage of adolescence which emanated from adolescents’ societies.

As an anthropologist, Mead sought to observe whether these problems existed because of adolescence or Americanism and, therefore, set out to Manu'a in the Samoan Islands. Hallowell's (1936) reflection and forecast of the future of anthropology, *Anthropology – Yesterday and Today*, submits that Mead managed to reach a breakthrough with her identification of the non-standard nature of what was originally thought of as salient in adolescence across social sciences academic spaces through the ethnography of her time in Samoa.

A case was made by Freeman (1983) after he investigated the authenticity of the information provided on the sexual practices by Samoan adolescent girls and concluded that it was not factual. Another case made to re-state the point that Mead wanted to make by Feinberg (1988), points to how she, through her rich descriptions, provided academic spaces with a view of how adolescence could be imagined as outside of Western perspectives.

Other anthropological works that were influenced by Mead's work in Samoa were Swartz and Merton's (1967) study of the semantics in the language of an adolescent cohort residing in an urban locale of the US and Schwartz's (1973) ethnography on Hopi-Indian adolescent girls. According to LeVine (2011), in *Traditions in Transition: Adolescents Remaking Culture*, who also cites Erickson's (1963) work *Childhood and Society*, adolescence is a meeting point between two histories, that of the individual and that of their immediate social environment. He adds that in this stage of life, individuals are not only being acculturated into their elders' ways of life but are in the process of recreating their own new cultures which draw from older ways while incorporating new features.

2.9 Rites of Passage

Van Gennep's (1960) *Rites of Passage* and Turner's (1969) *The Ritual Process* paved the way for ethnographic work on the ceremonial rituals that are observed at different stages and ages of lives across societies. According to Van Gennep, these rituals signal transitions from one group to another, or one social standing to the next. According to Bhuda and Koitsiwe (2021), within these ceremonies, the community's expectations of the transitioning persons are communicated. The ceremonies also highlight a new type of belonging in the new role. This thesis also observes the expected roles of adulthood to be assumed by learners which stem from the subjective views of the educators and the guardians.

Rites of passage in the form of initiation of young men into adult males have declined rapidly over the past few decades in South Africa, according to Motlhankane (2014). He connects this decline to colonisation, illegal activities in initiation schools (murders of initiated due to malpractice and people practising without the necessary credentials and experience) and globalisation – the

interconnectedness, diffusion and “interdependence” of cultures (Motlhankane (2014:14). Siweya *et al.* (2018) also connect the decline to anxieties and distrust by parents to reported cases of health complications, these counterfeit institutions, modernisation and a major turn from traditional practices to religion among Africans.

The same narrative came up in a study by Msutwana and De Lange (2017) which was on how Xhosa-speaking female teachers in a secondary school reflect on their early adulthood sex education and how they currently teach it. The teachers highlighted how the decline in traditional initiation schools has taken away adolescents’ means of being trained in adulthood and that they are left to construct their journey to adulthood by themselves. Msutwana and De Lange (2017) also cite Delius and Glaser (2002) who undertook a historical study of sexualisation in South Africa and attributed the decline to black people moving to the cities for employment opportunities and adapting to urban ways.

Historical Setswana initiation practices included separate initiation schools for girls and boys, *bojale* for girls and *bogwera* for boys (Monnapula, 2014). *Bojale* was a three-month time away from the rest of the community where girls were taught how to handle home duties, how to value people older than themselves, parenthood and went through female circumcision. The entry point for boys would be *bogwane*, where twelve-year-old boys would be taught about farming, traditional principles and the values of sexual activity at a remote location. The follow-up to this would be *bogwera*, which would include teachings on parenthood, how to refrain from alcohol abuse and how to behave around the chief and women; this would be completed by circumcision.

Most rites of passage take the triphasic sequence stated by Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1979): separation, liminality and incorporation. Initiation rites take the same course, and the rite is symbolic of the death of boyhood and the birth of manhood (Firth, 2014). The researcher describes a South African initiation rite using literature.

The initiation rites that signify the transition of boys to men (Mfecane, 2016; Ntombana 2011) among amaXhosa is known as *ulwaluko* (Qambela, 2021:3). It takes place when young men are 18 years old (Mfecane, 2016) and older. It occurs between June and July and between December and January annually and most ceremonies take place in the Eastern Cape (Mkhwanazi, 2018). Historically, the rite was conducted by a *mninisisusa* 'an adviser', *ingcibi* 'a traditional surgeon' and *amakhankatha* 'nurses' (Mkhwanazi, 2018; Soga, 1932).

Before the boy's departure, his family would slaughter a sheep and use the sheepskin to create a bracelet for the boy to use to cover his circumcision wound. Boys are taken to a remote site (separation) for between 21 and 42 days where they are trained on how to be a man. They are

accompanied by men who have already gone through the rite called *inkhankatha*, what the male nurses used to be called (Mfecane, 2016:204). This isolation from the everyday life activities and practices of boyhood signifies the metaphysical and bodily disconnection from it.

According to Qambela (2022:44), other boys, who are called *amanqalathi*, accompany the boys not to take part in the ritual but to gain knowledge and understanding of the initiation process. Virtues that are central to the amaXhosa social life, according to Mkhwanazi (2018), are *ukuhlonipha* 'respect' and *ubuntu* 'humanity'. These virtues are placed at the centre of the lessons at the initiation site and are meant to be applied in their future homes in their upcoming new roles as men. It is said that the boys are commanded to exclaim "*Ndiyindoda*" 'I am a man' right after the foreskin is removed as a proclamation of his new social status and growth as a man (Matholeni, 2020:12). AmaXhosa initiation rites are not just processes that are aimed at the conversion of boyhood to manhood, but they play a significant role in the 'becoming' process of personhood. It is within the spiritual and intergenerational teachings that boys receive connect and root themselves further to their kinship and amaXhosa roots (Matholeni, 2020; Ncanca, 2014).

2.10 Theoretical Framework

The following section discusses the theoretical frameworks that were used in the conceptualisation of the research question and the research problem. Social constructivism also relates to the communitarian and interdependence that are reflected by the study findings both at school, at home and in the relationships that learners have with their friends. The section also goes on to discuss the use of social constructivism in education research in South Africa and internationally. Habitus helps this study in considering how education can be a form of upward social mobility and cultural capital that learners strive for in their process of becoming who they aspire to be.

2.10.1 Social constructivism

Learning is constructed from intersubjective interpretations of continual inner-outer exchanges with immediate social environments. Expressions of masculinities and personhoods are also based on the written and unwritten contextual constructs dictated by the actor's immediate social-political and unseen environment(s). The theoretical approach used in this study is social constructivism, with special attention paid to intersubjectivity and meaning-making.

In addition to Mfecane's (2018) critique of the social constructionist view that masculinity is an individually produced process in section 2.7 of this thesis, he also critiques this view as not

accommodative of African views on personhood. He states that African personhood views human beings as being composed not only of physical material, but of the immaterial. The immaterial is formed by elements that work with the physical body or around it (Mfecane, 2018). This thesis agrees with Mfecane's (2018) critique, but continues to use social constructivism as situational to African personhood thought. Social constructivism that is referred to in this thesis is based on the combined agreement of African personhood scholarship that rejects the notion of only focusing on individualistic constructions and performances of masculinity and personhood. This scholarship aims to also support ideas surrounding the co-creation, shared understanding and the consideration of what cannot be seen in considering constructions of masculinity.

As stated in section 2.6 of this thesis, Appumilage (2017) Okpalike (2020), Odimegwu (2008), Gyekye (1997), Mentiki (2018) are in consensus regarding the process of African personhood being a balance between individuals working with others, themselves and what is not seen. These scholars' state that individualism is only one element of the parts that work together in the construction of personhood and masculinity. Mentiki (2018), though a firm supporter of communitarianism in the production of personhood, also believes that the individual, after learning what is required of him, assumes the responsibility of doing what is required to reach the next level of their personhood. As stated earlier, African personhood considers the physical and metaphysical compositions of the person and the obligations that the individual has towards everyone and everything that exists outside of them. Individual thought and belief in choosing to assume set out responsibilities can also therefore be manifestations of what is not seen.

Mfecane (2020) discusses social constructivism that incorporates the balance between the person, their immediate society and 'unseen' elements of African personhood in his ethnographic examples of the journey to becoming *Indoda* 'a man' amongst IsiXhosa speakers. The exhibition of the ceremonial rites of the boys' initiation among IsiXhosa speakers is a socially constructed display of the new social rank of an initiate (Mfecane, 2020: 5). What makes a man thereafter, is not only what he wears, his new known status, his socially constructed rigid and resilient body, but *izenzo zakhe* 'his actions' (Mfecane, 2020: 6). These actions as such, are not just how he performs his new masculinity, but how he treats others and treats himself. This stance is similar to how the boys in this thesis (Chapter 4 and 5), their guardians and educators refer to healthy masculinity as being about self-respect and about being respectful of other people. *Izenzo* 'actions' according to Mfecane (2020) cannot signify the transformation of a boy to becoming a man on its own, so it has to be accompanied by *isiko* 'the custom'. Therefore, the spiritual and metaphysical elements of the experience of the traditional custom, change in the boy's physical form and his intrinsic person make up his new personhood and masculinity. Mfecane's (2018)

critique does not totally dismiss the use of social constructivism in considering personhood and masculinity, but invites scholars to include the African thought that considers that personhood is composed of material beyond individualism and communitarianism.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 270) state that African personhood is “a set of intersubjective practices”. Duranti (2010) defines intersubjectivity as a mutually understood experience of the universe and of natural phenomena. It is through intersubjectivity that communities are formed (Duranti, 2010: 11). Another characteristic of African personhood that is demonstrated in ethnographies from African societies is that “meaning is achieved in social interaction rather than in isolation” (Mfecane, 2018:296). This thought goes on to suggest that kinship is the main site from which the production of personhood is made and thereafter, from the greater society. Everyday life situations that involve inter-subjectivity and ‘mutuality of being’ (Sahlins, 2013:10) are discussed further in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Adams (2006) states that social constructivism emphasises the importance of socio-cultural elements in the process of learning. Individual formulations of understanding also play a role in the interactivity of the learning process, thus, the learner and the education co-create learning and understanding. The term ‘scaffolding’ in teaching and learning comes to the forefront as the construction of the learning material and the learning environment is the performance of scaffolding one another (Adams, 2006:249; Silcock, 2003).

Fleury and Garrison (2014) discuss social constructivism based on philosophical anthropology and call for the learner to be taken into consideration more within the construction of knowledge. They posit that even though the role of the learner has been acknowledged, the formal education system as an entity has been placed at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Fleury and Garrison (2014) argue that educators and education administration should not limit teaching and learning to understanding and curriculum but should also consider the socio-political repercussions of their functioning.

With the consideration of the political economy of education and the effects of colonialism therein, Fleury and Garrison (2014:21) propose that the incorporation of not only the ‘minds’ but also the ‘will, selves and rights’ of individual learners in the theory of social constructivism within education be issued.

Within a South African context, Ogegbo and Gaigher (2019) observe a relationship between the academic underachievement of students in Mathematics and Science with educators’ understanding of the study material, lack of training and limited teaching methods. They conducted a study within the framework of social constructivism by creating a social situation

where educators would have to work together on a lesson study. Educators ended up having to exchange information and, therefore, created communities of practice and continual collaboration, thus, scaffolding one another within everyday teaching practices.

In the study of how educators navigate overcrowded classroom settings within South Africa, Maris (2016) used the social constructivist theory to observe and analyse how students and educators collaborate. The research included assisted learning support (lecturers and mentors within the field of education) and the aim was to see how scaffolding between all agents involved would assist educators in experiencing positive outcomes in overcrowded classrooms. Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2015), also use the social constructivist theory in their investigation of the exclusion of play as an essential part of learning in childhood education in South Africa and Nigeria. They propose a teaching and learning model that includes activities that employ “playful techniques” that are geared towards emotional, socio-moral and mental development (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015:4).

2.10.2 Habitus and Social Capital

This thesis uses Bourdieu’s (1997; 2002) theory of habitus and social capital in distinguishing processes of learning in terms of personhood socialisation and masculinity within the school system. Bourdieu’s (1997) theory of capital comprises three forms of capital, namely, social, cultural and economic capital. Social capital is the social networks, relationships and connections that people have with other people. Economic capital refers to what can be used as an exchange for items and goods. Cultural capital is the capability that can be internal (learnt) and made official (for example, a degree can be a form of cultural capital). The capitals co-exist; economic capital can afford one cultural capital (e.g. buying a ticket to travel to learn more about areas outside one’s knowledge) and this in turn can afford one social capital (e.g. making connections with people abroad).

Habitus assists in the interpretation of the differences in the cultural capital of learners in the township schooling system. This approach can assist in studying the excommunication of some parties whether by the self or by members of other groups. An example of how habitus and capital are applied within a school context is how Joorst (2015) unpacks how the resilience of learners in an under-resourced school utilises available tools as capital to complete their school activities. He also relates to the learners’ subjective accounts of how they navigate education and struggle.

Social inequalities within the schooling and grading systems can also be investigated through Bourdieu’s capital approach. According to Roksa and Robinson (2017), basic and higher

education departments require all learners to achieve the same cultural capital with unequal economic capital.

2.11 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, the usefulness of ethnography in the exploration of teaching, learning and classroom practices was discussed through the literature review. Why social constructivism is the relevant theoretical lens in the observation and analysis of socio-cultural nuances that occur within everyday life was also illustrated. The co-creation of meaning was discussed within the framework of African personhood and the social constructivism theory. This chapter also highlighted that for meanings behind masculinities to be understood, there needed to be an exploration of everyday life contextually and an investigation of local knowledge.

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion on the methodology utilised to address the question: What are the components and meanings of the productions and reproductions of personhood, education and masculinities in the relationships and respective homes of a group of adolescents in a North West province school? The social constructivist theory that was discussed in Chapter 2 guided this research methodology as the main research objective was to gather information on the meanings of masculinity and personhoods as constructed by boys and the people who care for and co-exist with them in the township.

The chapter starts by detailing the procedures observed to obtain access to the research site and how rapport was built with the occupants of the site. The sampling techniques employed for the selection of participants are then explained. Subsequently, a detailed discussion of the research approaches, including the strategies and procedures used follows. A review of the limitations elicited by the research methods and a reflexive piece on the unforeseen circumstances experienced in the field then ensues. The final section of the chapter focuses on the ethics considered and adhered to in the completion of the fieldwork and ethnography processes.

3.2. Foundation of the Study**3.2.1. Gaining access to the main study site**

This research was conducted over five months from July to November 2021 with a pre-ethics pilot over two weeks in March 2021. The researcher requested to spend some time doing fieldwork on premises of The School in Tlhabane Township close to Rustenburg, South Africa –close to her home. In a bid over negotiations with the principal of The School, the researcher asked about some of the challenges that were experienced by both the staff and learners.

The principal alluded to The School's educators' struggles with being able to achieve all the objectives during Covid-19. This was due to the new classroom arrangements that were altered for the COVID-19 restrictions. The normal classroom would have between 40 and 60 learners but because of social distancing, the groups were divided into two with 20 to 24 learners per class. This coincided with the number of classrooms at The School so grades alternated in attendance (for example, Grade 9 would attend during Week 1, then Grade 8 in Week 2).

Another challenge that the principal mentioned was that there was a shortage of teachers for the number of learners enrolled. Seeing this as an opportunity to assist learners and educators while

conducting fieldwork, the researcher– in dialogue with her supervisor –suggested that she run tutorial classes. This would not only get the learners up to speed with the work but would be a way to identify any other struggles that learners were having with the learning materials. The researcher then met with the principal and asked to complete the fieldwork by offering tutorial classes after school and during weekends to students who felt that they needed them. This was so that the research would not intrude on the everyday teaching and learning processes and so that the researcher would have the learners' undivided attention.

The principal agreed to this plan but days later came up with the idea of the researcher joining the staff temporarily as an assistant teacher. She would assist with Social Sciences (a combination of History and Geography) lessons because that was the department that needed more assistance. His motivation for the change of mind was that, if the researcher were to administer the tutorials after school, there would be a lack of security on the school grounds because learners tended to be unruly when male staff members were not present.

The agreement was also that the researcher would have to make herself available to stand in as a substitute teacher if teachers were overloaded with work and invigilated during exams. A challenge with the division of teaching duties ensued (as detailed in Section 3.7) and some re-negotiations were necessary. After these negotiations, the researcher was thereafter assigned to teach English First Additional Language (FAL) to one class in the Grade 8 group and one in the Grade 9 group. This arrangement served as a good opportunity for the researcher to do participant-observation by getting interwoven into the structure of the daily school activities and operations.

3.2.2. Building rapport at the site

The researcher was introduced to the teaching staff members on 26 June 2021 at the weekly Monday morning staff meeting before The School's assembly event. An introduction was made by the principal and the researcher was provided the opportunity to introduce herself and the research project, the activities involved in the fieldwork and the criteria for the eligibility of learners, educators and guardians to participate. The researcher stipulated that she needed three male teachers and three female teachers across varying age groups and with varying amounts of teaching experience to participate (for distributive justice).

Thereafter, the researcher was introduced to Mr Mothuloe (an English educator) who taught English in both the Senior Phase (Grades 8 and 9) and the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase (Grades 10 to 12). He provided the researcher with the Grade 8 and 9 timetables and showed the researcher in classrooms in which the allocated groups were located. He showed the

researcher his subject teaching files (one for language and one for literature), textbooks and the teaching guides that he was using. He also pointed out where each group was with class activities and the work that was due for the specific week was discussed.

Mr Mothuloe also gave the researcher his extra bottle of sanitiser to use in the classrooms. He warned that learners sat close to one another despite the COVID-19 social distancing regulations enforced by educators. He asked that the researcher routinely sanitise her own hands and those of the students with whom she engaged.

Furthermore, Mr Mothuloe referred the researcher to Mr Lengau who held the keys to the library so that the researcher could get the textbooks that she needed. Mr Lengau made a pass at the researcher, but she laughed it off. Mr Lengau continued to make a pass at her every time she encountered her on the school premises when there was nobody around. The library, as the researcher came to discover, was a hall wherein textbooks were stored; it contained only a few chairs and tables. The researcher also learnt that learners were not allowed in the library if they had not been sent by an educator to fetch books for the class and were not in pairs. Mr Lengau explained that there had been instances when learners had taken extra books for themselves; with an inadequate number of books for all learners, the staff had to be vigilant.

Upon the researcher's return, Mr Mothuloe referred her to Mrs Moratwa to receive stationery – a box of chalk and the standard student package (provided by the Department of Basic Education at the beginning of every year) that included a roll of pink book covering, two blue pens and a ruler. Mrs Moratwa then also showed the researcher the workstation that she would share with assistant teachers and other teachers, who needed to type out, print and staple documents (Figures 3 and 4). This room was more of a 'copy room' as its main purposes were for printing, copying and for staff members to gain access to the records cabinet. On some days, the researcher had a chair but on other days she needed to go out and search for a chair because this room was communal and other staff members shared the workstation with her.



Figure 3 Researcher's allocated workstation (Photo by author: 21 July 2021)

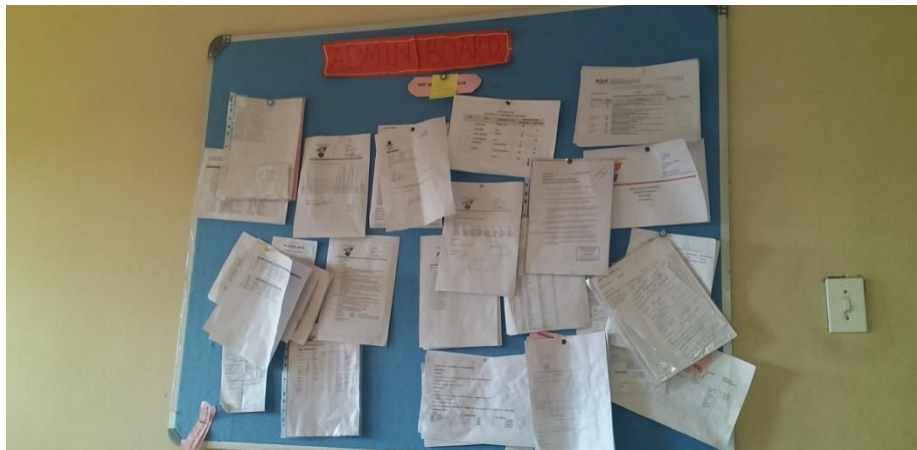


Figure 4 Notice board in the copy room (Photo by author: 21 July 2021)

That week the Grade 8 group were attending school, so the researcher met them and proceeded with the lesson from where Mr Mothuloe had left off. The researcher selected the participants on the following day (as detailed in Section 3.4.1). As the June examinations were also underway, the researcher assisted teachers across departments with copying exam papers, preparing and typing memorandums, printing and organising and stapling examination question papers during her 'free periods'.

From 28 June to 25 July 2021, a lockdown required all schools and tertiary institutions to close for contact teaching and learning until 30 June 2021.

From 28 June to 2 July 2021, the staff of The School attended school to work on teaching administration. During these two days, the researcher continued to assist different teaching

departments with marking, typing and document collation for the exams that were to follow when the schools opened. Acquaintance was made with all staff members during this time and this is also when the researcher built firmer relationships with some of the teaching and support staff members. She was invited to attend the teachers' morning service which involved the principal preaching a short sermon of encouragement and prayer and a session of announcements. This would happen even on days when students were not at school and also on Mondays when the broader school had an assembly.

3.3. Fieldwork

When the schools reopened, examinations began. The Grade 9 group was the first group to write and the researcher was requested to be part of the invigilation team. Invigilation was not limited to English so she got the opportunity to meet and engage with other Grade 9 groups. She was also requested to fill in as a substitute teacher for educators who had gone for COVID-19 vaccinations as mandated by the Department of Basic Education. Some of the teachers were also placed under house-rest due to vaccination side effects and she stood in as a substitute teacher for their classes too. At this stage, she went to school every day and read for her thesis when she had 'free periods'. She also made use of the time after an examination to select the Grade 9 participants for the study (as per the procedure detailed in Section 3.4.1). She also helped Mr Mothuloe mark the Grade 9 English FAL examination papers.

Examination time changed the mood of the teaching team quite drastically. Everything moved faster but the principal made sure that the marking was concluded quickly as the staff needed to complete the remaining teaching activities before the end of Term 3. Though the two-week emergency lockdown was a good measure against escalating COVID-19 cases, it put a lot of strain on both educators and learners. The unpreparedness showed in the examination scripts that the researcher marked. She knew that her students had not been ready for exams. The weeks of inconsistent attendance resulted in students forgetting what had been taught two weeks before and self-study did not work for the Grades 8 and 9 learners. She realised that most of them did not have the confidence to carry out their tasks unsupervised.

The researcher then fell ill for two days and could not invigilate but she continued to do so when she returned to school. Classroom observations commenced within the examination and invigilation period. Once the examinations were finished, students were allowed to stay at home so that examination marking could continue. The researcher continued to go to school to complete marking and to assist the teaching staff with administration while making calls to the participants' guardians for home visits. She was expected to be onsite every day but had to ask permission to

leave after her classes to travel for home visits. She continued to attend the Monday assemblies and made sure that she was there for the morning teachers' meetings on the days on which she was teaching.

As the term continued, the researcher became more a part of The School's fabric. Relationships were budding between herself and both groups that she was teaching as she got used to their communication styles and how they preferred to learn and they also got to know how to sit down and listen. It was not as easy with the educators; a few were open to chats but some were aloof to her being there. She was also not in the educators' WhatsApp group and missed some last-minute information.

Having to share a teaching file with Mr Mothuloe also meant that she did not have some of the other teaching material outside of the textbooks and teaching guides with which she had been provided. After lessons, she had to go to her workstation and write down field notes as she could not do that in the classroom. She would sometimes need to take a drive and find a spot to write field notes and record voice notes to herself if the copy room was too busy.

On some days after leaving school, the researcher had appointments with guardians for home visits. Some guardians worked and preferred that she come after 16h00, while the mothers who stayed at home preferred to be seen earlier. The first visits were for her to find the learner's homes, to meet their guardians and to introduce the guardians to the research. It was at this stage that she provided the guardians with the participant information leaflet, informed consent form, participant information leaflet and parental permission letter for the learner (minor) to participate in the study.

In September, still within Term 3, the researcher's supervisor, Associate Prof. J Auerbach, arranged a supervision workshop for her students. As she was in Potchefstroom, she arranged for them to meet in Rustenburg. They arranged to meet with the principal and for them to come and see The School research site. Only the FET groups were attending during that week as the Grade 12 group were writing their trial examinations. The staff was happy to meet the researcher's fellow master's students and her supervisor. This visit also led to other educators being more receptive to her and legitimised her presence at The School. They engaged with her supervisor and got to understand the depth of her research.

The researcher's supervisor and fellow master's students gave a word of encouragement to the Grade 12 group for their examinations and on the possibilities and opportunities that were available after Grade 12. They also advised that if they required more information on applying to North-West University, they should approach the researcher. The students knew where she was

stationed and, as she parked close to the Grades 10 to 12 site, they saw her on most mornings and they greeted one another. Unfortunately, students did not approach her and she was afraid to overstep boundaries (as they did not have a solid relationship) by asking them.

The researcher continued to do home visits and conducted three visits to each participant's home between September and December 2021. When the main school copy machine was moved from the administration office to the copy room in late October, there were more opportunities to engage in casual conversations with the educators and to have access to more information about upcoming events at The School.

3.4. Sampling: Methods, Rationale and Procedures

3.4.1. Procedure for the selection of learner participants

Once the researcher had settled into the classroom roles assigned by the principal and the Heads of Department (staff who occupy the position of HOD) on the 26th of June 2021, she asked for permission from the principal to draw a sample from the class groups. This selection occurred on 26 June (Grade 8: Class 8.2) and 30 July (Grade 9: Class 9.6) 2021. The availability of these groups was highly dependent on the COVID-19 intervention class group attendance. She selected three participants from each of the classes assigned by the principal through a randomised selection to prevent bias. The selection process went as follows

The researcher re-introduced herself to the learners as a student at North-West University and went on to explain her level of study. She then proceeded to explain the concept of masculinity and what social anthropology is. Learners engaged about the topic, asked questions and were provided with clarifications.

The researcher had a set of specifications in terms of who was required for the sake of the topic of the research project. Participants needed to be adolescent boys in the transitional stage of becoming young men. Therefore, she needed to use a sampling method that was systematic and provided the opportunity to eliminate the chance of including anyone outside the required sample. For this reason, she worked with a purposive strategy (purposeful inclusion according to specific criteria) of sampling which is roughly defined as sampling that is strategically designed within the theoretical understanding of the research site at the proposal stage (Mason, 2002; Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling is also helpful for a researcher to attain specialised knowledge from specific participants (Marton, 2013).

The researcher then highlighted the criteria of the research study which were that all participants needed to 1) be between the ages of 14 and 16 years of age, 2) identify as a boy/man, 3) be a regular Facebook user, 4) be available on Tuesday afternoons between 14h30 and 16h30, 5) be ready to answer questions about their everyday lives and 6) be sure that guardians would be available for calls and likely be interested in participating in the research. These criteria were developed as the sample frame for this cohort.

According to Griffie (2018), a sampling frame is constructed by listing the characteristics that encapsulate the themes in the topic and the research questions that need to be investigated (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Non-probability sampling is carrying out randomisation in a way that one will not be able to tell who will be chosen (Bernard, 2014; Griffie, 2018; Vehovar *et al.*, 2016). This was achieved through the drawing of names from a plastic sleeve with the name stickers folded inwardly. All the points were noted on the board for all learners to read.

The processes of remuneration, assent and consent were explained thereafter. The learners were notified that the understanding and signing of the assent (by the learners) and consent (by guardians) documents were a further requirement for full enrolment for participation in the research project.

The researcher also spoke about requiring written permission (from their guardians and themselves), included as a section in the consent and assent forms, to perform digital ethnography on the prospective participant learners' Facebook accounts, the granting of permission via consent forms, on which days the ethnography would be conducted (Fridays and Saturdays between 15h00 and 19h00) and that the participants would be shown which parts of their interactions would be used in the analysis section of the write-up of the paper. The learners were thereafter encouraged to lift their hands if they identified fully with the stated criteria.

Each learner who thought themselves eligible to volunteer for the study according to the criteria raised their hand. Each was then handed a small piece of paper (all equal sizes) to write down their names and surnames. The learners were asked to fold the papers inward until their paper was at its smallest size. The papers were then all put in a transparent filing sleeve. Learners who identified as female (for inclusion of all genders in this activity and because they were the neutral parties in the selection process) were then asked to volunteer to go to the front of the classroom and select three names from the plastic sleeve in front of the class. The first three girls to have their hands up were asked to make their way to the front. Each girl drew a name from the filing sleeve and read it out.

Without being prompted by the researcher, learners proceeded to raise applause after each selection and announcement. The remaining names (in the plastic sleeve) were kept for possible re-selection if any of the chosen learners decided to drop out of the study or would need to stop for any reason. This was addressed with all involved. Each selected participant was subsequently provided with a leaflet whereon they filled in their individual details. The details included their full names, their grade, and the name of their guardian whom they were comfortable with to be contacted, their own cell phone numbers, their guardians' cell phone numbers and their home addresses. All selected participants were thereafter approached at their desks and were provided with the opportunity to ask questions; all methodologies were explained to them individually.

3.4.2. Procedure for the selection of educators

The researcher took advantage of the time spent with educators during the preparatory week (working days between 28 June and 2 July 2021) by providing each educator with a synthesised version of the proposal with the key points. While introducing the contents of the document and discussing it, male educators volunteered to be a part of the research. Two female educators were approached and invited to participate, and they gladly accepted; they were chosen with variation in mind (completing the demographic of a young female educator with a lot of teaching experience and a young female educator who had recently started to teach).

3.4.3. Procedure for the selection of guardians

When the learners wrote down the names of the guardians with whom they were comfortable to be contacted, the specific guardians were automatically selected. From observation, these were the guardians who fit the criteria of being the 'most frequently available' guardians and, in one of the learner's cases, the guardian who would be interested in participating in the study.

3.5. Research Approach

Marcus (1995) coined the term multi-sited ethnography referring to utilising a combination of qualitative methods to study social situations and persons. These methods were meant to capture elements of the person or situation in transition between different fields. Pierides (2010), in *Multi-sited Ethnography and the Field of Educational Research*, states that a gap exists in educational research where categories that are not confined to the school site but are important in conducting a more comprehensive analysis of teaching and learning are not being explored. These unexplored avenues are social status, individuals' historical backgrounds and their connections to their surrounding societies.

At the onset of classroom ethnography, Smith (1967) started imagining that classroom practice could be better understood through multi-sited and cross-situational encounters and across different actors. The idea behind this concept is to follow these elements within a single geographical site. This thesis was constructed in a way that followed township adolescent boys through school ethnography, classroom ethnography, reflective journaling, semi-structured interviews and digital ethnography. The outcome was being able to delineate the existence of relationship dynamics and alliances (Van Duijn, 2019) between participants and those with whom they engage and the spaces in which they engage (as demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis).

In observing the ethics of research, all protocols were adhered to as proposed. At the beginning of the fieldwork, the teaching staff members were all provided with complete information regarding the research and all activities. All parties that participated in the study were provided with information sheets highlighting their rights in the study, who to contact if their rights were being overlooked and their options in terms of voluntary consent.

3.5.1. Ethnographic research approaches

3.5.1.1. Classroom ethnography

Ferreira's (2016) view of the classroom is that it is more than just a setting, but a play of power governed by ritualised social laws. Ferreira suggests that it is therefore worth examining social acts when conducting education research. The classrooms at The School are set up with double desks, with about 26 learners in each classroom. Though the number of learners was reduced due to the COVID-19 regulations, the size of the classrooms does not have enough capacity for ample spacing. The learners still sat close to one another and some of the windows were broken and shut, while some doors were unable to close. However, the ambience of the classroom compensated for the structural shortcomings. The students made the environment pleasant with their laughter and playfulness.

The most salient feature of the classroom setup was that there was no table or chair for the teacher. Teachers are meant to get into the classroom, teach and leave after the lesson. The only time that educators spent extended amounts of time seated was when the educator needed to sit in for an absent teacher. Thorkelson (2008) observes the dimensions of how the classroom is physically organised in *The Silent Social Order of the Theory Classroom*. Thorkelson points out that the space creates a dichotomy between the focused and the not-so-focused, the ones who are present and those who are not in attendance. This was evident in the classrooms at The School; the learners were seated in two sections, the 'well-behaved' learners on the left and the

'uncooperative' learners on the right. This was how the class teacher had arranged the classroom setting. Where an arrangement had not been enforced, learners normatively located themselves in this fashion.

3.5.1.2. Digital Ethnography: social network ethnography

Calliandro (2018) asserts that social media sites are for what most people choose to use the internet and, therefore, present a more well-distributed and rich socio-cultural content and connections site of ethnographic enquiry than any other online group communication sites. Citing Hines (2008), Postill and Pink (2012) state that the development of social media has created opportunities for researchers to investigate new interactive sites where social relationships are built and maintained. Hines (2008:260) sees the development of technology and people's engagement with it as a "social process" and "technological appropriation". The social process is the integration of technologies in functions that govern everyday life and activities, while the appropriation of technologies includes issues of access, ease of use (user-friendliness) and technological literacies.

The online activities of the adolescent boys were observed on Facebook with their permission and the permission of their guardians (assent forms and consent forms). This observation was aimed at discovering how the boys utilise technology in everyday life (outside of their verbal commentary in their interviews and written commentary in their journals), how they interact with other people online, how they use the online space to construct masculine identities and how they perform these identities online. It was also a way to compare the selves that they created online with their classroom, school grounds and home selves.

According to Wang and Liu (2021), digital ethnography as a research method requires a researcher to be immersed in the online 'world' of the participants long enough to see as many interactions and events unfold as possible. This calls for a researcher to be online regularly to be fully acquainted with the site, how participants use it and to keep abreast with the ongoing conversations (Wang & Liu, 2021). Screenshots of text status updates and stylised images of icons, celebrities and events shared (not photographs) were taken during weekends and weekday late afternoons after home visits throughout the fieldwork process. Another point of interest was the tag lines that the learners wrote in the 'description box' where the learners briefly described who they were; these had accompanying emojis that would be stylised (arranged in specific ways).

Calliandro (2018:553) also identifies digital ethnography as a method that creates opportunities for a researcher to not only "follow"/ study people online, but to also create opportunities to

observe the languages; and activities that accompany people's uses of social media sites. Some of the learners stated that they were students in higher education, and some also wrote that they were employed. What was also noted was how the learners wrote their names on Facebook; they used special characters, while some names were written as sentences. If there were any photographs with provided captions, the photographs were saved for description and analysis. Any comments that the participant made on other people's status updates or pictures were also recorded. The participants were shown all images captured via screenshot and asked for permission to use them for analysis.

3.5.1.3. Mobile Ethnography: Home Visits

Andre Novoa (2015: 100) defines mobile ethnography as "mobile participant-observation with a particular focus on mobile phenomena". Mobile ethnography can be conducted within wide geographical spaces or with trips between participant homes and other research sites (Novoa, 2015). I used mobile ethnography, which Novoa (2015) states as having emanated from George Marcus' (1995) idea of multi-sited ethnography in conducting home visits to follow the paths that the boys moved along outside of the school site. Kevin Browne (2014: 112) asserts "that homes are porous, and the paths that traverse houses are extensions and transformations of lines that connect to other places". By moving with participants to their homes, researchers are able to engender understanding of the field that they are in (Browne, 2014, Ingold, 2004; Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). Within these paths at home lay narratives, relationships and symbols to investigate (Ingold, 2007). Janet Carsten (2018) states that within homes, the relationships between residents, between family members and their relationships with the government are embedded. Homes are also sites that if entered can show researchers how power dynamics are organized (Carsten, 2018). Paolo Boccagni (2014: 280) used the term 'homemaking' to refer to the practices that are related to 'meaning and attachment' that is placed in place, connections between people and situations that they undergo together. Focusing on how homemaking is done, spoken about and organized can be a source of information on how meanings are made and how connections in the home are negotiated (Boccagni, 2018). In this study, the researcher asked the boys questions regarding chores, who allocates them and activities in the home in the journals. She also observed activities in the homes when she went for the home visits. The researcher provides details regarding finding the homes, encounters and events that she observed and experienced during the home-visits in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Sarah Pink, Jennie Morgan and Andrew Dainty (2015) identify homes as being sites of privacy and sensitivity. They argue that there are also emerging interrelations, overlaps and complexities between what is personal and what is general (Pink, Morgan & Dainty, 2015). There were

situations that the researcher could have only known about when she physically went to the boys' homes and after making rapport with the boys' mothers. There was sensitive information that she had to promise to keep to herself in respect of the sanctity of the information not leaving the home with me. Doris Lydahl (2021) contends that researchers need to figure out how to make a compromise between ethical research practices and creating a safe space for participants to speak freely. Lydahl (2021) proposes that researchers try shifting roles where necessary in home settings. During home visits during fieldwork, the researcher often switched between taking up the role of an educator where the boys' fathers were concerned, aunt to the boys, and a sister to the mothers depending on the situation. Rockie Sibanda and Leila Kajee (2019) found that home can also be a site for literacy within their study of early childhood education in a South African township. They found this in instances where there are 'literacy brokers' (someone who assists with literacy aspects in an informal setting), which is when guardians engage with learners about what they are studying and siblings assist one another with homework. The homes in this study were sites of literacy where Thapelo's cousin meets with him regularly to assist with examination preparations, assignments and tests; where the older siblings (Bandile's older sister, and Thapelo and Kagiso with their younger siblings) assist their younger siblings with homework and where there is reciprocal exchange of information between learners and guardians.

3.5.1.4 Interviews

The interviews that were conducted in the course of the home visits responded to some of the questions that remained about the everyday life of the boys. The researcher had made some observations during the introductory and succeeding visits, but the lengthy conversations during interviews validated, reinforced or corrected the observations. According to Tom Boellstorff (2020: 57), interviewing produces reactions, whilst if combined with participant-observation, researchers can 'compare what participants have said with what they do'. Boellstorff (2020) posits that conducting interviews without participant-observation in anthropology creates deceptive results. The interviews that were conducted for this study were semi-structured interviews and were between 40 minutes to an hour in length. The researcher recorded the interviews with her laptop when on school premises with educators and with the Recorder app on my phone when at the learners' homes. The laptop was useful as it could detect sound more effectively on school premises because noise could not be controlled once learners were out on break or when any group in the senior phase section (Grade 8 to 9) had a free period. The smartphone app was sufficient for home environments because there were opportunities to move around if there were distractions. All guardians were interviewed at their own homes at times that we had agreed on according to their availability. The learners were interviewed at their homes too in the presence

of their guardians, except for Bandile of whom his mother provided permission to be interviewed at my home since she works day shifts. The educators' interviews were conducted on the school premises, except for one educator who opted to be interviewed at my house. The questionnaires for the guardians and learners were translated in Setswana because the learners were not completely fluent in English, and in order for guardians to be able to express themselves freely in the language that they speak at home. Educator questionnaires were not translated as it happened that the staff communicated in English during some meetings and while teaching subjects excluding Setswana.

According to Hamza Alshenqeeti (2014), using word-based data like interviews provides the valuable nuances, practices and the characters of people that measurable data misses. Interviewing also creates opportunities for participants to openly convey their emotions and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews, according to Alshenqeeti (2014), provide the researcher with room to make adjustments by exploration through the asking further questions that are aligned with the research questions, and with the research objectives of the study. The open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews also allows participants to be in control of their own narratives (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland (2013) argue that the presence of electronic recording devices have changed interviewing as a method of data collection as it dilutes the original in-person details of the interview experience. During interviews, the researcher also took notes alongside recordings where possible and she also wrote down memories of what she observed during the interviews afterwards.

3.6. Data Processing and Analysis

Exploration in research is used to unveil, unravel and acknowledge what was there but was not seen before or was overlooked (Kohno, 2020; Krouwel *et al.*, 2019). The research questions and objectives of this study were exploratory and the analysis was conducted deductively to discover what was asked and for what was aimed. To make these deductions, it was important to use a means of analysis that catered to semi-structured and unconfined data. For this reason, thematic analysis which Castleberry and Nolen (2018:808) define as a form of qualitative analysis that "reports patterns (themes) within data" was applied.

The data were analysed through a four-step process, drawn from the six-step guide by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), *Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars*. Braun and Clarke (2006:2012) define thematic analysis as an undermined yet most popular qualitative research analysis method in the Social Sciences. The first step the researcher took was to write out the findings; thereafter, patterns were identified.

The original definitions of the themes were checked to determine if they defined what had emanated from the findings. Subsequently, the most emergent themes were noted.

Having the raw data on which to look back and from which to draw as the writing proceeded helped the researcher to find the nuances and intricacies – sub-themes – that emanated from the main themes (Figures 5 and 6).

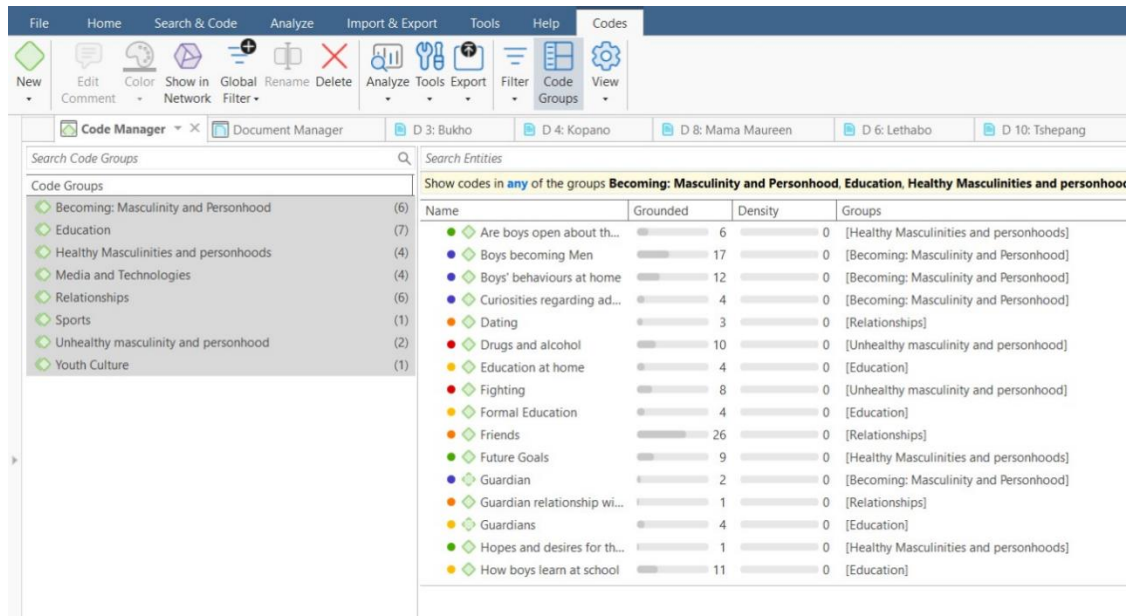


Figure 5 Coding by colour

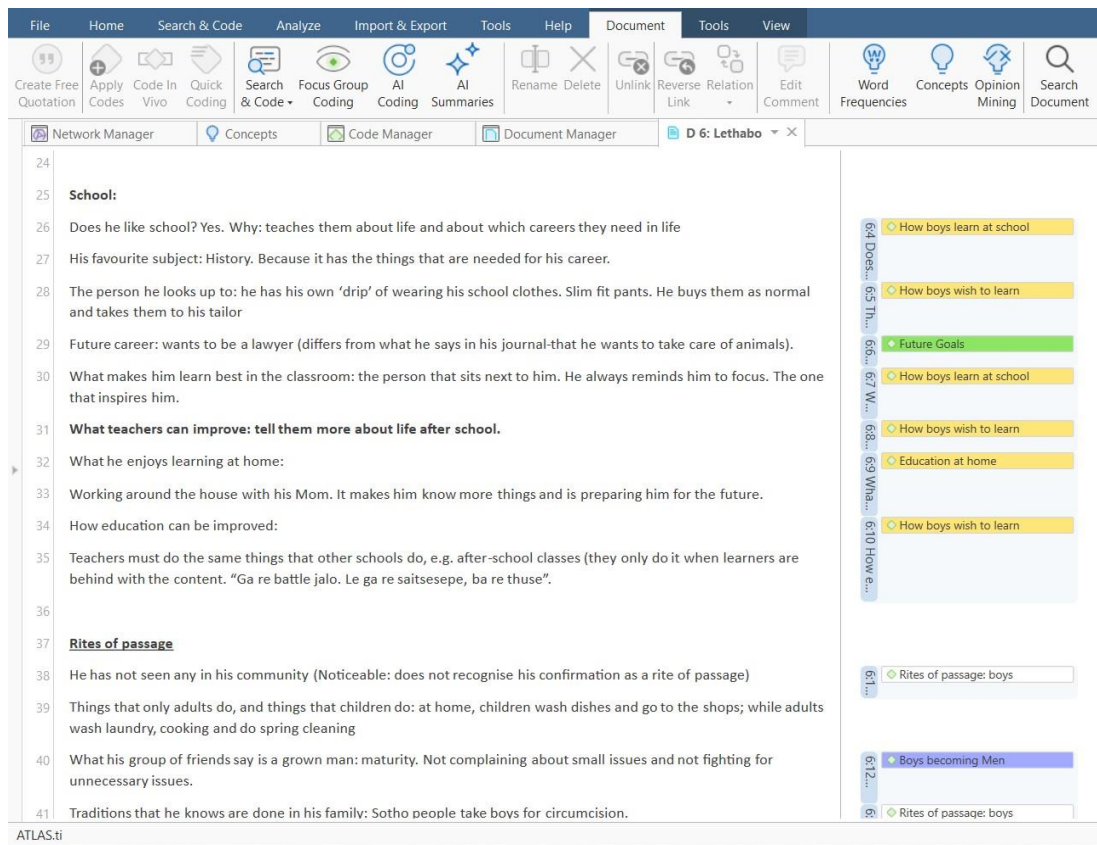


Figure 6 How interviews were coded

A limitation of this process was that it took longer than it should have. The researcher chose this method because it was deductive, a sentiment shared by Humble and Mozelius (2022:81) in their comparative conference discussion paper *Content Analysis or Thematic Analysis – Similarities, Differences and Applications in Qualitative Research*. As most of the nature of this research study was exploratory and observational, it was important to choose the most deductive form of analysis.

3.7. Limitations and Reflexivity

3.7.1 Challenges during the ethics clearance application

Rufalow (2020), in his reflection on his methodology, states that it can be extremely difficult to attain access to a school for research. It took four months for The School and the Department of Basic Education to provide letters of permission for the project after much persuasion and pleading from the researcher and her supervisor. Waiting, as an ethnographic experience itself, according to Palmer *et al.* (2018), provides a researcher with time to become immersed in the research site. In their community-research ethnography *Waiting, Power and Time in Ethnographic*

and Community-Based Research, Palmer *et al.* identify waiting as a point of powerlessness in the field where researchers experience who holds power over others, in which space and why (Palmer *et al.*, 2018). It is an opportunity to bear witness to fields that they would have otherwise not known without the wait. The bureaucratic channels within community-based situations are best expressed by the quote, “Above all, be prepared to wait” (Palmer *et al.*, 2018:14).

As the researcher had availed herself as an extra pair of hands in a space that required hands, following the principal’s meeting with the Social Sciences and English HODs, she was requested to teach five Social Sciences classes (two Grade 8 groups and three Grade 9 groups). This needed to happen as soon as possible as that subject had been recently more short-staffed due to a colleague resigning. This posed a challenge as five groups meant that there would be less time to cater for the other methodologies (home visits and interviews) and there would be fewer opportunities to actively observe activities on the school grounds.

Although one of the HODs expressed disappointment as “a good teacher should be able to handle five classes and to conduct research at the same time”, a compromise was ultimately reached. With the support and guidance of the researcher’s supervisor in how to explain the complexities of the research to the principal and the HODs, they agreed to let her teach English to one group of Grade 8 and one group of Grade 9 learners. The English department in the Senior Phase was also struggling with having only one teacher in both groups so this compromise was also helpful.

3.7.2. Reflexivity on the discomforts in the participant-observer role

Van Duijn (2019), in *Everywhere and Nowhere at Once: The Challenges of Following in Multi-sited Ethnography*, alludes to the wavering role of the ethnographer in a multi-sited field of study. A researcher, according to Dujin (2019), needs to learn how to navigate awkwardness by changing roles in different locales. These roles are not fixed as a researcher needs to reintroduce themselves to each field.

Within the field, there were tensions regarding the researcher’s actual role. At certain times, her services were that of a full-time teacher and in some instances, she could not get too comfortable with the teacher’s insider jokes or lunch-eating rituals. Newly appointed educators also expressed these tensions in copy room conversations. One of them expressed the anxiety as “waiting for the day that they become permanent” to stop feeling dispensable.

This tension was however non-existent during home visits when engaging the learner participants’ guardians. Once the researcher had visited a home for the second time, she was acknowledged as the researcher who not only assisted at The School but also had immense interest in the child

and the family. Relationships with the learners at school were more consistent as the researcher interacted with them in the one-size-fits-all role that was transferred to their home environments.

3.8. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methods implemented in the collection of the data for this research study. The way access to the field site was obtained and the steps that were taken in conducting fieldwork were described. Encounters in the field were also discussed, along with a reflection on the limitations of the study and the researcher's positionality while working in the field. This chapter also discussed sampling techniques and procedures and how the data were analysed.

CHAPTER 4 *KE KOPA LE ITLHOMPENG, BANAKE – ‘PLEASE RESPECT YOURSELVES, MY CHILDREN’*

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the values of the school and home sites that align with those that are (still in particular areas) included in the pedagogy implemented at traditional initiation sites (whose general structures and activities were explained in the literature review) are examined. The values that are used are based on local knowledge (the laws of the land about mature adulthood and masculinity) and the tenets of *botho* ‘humanity/the state of being a good person’ within the general framework of African personhood. Teaching staff and guardians, respectively, fuse the Western formal structures (school programme) of education to impart and teach boys local knowledge to prepare them for adulthood and becoming men. The school can be regarded as a cultural process and performance and education (whether local knowledge or formal education) as initiation.

As stated in the introduction (Chapter 1) and the literature review (Chapter 2), when discussing rites of passage, the process can be viewed as triphasic – separation, liminality and incorporation (Turner, 1974, 1979, 1987, 1989; Van Gennep, 1960). The boys in the study navigate between the stages of separation and liminality. The school site and the home site in this context are observed as the imagined spaces (metaphorical initiation ritual sites) of being separated from their ‘free will’, while liminality is the process of choice in learning what adults are teaching them, choices to learn and choosing to use what they have learnt. The following sections describe the sources of knowledge from which educators and guardians draw in teaching learners about adulthood and masculinity.

4.2. Lessons and Lesson Outcomes at Traditional Initiation Schools

According to Siweya *et al.* (2018), the lessons taught at Xitsonga-speaking initiation rites are role modelling, fearlessness and aggressiveness as qualities of manhood. With role modelling, a boy undergoing initiation is taught to keep the company of other men from whom he can learn valuable ways to accomplish tasks and about Xitsonga rituals and practices. The boy also needs to be able to emulate the values and standards of such men to be regarded as achieving ideal masculinity. Role modelling as an outcome means that the boy can build brotherhood bonds with other men when he is a man. The endurance of young men is also tested by sleeping in the cold and being able to withstand pain after circumcision. Being able to withstand these conditions signals bravery and proving this means that the boy will be able to protect his family from harm in future.

In *bogwera* (Setswana initiation rites), boys are taught self-reliance by obtaining skills and knowledge about what life in adulthood entails (Ratsie & Munsaka, 2021). The songs that they are taught are attuned to lyrics about repercussions of behaviours that lead to problems like prison, poverty, disease and unplanned pregnancy. They are also taught proverbs and idioms that have the same essence.

Corporal punishment, when initiates do not follow instructions or behave in a way that goes against the standards of the initiation school, is also imposed. Initiates are said to be whipped with branches of the *moretlwa* 'Grewia flava' and *moologa* 'Croton issimus' trees. Initiates are also taught the conventions and laws of their immediate society and Batswana customs regarding marriage and the running of a functioning home. Furthermore, initiates are taught how to work with their hands to have skills that they can use to earn money for necessities for their future homes. Boys are taught how to farm and how to build and thatch houses; girls in *bojale* 'girls' initiation' are taught how to cook, sew and knit.

In amaXhosa initiation rites (Fynn, 2014), initiates are taught that the wound from the circumcision shows fearlessness. Perseverance and tolerance through enforced rules are seen as a sign of self-control and being disciplined. Having these qualities qualifies *amakrwala* 'newly initiated men' for being involved in major cultural customs, important society meetings and *ukwakhaumzi* 'building/starting their own homes' (Qambela, 2021). Furthermore, being able to complete the intensities of initiation rites proves that initiates are ready to take on responsibilities that are beyond those of childhood (Kyalo, 2013). Having received wisdom in the form of moral values, amaXhosa *amakrwala* (initiates who have completed the initial ritual) are seen as ready to be responsible men (Ntombana, 2011; Pauw, 1994). Their new responsibilities would thereafter "involve taking care of the family; he does not live for himself but for the whole family" (Ntombana, 2011:76).

4.3. African Personhood Values

The attainment of authentic African personhood entails the development of high moral standards (Ikuenobe, 2006, 2016; Molefe 2019; Molefe, 2020). A meaningful life within the African personhood thought can only be attained through moral excellence (Molefe, 2020) and possessing dignity. Chisale (2018) states that ubuntu upholds morality; citing Letseka (2013:351), she states: "Young people who are initiated into ubuntu morality have the potential to become citizens that are inclined to treating others with justice and fairness at all times".

The principles of ubuntu include care for others, treating others with dignity and paying back/paying forward benevolence. Benevolence creates the energy for one to develop empathy,

persevere through difficult situations and make the best of opportunities (Chisale, 2018; Salzberg, 2004). Virtues of *botho*, according to Sodi *et al.* (2021:447), are “compassion, humanness, love, respect, generosity, and living independently and collaboratively with all that is in existence”.

4.4. Local Knowledge

Clifford Geertz (1983) launched the term, local knowledge and defined it as knowledge constructed within specific contexts and exists within a specific generation. His interpretation of culture was that it is a “network of meanings”, and that these meanings are within cultural texts, languages, ceremonies, customs and general behaviours of people (Yi Hu, 2013). The ‘locality’ in no way restricts this knowledge to the place (but context), and new local knowledge continues to become constructed as modernized and globalised languages. According to Geertz (1983: 167), “like sailing, gardening, politics, and poetry, law and ethnography are crafts of place: they work by the light of local knowledge”. Therefore, Geertz likens local knowledge to ‘the law of the land’ in socio-cultural situations. ‘Local’ in his interpretation refers to “not just place, but time, class, and variety of issue, but as to accent—vernacular characterizations of what happens connected to vernacular imaginings of what can” (Geertz, 1983: 215). Local knowledge according to Geertz are the principles that give way to legal sensibility within a context. Ramirez (2003: 239) states that:

“Local knowledge was the key to understanding local structures and practices, and as the latter varied enormously, so did the content of local knowledge. Local knowledge was at the heart of local culture. The scope of anthropological inquiry has expanded beyond its traditional domain.”

He recommends that anthropologists of education turn back to observing rituals to understand acculturation in sites of education and how meanings of educational systems are made at a local level.

Rites of passage also serve as a transfer of local knowledge by community members to those who are on the cusp of being incorporated into the community as adults and acceptance of the knowledge by those being initiated. Malinowski (1990:418) in his view of the notion of rites of passage states that it is a time of “intensive religious character” by the adolescent’s immediate community. The community “mobilises and sets in motion its authority to bear witness to the power and reality of the things revealed” (Malinowski, 1990:418). What will be revealed after the adolescent has been introduced to difficult circumstances, brought under strict regulations, the educational function through which adolescents are introduced into the world of adults, introduced to higher standards and tested shows the ‘initiate’s’ readiness for adulthood (Jaskulska, 2015:97). Rites of passage are highly spiritual because of the severity of new anxieties that are

accompanied with physiological and physical changes and with expectations for the adolescent to reach incorporation while knowing how to conduct adulthood correctly (Jaskulska, 2015).

4.5. School Culture, Rules and *Botho*

The setting at the school as a structure of performance is described in this section. How these performances imitate daily life and are preparatory for inclusion and participation in the greater society are depicted. It is important to understand how school is also a centre of separation within imagined rites of passage where learners are being trained to become actors who can play the role of adults.

4.5.1. School assembly as a ritual practice

Schools in South Africa – and all over the world – function under a set of principles and values that are necessary for the management and functioning of school activities. For these principles and values to be addressed, monitored and reported on, regular meetings need to be held. One way that schools get together for these reasons is through school assemblies.

Within the South African education and pedagogy context, Silbert and Jacklin (2015) conceptualise school assemblies as systems that administer and warrant the social strata of the school and address the roles of learners within the strata. They assert that the school assembly is a platform for those at the top of the strata to convey the description of what the school is and what the school should be like. Silbert and Jacklin (2015), citing Luke (1995:34), deem the school assembly to be “the material fabric of which school ‘rules’ are woven and the very sites where official versions of ideal and successful students are represented”.

On Monday mornings, The School (from Grade 8 to Grade 10) would gather from 7h30 to 8h00 at the Senior Phase side of The School within the rectangular structure formed by the classrooms (Figure 7). This type of gathering is what is called the school assembly in many places.



Figure 7 The Senior Phase side of the school yard

Assemblies at The School would also be requested by the management team whenever there was a special message for the learners, before exams began or on the day when learners would be leaving for their school holidays. The learners would stand in formation according to their assigned grades and classroom groups. Some educators would stand in a circular ring around them and some within the lines of the learners' formation to keep an eye on learners to control noise (chatter or disruptive movements that would disturb speakers) and to make sure that latecomers stood on one side for disciplinary action after the assembly meeting.

The principal and the educators who were scheduled to speak would stand in front of the learners on the classroom verandas. The event would begin with the principal addressing learners. He would start with a prayer and one of the female educators would be asked to start a hymn so that learners and other educators would sing along. On other occasions, he would start the hymn himself. The principal would then provide announcements regarding any news from the Department of Basic Education. He would also alert them to any events that would be coming up during that week. Thereafter, he would provide a verse from the Bible as an encouragement for the rest of the week and would explain what it meant and how the learners should apply it to their lives and studies. In all the assemblies during which she was present during the time of data collection, the virtues that were imparted in most of the messages delivered to the learners by the

principals and by most of the management staff were regarding *seriti* 'dignity' and *maitseo* 'good manners/respect/discipline'.

A member of the managerial staff would then be next to remind learners about the importance of their studies, to behave well for the rest of the week and to treat their educators with respect. Each week, learners were told about the proper way to wear their uniform, warned about how they conducted themselves when they were not at school and to not forget the results of doing well, i.e., a successful life. *Ke kopa le itlhompeng, banake* (*banake* is short for *bana ba ka*, which means 'my children') 'please respect yourselves, my children' was one of the lines that were said the most, especially when there had been a bad report about behaviour that went against school rules. The reprimand would be gentle, but it would be centred on the idea that the behaviour that the learners take on now will define the kinds of behaviours they will take on as adults, workers, parents and members of society.

The female members of the management staff would call the learners *banake* 'my children'. During these talks, there would be great emphasis made on the educators being the learners' guardians (in Setswana, they would say *batsadi*, which directly translated to English means 'birth parent') and that it was essential that the learners knew that what was being requested of them was good for them. The speeches by the principal and the members of the management staff would encompass the school rules and repeating them every week in a different way seemed like a way of cementing and affirming them for the learners to not forget.

MacLaren (1999), whose book *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* is deeply influenced by Turner's (1974, 1979, 1982, 1987) work on ritual, liminality, rites of passage and performance and culture, states that rituals function as the foundation of social structure. He also adds that "rituals constitute a great degree of the major semantic networks; cultural contexts and ideation domains through which attempts are made to regulate social life" (MacLaren, 1999:40).

Together with other scholars of education and cultural practices, Bernstein *et al.* (1966) in *Rituals in Education* see schools as institutions that pass on implemental and conveyable ways of life to learners. Implemental ways of life are processes, tasks and corrective practices that harness employability. Conveyable ways of life are the ascriptions of the worth and outcomes of learning. According to Bernstein *et al.* (1966), conveyable ways of life, although considered factious, form the basis of its collective principles and are meant to create solidarity. Conveyable ways of life, which are meant to create accord and unity and are indicative of a family unit/community, are more likely to function through ritualisation. In this light, rituals that are practised through

conveyable ways are separated into two types: consensual and distinguishing rituals. The focus of this section of the paper will be on consensual rituals.

4.5.2. School assembly: an application of a hybrid globalised and African ritual

The structure of the school assembly can be likened to that of the German evangelical ritual, *konfirmation*. Though this practice takes place in evangelist Christian churches all over the world as church confirmation, the detailed descriptions offered by anthropologist Gallinat (2005) on how *konfirmation* is conducted in East Germany give insight into its likeness to school assemblies.

The ceremony starts with the young people who will be taking the oath of confirmation walking in a cortege into the ceremonial venue (church hall or public hall). The main speaker (leader in public office, principal or a leader in the military) then gives a speech, telling them about what the transition from being a child member of the church to becoming an adult member of the church entails. An oath is then read by the main speaker and echoed by the young people in the procession. The speaker explains the oaths taken and relates to them what the young people should expect and how to draw on this oath in their lives. The political aspect of this procedure would be that the oath would also include the young people participating in the *confirmation*, promising to be under socialist rule as labourers and pledging allegiance to the struggle for unity among all peoples. The participating youth would do this with their backs turned to their guardians.

Another ritual that the school assembly resembles is the *kgotla* 'place of gathering'. As reported by Phetolang (2010), the *kgotla* in early Setswana communities was the central point of gathering and was headed and requested by the ward *kgosi* 'chief'. It was mostly used as a place to bring up any burning issues, to provide the community with information and to solve any disputes. The gatherings were also a space where the customs and traditional practices were taught to the youth, according to Oduaran *et al.* (2019).

Larson's (1985) study on *Traditional Tswana Housing* provides evidence that a *kgotla* was also built for family homes and was meant for the same purposes as those of the chief's *kgotla*. In these settings, the eldest member of the family would moderate the discussions. The aspects where the school assembly differs from the *kgotla* is that the *kgosi* does not only lead the meetings but is there to arrange and mediate conversations between members of the society (Phetolang, 2010); young people were encouraged to be a part of conversations and to criticise the *kgosi* (Oduaran *et al.*, 2019).

4.6 Support Staff as an Essential Part of School Culture and Functionality

At the main gate of The School that all staff and learners use, a security guard signs in all cars. Upon entrance to the school grounds, the security guard took each person's temperature and sanitised their hands. If the temperature was too high, the student or staff member would be turned back. There was also a sanitising station where screening would be completed for all learners and members of staff.

The work of screening was an equal opportunity provided to members of the surrounding Tlhabane community. This temporary work provided income to several homes during the lockdown. The screeners, as a part of the community, were friendly to staff, pleasant to visitors and had good relationships with learners. They became a part of the school infrastructure, a type of outside reception staff.

Full-time general work staff rotated in shifts: those who were responsible for the upkeep of the classrooms, those who were responsible for the cleaning of staff rooms and those who were responsible for the school grounds (garden work). The learners would call them *mmamane* 'aunty' and *malome* 'uncle' and they were dearly respected. The cleaning staff also assisted the teaching staff with keeping learners in class, dispersing crowds hanging out at the taps on the grounds, keeping the noise levels down in between periods and keeping an eye on any learners who littered on the school grounds.

The cleaning lady, who was responsible for the copy-wing of the administration building, Ous Tsholo, made it a point to talk to and engage with the researcher regularly. She would mostly relate news about her daughter who had finished matric, what progress she was making in trying to enter the job market and how she was navigating spaces that would allow her into tertiary studies.

One of the ground-keeping staff members, Ous Thati, assisted the researcher greatly on her first day of teaching. Being used to the quiet and order of a private school setting, the researcher did not expect to have to manage noise levels. Ous Thati was prompted by the noise in the Grade 8 classroom and came in to give the learners a warm, kind but firm talk about how they needed to respect new educators and asked them how they would feel if they were in her shoes. This built a solid foundation for her relationship with the learners as they were kinder to her in the lessons that followed.

Support staff also uphold virtues of hospitality for guests and are also part of the structure of those who uphold the regulations that need to be respected by initiates within the stage of separation. They also fall within the ‘a child is raised by a village’ tenet of African personhood/*botho*.

One of the classrooms at the far end of the Senior Phase section building was used as a break room for the cleaning staff, screeners and assistant teachers. The support staff would use this room to charge their phones, have lunch and chat about struggles at work; it was a relaxed and inviting environment. The researcher visited this room on some occasions and never felt as if she were a visitor. The support staff members would engage with her about her experiences and uncertainties surrounding temporary work and about their families.

Before each first break (recess), another group of women would arrive at the Senior Phase school grounds carrying big dishes, large serving spoons and wearing hair nets. These women were part of a Department of Basic Education initiative, the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) which runs countrywide at public schools (DBE, 2014). This is an opportunity for unemployed members of the community to earn a stipend. The work is voluntary, and volunteers are appointed by the school governing body (SGB).

Ladies who cook for the programme, formerly referred to as food handlers within the programme, are also affectionately called *mmamane* ‘aunty’ by the learners. The menu ranged from samp and beans, pap and meat, mielie rice and cabbage and macaroni and mince to Sunday ‘7 colours’ (Sunday dishes made predominantly in the township locale that is characterised by having several colours with signature components such as beetroot, pumpkin, rice, meat, chakalaka, tomato relish etc). Most learners enjoyed the meals and usually became excited to know what they would have on specific days. Some learners (not the participants of this research study) said that the only reason that they attended school was to enjoy a balanced meal.

However, some students would take chances and would ask for money from educators, including the researcher, to buy *sphatlho* (a quarter-loaf of bread with chips, atchar – a spicy pickled mango and oil mix – and a sausage colloquially called ‘Russian’ – as it resembles *kishka/kielbasa* sausages that were introduced to South Africa by Russian settlers during the Anglo-Boer War (Van Tonder, 2020) to experience variety.

4.7. The boys reflect: Education as an investment for future success

Self-reflection through writing and talking according to Langa (2020), helped his adolescent boys-turned-men (over 10 years) participants to deal with challenges. Conversations with one’s “self” helps people to make peace with the past and helps them to learn from their mistakes (2020:

115). It also helps them to think and plan towards the future. The following are reflections obtained from this study's participants' journals and from their interviews regarding their experiences of learning at school.

4.7.1. Formal education as the fuel to aspirations

The educators' approach and attitudes towards the learners seemed to be determining factors in the boys' interest in school subjects and their level of enjoyment thereof. Bandile enjoyed Setswana because the educator takes time to listen to the learner's opinions and she provided learners with space and time to prepare for exams in her classroom. This educator was also open to learners approaching her with questions from other subjects if the relevant educators were busy. Learning ways to make everyday life easier was also a reason that made Bandile enjoy some subjects at school. He learned about the culture and traditions of the Batswana people (the language predominantly spoken in Tlhabane), which connected him more to the township. He also stated that the English lessons taught him how to pronounce, understand and use "bombastic" words; and that through the Monday spelling tests, he gets to expand his vocabulary. The school subject that Bandile was least able to learn from will not be specifically mentioned for reasons of confidentiality and sensitivity. The educator who taught this subject yelled at learners and did not provide hand-outs of lesson outlines. According to Bandile, the learners required these hand-outs to know which points to focus on. He also stated that where handouts were provided in other subjects, they provided helpful summaries of the teaching material which assisted him in exams.

For some of the boys, school was also a gateway to their aspirations and future goals. Bandile dreamt of becoming a mechanical engineer or a farmer. He reflected in his journal that the way school was leading him into these paths was through teaching him how to socialise, how to solve complex problems, and how to think beyond expected means.

Lesego also stated in his interview that school is a preparation for future careers. He enjoyed History because it covered what he needed to achieve his dream of becoming a lawyer (he had also written that he would like to take up any profession that allowed him to take care of animals). He also enjoyed school as it was the place where he could ask questions about the world and was able to find answers. The researcher also observed him to be quite inquisitive in the classroom, and he would always ask for clarity when he did not understand assigned tasks. How an educator treats learners was also important to Lesego's learning as he stated that there was an educator who does not "like children", which made it difficult for him to take an interest in the subject material (this was a different educator from the one Kagiso mentioned). An improvement

in learning suggested by Lesego was being provided with more information on how to navigate life after finishing school. He also suggested that the school not only provide them with after-school classes when learners are behind on the teaching plan, but that they avail this space for the learners to ask questions that they do not get time for in class. He said, "*Le ga re sa itse sepe, ba re thuse*" 'They need to help us even when we do not know anything'.

As stated earlier in his profile, Thebe went up to Grade 9 and the last grade that he passed was Grade 8. He therefore did not connect his aspirations with formal education. He is however creative and is good at art. He used it to tell stories and to express how he felt about issues and saw it as a future opportunity to make a living. He alternatively wanted to do something in sports (specifically soccer). One of the educators expressed frustration in her interview regarding Thebe's situation. According to the teacher, there was not much intervention regarding learners who had learning difficulties at The School and in most overcrowded schools because the educators were so overwhelmed and had little opportunities to support these learners. She also expressed frustration at the limits in resources to administer interventions. Although he struggled, Thebe was condoned to the next grade until they could not condone him any further. He expressed that he only liked school a bit, but that it bored him. What he imagined would have changed his feelings about school would have been if there was soccer at the school (there was no soccer at The School in 2021), and if there were more Art activities. He enjoyed English for communication purposes and Natural Sciences because they explained how things work and how things are built and are created. It would seem that if there were opportunities for his strengths to have been nurtured, he would have probably managed to stay on at school.

Kagiso's journal reflection about school spoke to its social element; he enjoyed school because of the friendships that he made and maintained at school. He reflected on the conversations that he had regarding romantic interests with his group of friends and the strong bond that he shared with them. He found solace with them, and he stated that they made him feel like a "top dog" (someone with a significant amount of power) as they always managed to boost his confidence in himself. In his interview, Kagiso stated that his "whole life was at school" and that "he could not live without it". Not only was school a safe, social and uplifting environment for him, but it held the key to where he would like to see himself in the future; which was obtaining a matric certificate. He said that "he would like to walk a different walk from where his parents walked". In his interview, he said, "*ke batla go nna motho sechabeng*" 'I want to be someone in the nation' (a valuable member of society). He also added that his aspiration was for people to see that he is 'someone' (dignified, important, of value) once he enters a room.

Kagiso had multiple aspirations which included becoming a musician, playing professional soccer, and becoming a mechanical engineer. He also stated that his matric certificate would remain something to fall back on if any of the other occupations would not work out. Kagiso stated that he enjoyed Creative Arts because it was preparing him for his music career, specialising in the production and performance of *Amapiano* and *Kwaito* music. Kagiso drew his passion and choice to focus on *Kwaito* from stories that he had heard about his late grandmother and father's popularity in *Kwaito* and *Amapantsula* dance. Kagiso also commented on a change he would want to occur in Creative Arts in his interview. He stated that there were little to no opportunities for learners to express themselves creatively as individuals since most textbook activities required group work. He also expressed his interest in Life Orientation in his journal. He liked it because it kept him updated on career choices and provided him with information on changes in his body as he grows up. He said this in his interview, and in his journal, he stated that he learns a lot about the "differences between being a man and being boy". Life Orientation was also a resource that Kagiso drew from in considering his growth as a person and becoming a man. A few days after meeting Kagiso, he told the researcher that "he hated school and that he did not want to attend it anymore because teachers make them fail". He thereafter stormed off out of class. The researcher asked him about this incident during his interview and he responded that he was disappointed in his previous term results. He had failed the previous term and was upset because he could not afford to fail since school is an investment for him. He stated that he was more upset with himself than with his educators and that he was working hard to recover his marks in the term that they were in. Education was therefore central to Kagiso's future security. Kagiso's mother stated the following in her interview:

'He always tells me that he wants to be a businessman, I support his wish. I hope that he achieves it, gets educated and finishes school. I never finished school, but I want to make sure that he does. I want him to face his dreams.'

Kagiso's aspiration of finishing basic education and "walking the path that his parents did not walk" is in line with his mother, Christina's aspirations for him.

This section has dealt with how the boys in this research study learn, the existing factors that encourage and help them to learn better and the values that they place on formal education. The boys desired classroom spaces that were void of anxieties and provided opportunities for asking questions. A study by Bosman and Schulze (2018) also found that students in another South African secondary school preferred this kind of learning environment. The authors recommend the consideration of classroom spaces that are calm as a way to build student morale (Bosman & Schulze, 2018). Stahl, Nelson and Wallace (2017) assert that amid the uncertainties of

neoliberal labour markets, the consideration of risk plays a significant role in boys' personal deliberations of aspirations. Multiple aspirations therefore act as a 'backup plan' for the boys in this study. It is also a strategy to mitigate the risk of possibly "not becoming a breadwinner, not being the right sort of man, not presenting the more successful version of themselves..." (Stahl, Nelson & Wallace, 2017). Another point made by most of the boys is the association made between upward economic mobility and education. As reported by Stahl, Nelson & Wallace (2017), the rise of neoliberal governments has given rise to a notion of the survival of the fittest, which has also resulted in financial disparities. Underprivileged communities have therefore culturally aligned societal aims and processes towards the attainment of upward economic mobility. Schooling and teaching habits have also had to mould their meanings of education towards the pursuit of upward economic mobility (Stahl, Nelson & Wallace, 2017).

4.8. Educators

4.8.1. Fluidity in the performance of teaching

The teacher is everything: a counsellor, the police, a mother etc. (Teacher Belinda)

The educators at The School dressed formally and were very clean in their appearance. Given The School's emphasis on appropriate personal grooming, they led by example. The female educators were consistent in changing their hairstyles and nails; this applied to most of the young educators and a small portion of the older educators. The researcher, being a participant observer, strove to keep up.

In the researcher's observations of the educators at The School, there were performances in which she saw educators switch according to specific situations. There seemed to be an unwritten but noticeable rule for educators to look as if they 'have it all together'. The educators would never show any vulnerability or stress. One of the interviewed teachers said that anyone who was considering teaching should "be okay and not have personal problems". According to this teacher, a teacher must not have a short temper or they might hurt the learners. "When you have problems and you're dealing with teenagers who are disrespectful, you end up getting aggressive," the teacher said. In this instance, the performance of teachers seemingly 'having it all together' is for the benefit of the students. The educators cease to be visibly vulnerable or emotional but to 'be strong' for the learners.

The educators would either frequently smile or be in busy 'focus' mode (working at their desks with a serious demeanor) in the staff rooms. As soon as the educators stepped onto the school grounds and into the classrooms, they would switch to their serious faces. The researcher was

advised by an educator at one stage to toughen up and that ‘these specific learners’ (learners at The School) did not hear an educator when the educator spoke in a low voice. He told the researcher that one needed to speak loudly with a firm tone to be heard.

How teachers dress and walk and, their overall demeanour seems to be a form of resilience against some of the challenges that they face within their positions. One teacher stated that they are not paid enough and that some teachers stay in the profession for the sake of survival and are disrespected by learners and their parents. Another teacher said that subject advisers, who are brought in by the Department of Basic Education to supervise, monitor and assist teachers with ways of improving education, ‘abuse’ teachers. According to this teacher, the advisers do not advise, but ‘they scream and shout ’and say ‘horrible’ things like ‘learners are perhaps failing in their studies because you are boring’. The older members of staff smiled less, even in the staff rooms. The researcher had worked at The School for about two weeks before any of the older educators smiled at her. What was also interesting was that the younger educators showed more emotions and even took sick leave.

One educator, who had more than 10 years of teaching experience, stated that how an educator exercises their authority matters and that an educator needs to know how to deal with learners. The educator also added that learners needed to know that there were repercussions for misconduct; if an educator threatened repercussions and made sure that they were experienced, the learners respected the educator. If the educator did not implement the repercussions, the learners ended up not taking the educator seriously. Another educator stated that ‘boys like power’ and that they tested educators by seeing how far they could go in disobeying them before they did what they were asked. One educator claimed that older female educators used pet names like ‘papa’ or ‘boy’ as a strategy to soften the boys’ aggression and that these words of affirmation were not directed at girls because they did not misbehave as much as boys did.

The school’s boardroom was used for preparing and stapling question papers for examinations and the management staff used it to discuss urgent matters. The boardroom was also where learners were called in for disciplinary action (the principal would go to be seen in the boardroom for these interactions), for meeting with parents and if any learners were in distress. It was in this room that the researcher saw the strict side of educators becoming gentler and their vulnerability exposed. If a girl learner had any issue, two or more female educators spent time with the learner in the boardroom with the door closed, providing her with the space to either cry or voice her frustration. They would together speak gently with the learner and would try to find solutions to the learner’s problems. The researcher never observed this kind of intervention with a boy.

It was only in the copy room, which was situated at the far end of the administration block, where the researcher heard about the educators' struggles. Struggles that were discussed in this space were concerns about when fixed-term contracts would become permanent positions, low salaries, and frustration about learners not cooperating, issues regarding the printer, low marks and reports about learner misbehaviour outside of school. This was also a space where educators would go when tired or ill and needed to work at a slower pace.

In Fayard's (2004) and Weeks' (2007) works on the ecology of informal interactions, they found that in corporate and large organisations, the copy room, because it is usually secluded, has in some contexts offered workers space to let down their guard from the pressures of the workday. They also suggest that the waiting that workers do while waiting for the machine to conclude jobs affords colleagues the time and space to catch up on each other's personal lives.

When educators were asked about the availability of any psychological support at the school or from the department, some said that there was not any available. Only one educator, who reflected on a time when one of the other educators had passed away, said that a psychologist appointed by the Department of Basic Education spoke to them as a group. The educators stated that the only debriefing that was provided for the teaching staff was to discuss teaching outcomes. One of the educators stated that these sessions did not help with the functioning of the school as what was discussed as solutions was not implemented.

4.8.2. 'Doing teaching': love as a requisite

Ma'am Moratwa, a senior teacher and part of the management team, expressed deep hurt about her powerlessness over students using drugs on the school premises, how it was affecting their academic performance and how they treated students who were not using. "Yes, we have our children at home but when we get home, we still worry about our learners, who are also our children," she said. "*Re a ba rata*" 'we love them', she added.

The helplessness expressed was also due to teachers having limited disciplining rights over learners. She lamented, "If we take drastic measures, parents come to school to confront us so there is very little that we can do to discipline students in extreme situations like drug abuse." Queen B, a teacher in her late twenties, also stated in her interview that "the most fulfilling part of being a teacher is when you can advise learners as a parent". The teacher here recognises herself as beyond a teacher and more as kin to her learners.

The 'deputy parent' role can also be seen in the reasons that teachers provided for taking up the profession. Ms Motlhatswa's reasons for taking up teaching were because she 'loves helping

people' and gets opportunities to help learners. She also stated that most learners in the school had trouble at home. She said that she knew that this was a calling when she wanted to be like the teacher who took them all after school for extra classes in middle school (now called the Intermediate Phase, Grades 4 to 6). She stated, "It is the opportunity to be there for learners that makes this job worth it; addressing their problems and loving them there and then."

Liston's (2000:82) identification of the relationship between love and teaching is that "good teaching entails a love for the learning enterprise" and that "this love is a vulnerable undertaking that leaves teachers open to pain and rejection". Love as part of the teaching practice can be found in the earliest versions of the pedagogy of teaching. Montessori (1913:20), in her more-than-century-old book *Pedagogical Anthropology*, alludes to "the spirit of love" as the basic tenet of teaching and relates it to the role of a guardian in the act of 'begetting' children. In this analogy, the educator is seen as a parent, "destined to protect all mankind, having the responsibility to reform the school and therefore society as a whole" (Montessori, 1913:20).

In one of the interviews, a teacher said that teaching is "the best opportunity to change the world by affecting young minds positively". Pedagogy, according to Montessori (1913) is the labour of love that protects and redeems learners and society at large. In Montessori's view, teaching can be likened to a parental duty, and, in anthropological thought, this can apply to qualities of kinship and relationship.

Sahlins (2018:23), in his book *What Kinship is, and is not*, and Stasch (2009:109) define kinship as "inter-subjective belonging". The scenario offered to elaborate this is Stasch's thick description of kinship among the Korowai peoples of Western New Guinea. According to Stasch, the Korowai identify kinship as emotions of "love, longing and care" and as the labour of "caring for" others, creating entanglements between persons through a mutual responsibility towards one another.

Learners, from observations made at the field site, reciprocated the love and care of kinship towards teachers by volunteering to help teachers carry scripts back to the staffroom after lessons. The researcher saw evidence of this in her classroom settings too. Learners would compete for the opportunity to do this service. Learners would also compete to clean the board for the educator and to distribute copies of worksheets and reading material around the classroom. Without generalising this to all learners, she had on three occasions witnessed learners calling female teachers, *mama*, which is a reciprocation of the female teachers referring to learners as *banake* 'my children'. She had initially thought that she had mistaken the learners for saying 'ma'am' until she started noticing that one of the participants of the study referred to her as *mama*, even in their WhatsApp chats.

Kekopa le itlhompeng, banake ‘please respect yourselves,’ my children’ is a plea to learners, by a teacher, a further probe into the relationship between love, kinship and teaching within the context of the school. The highlight of this specific section will be on the word *banake* (short for *banabaka*) ‘my children’. Townsend (2019: ix), as editor of the book *Instructional Leadership and Leadership for Learning in Schools: Understanding Theories of Leading*, put together ways in which the African proverb ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ is used in different parts of Africa. In Tanzania, the Bayaha people have a saying, *omwana taba womoi*, which means that a child is raised in different homes by different parents; quite similar is the Western Ugandan proverb, *omwana takulila nju emoi*, meaning a child’s upbringing does not happen in one home. The Jita people of Tanzania say *omwana taba womoi*, meaning that a child belongs to more than one parent and home. These sayings refer to a child’s growth process as happening across spaces and being rooted in several spaces at once. The more striking and most relevant towards the discussion of the parental (and kinship) aspect of the discussion of this section is another proverb by the Jita of Tanzania, *omwana ni wa bhone*, which means that the raising of a child belongs to the community regardless of their ‘blood’(biological) parents.

Writing in a South African context, Monyai (2018) identifies Setswana proverbs that relate to kinship. *Botlhale jwa phala bo tswa phalaneng* ‘a buck’s intelligence comes from its parent’, *kgakakgolo ga kena mebala, mebala e dikgakaneng* ‘as an adult guinea fowl, I have no colours; my offspring has colours’, which means that as an adult, the parent has full responsibility over the child. It is an expression of modesty and nobility: the parent sacrifices their glory for their child to shine. Education within the setting of the school is collaborative, teachers and learners are in a familial relationship that is beyond the school structure and both parties have a moral ethic of providing the education and receiving it, respectively.

4.9. Personhood and Home: Where Botho Resides

Many Setswana concepts relating to space and place were embodied in the concept of *botho* – respect for the sanctity of the human being and a human being’s connectedness to other people as well as the natural environment and the spiritual realm. Mosienyane (2009)

The boys, in terms of how they speak about their homes and how they relate with other members of their kin at home, exude an emotional connection and rootedness. This connection is not only one that learners maintain within their homes but also in their immediate communities.

A Setswana *leele* ‘metaphor’, *gaabomotho go thebe phatswa* ‘one’s home/origins is a sharp spear’ (direct translation), came to mind when reflecting on the experiences of the boys’ homes during the fieldwork stage of this study. Sakhile & Me (2021) loosely translates it as ‘there is no

place like home' with an emphasis on a sense of acceptance and nurture from or by the place or the people. The researcher's background knowledge of the metaphor is that it means that 'one's home/place of origin is the most important element in one's life', the strongest weapon in one's arsenal. Both translations are synonymous with the claim by Njwambe et al. (2019:413) that African ideologies of home place it at the centre of attachment and belonging.

In addition to the immaterial value that learners place on their homes, a key feature in most of the boys' homes was their physical connections with other homes and social relationships built around these connections. Influenced by anthropologist Shapira's photographic ethnographies of Bechuanaland (early Botswana), Steyn's (2012) *The Influence of Botho on Social Space in Botswana since independence* connects the spatial structures and anthropological nature of the traditional architecture of early Batswana homesteads, *malapa* 'homes. Steyn (2012) quotes a Botswana architect on the essence of what the historical structures represented in the above-stated quote. The following section of this thesis makes pertinent references to similarities of the boys' homes with the historical Batswana family home: "not an isolated enclave. It is not only a domestic organisation, but also has spatial implications and relationships beyond that of the family home" (Steyn, 2012:123).

4.9.1 Boys' homes: hospitality, openness and conviviality

It is important to note how situations, how she was received and the relationships that developed may have been affected by the researcher's positionality. The researcher found that once the boys' mothers knew that she was a teacher at the boys' school, there was a certain importance attached to her presence. Other family members would need to leave the room in some instances and one of the mothers once cut her appointment short with her friends to make time for her (even though she had insisted on coming back at another time). It is also worth noting that this is how a new visitor is treated in many Batswana homes. After the first visit, the atmosphere was more relaxed.

The learner participants were always on their best behaviour at home, but the researcher also found that this was the case when guardians were at home and when they were not. Because she was a woman, the fathers were not prepared to engage with her further than asking about why she was visiting their house. The fathers would call their wives to meet with her and would leave for another space. Tlhabane and surrounding villages and townships, as the findings of this study have presented so far, is a gendered space. She had to respect the boundaries that were in place, but she also found that if she had been a man, the fathers' sides of the stories could have featured more in the boys' stories.

The researcher's dual role as a teacher and a university postgraduate student also created assumptions that she had access to support services (for starting NGOs, that she could assist a family financially and that she had ways to get students into higher education faster). Her roles also provided mothers with access to talking about things that they could not be open to people whom they knew. The idea that she was a stranger and was there to listen without wanting anything in return provided a safe space for mothers to express themselves. She was grateful for their trusting her with their most sacred thoughts and emotions.

Through these interactions, she became someone beyond a teacher and a researcher; she became a sister. Her role as a woman became a place where she found a home in the mothers' homes. The relationships that were built during home visits still exist and she cherishes each one of them. The following sections provide an outline of how she experienced the homes of two of the boys.

4.9.1.1. Bandile's mother: "*Re jarisana mathata* 'we carry one another's burdens'."

On the researcher's first visit to Bandile's house, she was welcomed warmly by his mother, who had already prepared chairs for both of them outside her corrugated iron house under the shade of the main house. She noticed the shiny and bright red stoep in front of her doorstep. As they engaged in casual conversation about her upcoming shift at work and about the blaring heat, Bandile's older sister came along carrying a tray with glasses and a 1, 25 litre bottle of a cola-flavoured fizzy drink. Bandile's mother apologised for not going inside the house because of how small it was and said "*mara ke mo gae* 'but, it is home'." The researcher reiterated the same words.

Bandile's mother then expressed that it would not be home for long, and the researcher agreed. She then told the researcher about how she was working to get herself and her children a brick house. Her corrugated iron house was clean, shiny and decorated and the hospitality was welcoming. It was most certainly a home. During the researcher's second visit to the home, she found Bandile alone and, for ethical reasons, she asked that they move the interview to her home. Before leaving, Bandile asked to see two of his neighbours to tell one to keep an eye out as he was going out and to give the house keys to the other in case someone in the yard needed something from their house. There was communality and protection/care for one another's homes.

Throughout Bandile's mother's interview, the researcher noticed that interconnections were being made and maintained by the residents of the yard. When one person left the yard, they would report to their neighbour or hand them their room keys. Bandile's mother was also babysitting a

neighbour's baby who fell asleep in her arms during the interview. This made sense when in the interview she was asked in what way masculinity affected her. She expressed that most of the gentlemen in the yard where she stayed were gentlemen and that they were good role models for Bandile. She further stated that they were like brothers and family and that they carried one another's burdens.

4.9.1.2. Thapelo's family: "*Re tla go tshwarela dintja* 'we will hold back the dogs for you'."

As the researcher used to work at the clinic in Sunrise Park during the time that she was doing fieldwork in understanding the relationship between depression and physical chronic illness, Thapelo's home was not difficult to find. When she got to his home, she found his father sitting outside listening to a soccer match on the radio while Thapelo's siblings were playing around him. He was welcoming and kind as she introduced herself. He told her that Thapelo had told him about her and the research. They talked about what the research entailed, and he asked a few questions. He called Thapelo's mother and introduced them. He also filled in the consent forms on her behalf and added her contact details. Thapelo's mother was soft-spoken and did not talk much. They sat for a little while and they asked about what Thapelo was like in the classroom and how he was doing in the subject that she was teaching. They then arranged for an official interview appointment.

The researcher's second visit to the home was not as comfortable as the first. It was a weekday and she arrived at the house around 16h00 so that she would find Thapelo at home. When she arrived, Thapelo and his father were going out to fetch firewood. The researcher was conducting an interview with Thapelo's mother, and as it became later in the afternoon, she saw how Thapelo's grandmother came out with candles and put them around us. By the time they had to do Thapelo's interview, it was already dark and writing down notes was no longer possible. Thapelo's mother explained that their area went without electricity and water for days at a time and that they were already accustomed to it. She also expressed that having no electricity was their 'norm' even when electricity was available since Thapelo's father had lost his job and as she was also unemployed. The researcher went home heartbroken and helpless after the interviews.

While on the way to visit Thapelo's house for the third time, the researcher was informed that he was still in town with his parents and that she should wait for him at his house. Without asking any questions, she did as was suggested and parked in front of his house as usual. As she stepped out of the car, Thapelo's grandfather, whom she had only seen briefly during the first visit, ran to the gate to stop her from entering the yard. He stated that as the 'youngsters were not around', he had to take the dogs to the backyards so that they would not bite her.

Dogs are mainly kept to protect the home from criminals and to keep intruders at bay in townships. When the father of the house is not around, the dogs are often released from their designated place, which is usually at the back of the house. It was only at this point that the researcher realised that before her second visit, this had been done. As someone who grew up in the Rustenburg locale, she knew that once the dogs are held back for you, you are officially acknowledged as a non-intruder and a friend of the family. Thapelo's grandfather then opened the gate and brought her a chair to sit with Thapelo's grandmother and a cousin who had come to visit.

As with Thapelo's father, Thapelo's grandfather sat at a nearby tree reading a newspaper away from the circle of conversation. Thapelo's grandmother talked to the researcher as if she were her daughter's friend, calling her *ngwanake* 'my child' and went into detail about her progressing blindness. As the researcher empathised with her, she went more into detail about her purpose. She told her about how difficult it had been growing up and working on farms and how her health challenges were imminent. She also asked about the researcher's marital status and when she planned to get married. Thapelo's grandmother also told her to come and visit the house that she had worked very hard to build in Zeerust. She also asked for her thoughts on what she envisioned Thapelo's future would be like.

Thapelo then called the researcher to come to the main road to meet him and his parents as they were getting out of the taxi with their groceries. Thapelo's grandmother then took her halfway to the gate and tried explaining where the main road was in case she got lost. Upon her arrival, Thapelo's father put their groceries in the back of the van and told her to take Thapelo's mother with her as he walked behind the van. On this day, the researcher was welcomed warmly, became a part of the women's discussion and witnessed Thapelo's father's chivalry. She also saw how her assistance with the groceries was an unwritten expectation. Following this event, Thapelo's mother called her *ausi* 'sister' and no longer Ms Maribe. She had also added in one of their phone calls that Thapelo had gained a new mother in her. Thapelo and his mother still call her and send WhatsApp messages to check on how she is doing and they keep her updated on Thapelo's progress at school and with his soccer activities.

4.9.1.3. *O nale maoto a mantle* 'you have beautiful feet' – Christina

On the road to Seraleng on the highway, as she was about to go into the off-ramp, a group of boys in uniform were hiking and they pleaded to be picked up. They were all getting off along the way to where the researcher was going, so she gave them a lift. When she entered Seraleng, she got lost on her way to Kagiso's house. The housing settlement (RDP housing) that they lived in

was fairly new and she could not figure out the double house numbers. After circling the area twice, she decided to ask the boys at the shop if they knew Kagiso. The researcher described him, told them where he went to school and told them that he played soccer. They immediately knew who she was talking about and directed her to the house. The researcher found Kagiso in the kitchen cooking while his siblings sat and watched a movie on television. He told the researcher that his mother had gone out for a while but would be back soon. The researcher called her to confirm, and she said that she was finishing up an important matter with her sister who lived close by and that she would join them at the house soon. After Kagiso finished dishing up for his brothers, they proceeded with the interview. Kagiso was different from how he was in the classroom. He spoke in a softer tone, he was gentle with his little brothers, and he could sit still for more than ten minutes. Christina came back as the researcher and Kagiso were about to round off the interview. Christina was a tall, warm, expressive and talkative lady. She and the researcher talked about the research, and they agreed that the interview would be on the Sunday that would follow. She also told the researcher about her irregular shifts at work and that the only times that she would be available would be over weekends. The researcher received a WhatsApp message that evening from Christina and Kagiso a few minutes after she had arrived home. They were asking if the researcher had arrived home safely, and she responded accordingly.

When the researcher arrived on a Sunday, she found Christina cooking Sunday lunch. When she came into the living room (the kitchen and the living room were open plan), Christina said, “*o nale maoto a mantle*”, which means ‘you have beautiful feet’. As a metaphor, the statement means that the researcher knew exactly when to come for a visit since there would be feasting. The metaphor speaks to timing and being welcomed to share the feast and events that accompany the feast. Christina invited the researcher to sit down on the couch and told her that they would ‘catch up’ until she had finished cooking. She asked the researcher where she lived and how she was experiencing teaching at The School. The conversation continued to flow towards who she was and her narrating the story of how she became who she was. She talked about how difficult it had been raising Kagiso because she was in her mid-adolescence when she had him. Christina’s job was also stressful as she got paid minimum wage and struggled to make ends meet at times. Kagiso’s father left her with the child but returned to Kagiso’s life recently. Christina also shared the immense challenges that she faced before becoming a mother. It was a personal and deeply emotional moment as the researcher empathised with her challenges. She was not a researcher at that moment with her as she was not observing but sharing a moment of pain and reflexivity. As they continued to talk, Christina talked about her ‘happily ever after’, a man that she had recently gotten married to who was kind and cared for her past. Her husband stayed where he was employed in Gauteng province but visited the family regularly. Christina thanked the

researcher for listening and said that it is not often that she gets the opportunity to speak about sensitive issues, especially to a fellow woman.

The conversation was turned around when Christina told the researcher about her dream to open an after-care facility (specifically a non-profit organisation) because she was concerned about the safety of children and teenagers in their area. She stated that since guardians were constantly seeking means of survival and that children in her area stayed home unsupervised after school. Christina also reported cases of children who had gone missing quite recently to the time that the interview was conducted. Before starting the interview, Christina took the researcher to the soccer field which was situated opposite their home, and they went to watch Katlego playing a match. Christina beamed with pride as her son made moves on the field and kept pointing at him. Christina and the researcher found Katlego's little brothers and their friends in attendance and watching the match. When it started getting a bit late, they returned to the house and proceeded to conduct the interview. The researcher unfortunately could not stay for lunch as it was needed urgently at home, but she felt at home during the afternoon visit.

4.9.1.4. Research during a time of bereavement

During the researcher's first visit to Lesego's house, she found his father (who was his grandfather, but Lesego called him his father) sitting on the *stoep* 'veranda'. She told him that Lesego had been selected to take part in this study and that she needed to speak to his guardians about what would happen next. The father understood her explanation, invited her into the house and went to call Mama Mirriam, Lesego's mother (who was Lesego's mother, but Lesego called her his grandmother). The researcher sat in the living room and when Mama Mirriam arrived at the living room, they continued to talk about the research and what it entailed. Mama Mirriam then gave verbal consent for her and Lesego to take part in the study and signed the consent forms. The researcher and Mama Mirriam continued to talk about Lesego, about how school was going and why the researcher chose to do this research.

Our second appointment was when the researcher had to collect the journal that Lesego had responded to and when she had to drop off his first airtime delivery. As she approached his street, the researcher saw Lesego playing soccer on a gravel 'short street' close to the supermarket and she stopped to call him. Lesego and all his soccer friends got on the back of the *bakkie* 'pickup truck' and we went to his house. The researcher and Lesego found the family sitting in the living room and watching a movie. She sat down to have a friendly chat with Mama Mirriam, and they arranged a date for their interview.

The scheduled interview fell into a difficult week for the family as they had lost a cousin at a shooting in their village. The researcher did not know of this until she arrived at where Mama Mirriam had directed her to go over the phone. Mama Mirriam was so kind that she was willing to continue with the interview even during this tough time. As the researcher was not clad in the appropriate clothes for a wake, she could not go inside the yard. At a Batswana funeral, the wake is all week before the funeral event and women are usually required to be in dresses and having had covered their heads in *doeks* 'head wraps' or should be wearing hats. Mama Mirriam called the researcher telephonically and asked that she not leave.

The researcher, being a local of Rustenburg, knew about the gendered arrangement of women working in one area cooking and the men in another area. The men usually work with the meat or set up structures like the tent, arrange space for where the chairs would be set up and prepare the fire area where the *mogodu* 'tripe' and other intestinal parts of the cow or sheep would be cooked. The setup at Mama Maureen's relatives' home was different from what the researcher understood. The chief was present and was sitting with men in a circle. This was much like what is called *lekgotla* 'a gathering at the chief's home which is usually regarding legal proceedings, sharing information with the community and discussing customs and rituals'. The women were standing up at the other side of the house grouped together while waiting for the meeting to conclude. The young men were not part of the talks but were moving around at the back working on firewood, and some were walking in and out of the yard bringing things like chairs, three-foot pots and sink bowls. The researcher then recalled a practice that her mother had taught her while she was growing up while she was wondering how she could assist at that specific time. The researcher stapled paper together to form an envelope and enclosed *matshediso* 'consolation'. *Matshediso* is anything that one can give to the family of the bereaved that can assist with proceedings and can range from vegetables, meat, tea, coffee or money.

After some hours when the meeting was concluded, Mama Mirriam went to the car to meet the researcher and apologised for the wait. She explained that when the chief is present at one's home and there is a meeting, all elders have to remain in the home and are not permitted to leave the premises until he does. The researcher hugged Mama Mirriam and gave her the *matshediso*. The researcher proceeded to ask Mama Mirriam about what happened to her nephew (as she understood this as part of the consolation process. It is local knowledge that every time someone bereaved talks about how their kin passed on, they get to heal with each reflection and narration of how the passing occurred). Mirriam narrated the events leading up to the tragic event. She still wanted to continue with the interview the very same afternoon, but the researcher said that it was fine that they rescheduled. Lesego was not around as he was not allowed to be at the wake and

would only attend the night vigil the night before the funeral and attend the main funeral event. The researcher and Mama Mirriam spoke over the phone during the weeks following the funeral and arranged for the interviews a month later.

4.9.2. Botho in kinship: practising the mutuality of being

Sahlins (2011:10), through a social constructivist perspective, defines kinship as “a manifold of inter-subjective participations, founded on mutualities of being”. Mutuality of being and inter-subjective participation refers here to co-belonging, being co-members of one another’s being, a co-presence in one another and the interconnection of lives (Sahlins, 2011). This philosophy correlates with the discussion on African personhood, and it is seen in the relationships that the boys and their siblings maintain in their respective homes. The first evidence is seen in Monica’s expression of love and her willingness to sacrifice a part of herself for her younger brother, Thebe:

‘I wish that I could give him half of my brain so that he can at least have the perspective of someone his age.’

Monica, as a student psychologist, empathises with Thebe’s condition. It is one of the reasons that she took up psychology and aims to specialise in educational psychology to help her brother and others who have learning difficulties. She says the following:

‘We are close because I understand him more than other family members because of his intellectual problems. I do not run much out of patience with him, even though there are times when I wish that I can shake him and say ‘wake up’. We are close; he understands me and I understand him. He is able to come to me when he needs anything. He actually usually approaches me before approaching anyone else. He’s my younger brother, my mother’s last-born child.’

Monica is also quite protective of Thebe and is willing to engage in sibling rivalry for his cause. There are four siblings in their family, consisting of their oldest brother who has moved out of the home, an older sister (Thapelo’s niece and nephew’s mother), Monica and then Thebe. The researcher had not met their older sister but had seen her around the house. Monica expressed some frustrations about this sister a few times in the interview but what hurt her most was when Thebe was affected by the sister’s conduct:

‘All siblings get along well. There’s just one particular sibling who has mood problems. Last week, I was not around and I heard that she came into Thebe’s room and said some mean things. I also do not get along with this sibling.’

The second case is Kagiso and his two siblings. During the researcher’s first official home visit, she found Kagiso preparing food for his younger siblings as they watched a movie on television.

According to Christina, his mother, Kagiso wakes up first in the morning to get ready and then boils water to help his little brothers get ready for crèche and for school. These acts of caregiving could be dismissed as 'only for women' but Kagiso does them with the motivation of love. His mother also said that he boiled water for her too and woke her up right before helping his brothers get ready. She says that this is because he understands the immense exhaustion she experiences at her cleaning job. Christina also says this when asked how Kagiso relates with his siblings:

'Ke abuti, ke cousin, ke malome 'he is a brother, a cousin and an uncle'. He treats them with care; they come first to him.'

Lesego is the same with his nephew (his 'sister's' child) – the complexity of kinship differs here. To contextualise this, Mama Mirriam is not Lesego's mother, although she is regarded as such. The lady whom he addresses as his sister is his aunt. Nonetheless, his nephew is still considered his *setlogolo* 'nephew' within the family arrangement. An uncle, in this social environment, is likened to a father and it is therefore mandated that he be respected. The notion of respect comes into play when he enforces more discipline on his nephew. He also states in his interview that he spends less time with him to draw boundaries. Mama Mirriam states the following:

'He's good with everyone. He's quite strict with the nephew. When he does something wrong, Lesego promises him a beating. He's an uncle.'

He does play soccer with his nephew and his friends to teach them how to play well. Sharing something that he values so much is also an act of interconnection of lives.

Ross (2010: 92), in her book *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, Housing and Everyday Life in a Post-apartheid Community*, writes about the complexities of household relationships. The relationships that emerged in her study cases where parents need to take care of their grandchildren as their own challenged the notion of the 'nuclear family'. In certain kinships, relationships are a result of 'fluidity and change'.

Thebe also has a niece and a nephew but, because he looks young, does not intimidate them. Their respect for him is not consistent.

'He also gets along well with his niece and nephew (the other sibling's children). They call him malome 'uncle'. Sometimes he feels like that they don't respect him because they see him as young.'

Thapelo has a brother and a sister; Thapelo and his brother look identical to their father. The researcher saw him around his brother and sister and his little brother followed him around. Thapelo has also enrolled him into his soccer club, and he plays in Thapelo's U13 (Under 13) division. Thapelo's mother says:

'They respect him and they get along with him. He helps them with their homework as well.'

4.9.3. Communication as a learnt symbol of conviviality

Contrary to the notion that 'boys don't cry' or that boys do not talk about their challenges, guardians in the study expressed that some of the boys were forthcoming with how they felt in different situations.

Ous Ruth, Bandile's mother says, "He speaks about his challenges. He also has someone in the yard that he speaks with. I am open so my children are also open." Not only does he open up to his mother, but he also opens up to *abuti* 'big brother' Makhado, who stays in their yard and is a friend of the family. Being open with her son and daughter are also strategies that make them comfortable to be open with her in return.

Christina, Kagiso's mother, says that they have a mother-son relationship and she has a friendship with her son. They call one another *chomi* 'buddy' and she says that whenever there is something 'bothering him', he lets her know. In her words, "I'm the kind of person that speaks her mind when angry, so Kagiso is also like that".

Thapelo's mother, Oumakie, observes her son's behaviour at home and when he is quieter than usual, she approaches him and asks him what is wrong. In their case, there is a boundary in what they talk about. She says that he only shares his problems if it is something that has hurt him at home and if it is related to something that he needs for school or soccer. Other more personal issues, such as dating and situations with friends, he discusses with his best friend.

In Lesego's case, his mother says that he never speaks about his challenges and that he is constantly on his phone. He does however state in his journal that there is a girl, Karabo, that he enjoys talking to at school and online. They talk about the challenges that they are both experiencing and the future. He defines her as someone kind and someone whom he trusts.

Thebe's guardian, Monica, finds that she sometimes needs to force Thebe to talk about his challenges, especially his learning challenges. She has however found ways to include discussions about it in conversations. She tells him about her challenges, especially in her studies, and this often gets him to share insight into how he feels. His main challenge is not

understanding why his friends can do some things and he cannot. Monica uses these conversations to make him see and appreciate his other strengths and to encourage him to be patient with himself.

Randell *et al.* (2016) found in their research on 'how adolescent boys manage masculinities and emotions' that boys negotiate how they show or talk about their feelings differently across contexts. They state that it is a balancing act and that their social environment is largely influential in how these behaviours are framed in social situations in terms of how emotions are practised around them. In the homes of Thapelo, Kagiso, Christina and Bandile, talking about how they feel is encouraged and probed; it is also a practice in which their guardians are active. The boys are taught by guardians to 'open up' about their challenges.

Furthermore, Kågesten *et al.* (2016) emphasise the immense influence that parents have on moulding the gender attitudes of adolescents through engagement, play and doing activities together. Niobe and Kambou-Ferrand (2014), in their study of *Boys' Resistance to Norms of Masculinity During Adolescence*, find that in adolescence, boys resist attitudes and practices of 'emotional stoicism' that are stereotypically associated with masculinity. In their study, boys are open about their challenges and are not afraid to talk about how they feel. They, however, find that as boys approach manhood at the end of adolescence, the resistance wears off and they become more closed off from others.

4.10. Drawing from Initiation School Practices: Associating with Older and Wiser Men

Although the boys' mothers administer most parts of their lives (school, sports and what the boys are responsible for at home), the boys have older males with whom they spend time and take up activities. Associating with older men who can teach boys that he can do to make life easier in homemaking and customs that men must know is one of the outcomes of initiation rites. The boys learn local knowledge like soccer, traditions and farming. They also learn ways in which they can be independent and take care of people around them.

Bandile spends a lot of his time in the yard with *Abuti* Makhado, who is one of the gentlemen that Ruth says is like a brother to her. He also has a strong relationship with his uncle (his mother's maternal brother) with whom he became close when he helped his grandmother raise him while he was staying at the village. The knowledge that his uncle shares with him is mostly based on amaXhosa traditions and they talk frequently over the phone. He has taught him their clan praise poetry, their family story of origin, the lineage of their chieftaincy and what men are responsible for in varying traditional rituals.

Lesego's father, whom the researcher found out to be Lesego's grandfather at a later stage of the fieldwork, is someone whom Lesego looks up to greatly. He stated that he wanted to be as brave as his grandfather and to take care of his future family in the same way that his grandfather did. Lesego's grandfather is always the last person up at the house because he routinely walks around the yard every night to check for any possible dangers. Characteristics that Lesego appreciated about him were that when his mother, Mama Mirriam, was ill, he prayed for her and took care of her until she felt better.

Lesego's love for soccer was something that he adopted from his grandfather as he used to play for local teams and follow local soccer events. He is also the person who encourages him not to give up in trying to achieve excellence in soccer, no matter how hard it becomes. His grandfather has also taught him vegetable gardening (as they have a very big yard, his grandfather advises him to make the most of it for growing food) and landscaping. Lesego's reflection of the best advice that his father ever gave him was that talking is a much better alternative to solving disputes than fighting.

Thapelo's father does not talk much, according to Thapelo. He is however the person who has taught him how to cook and they chop wood together every day. He consults with him on any of his needs regarding his soccer club involvement and his father attends his and his little brother's soccer matches. Thapelo also spends most of his free time with his coach, Moriti. He had asked the researcher to meet with his coach and when they got to his coach's place, he knew his way around. He also did assistant coaching, so he learnt a lot about soccer from Moriti. Thapelo goes to watch soccer matches at Coach Moriti's house as he has all the Super Sport channels. Thapelo also has an older cousin whom he goes to for assistance with homework; he says he inspires him because he 'knows many things' and recently finished school with excellent marks.

4.11. Rites of Passage as Observed by Guardians

Monica's reflections on the rites of passage that she went through were conflicted because of her current beliefs. She felt that she was coerced into getting confirmed into the church and taking the religiosity route because her grandmother was an ordained minister in the church. She recalled being taught prayer at school and home and that she now questioned proof of God. However, she stated that church and the practices and the morals it taught her had moulded her into who she is today. Monica had also taken positions in church administration which involved a lot of decision-making; this involvement had provided her with meaningful leadership skills. She wished that she had been better prepared by her parents and immediate community for being a woman and an adult. Monica says:

'I wish that my parents had told me more that life is not easy! When I was young, I wished to finish school and to be working. Being an adult is not easy! When it comes to mental health issues, I wish that us black people could be more opinionated. We have a lot of stress and we cannot be open about it and they also went through these issues, but they cannot want to talk about it. They would rather drink so that they can forget how difficult life was, instead of sitting us down and letting us know that there will be certain situations in life. So, we have to figure things out ourselves. I think that this mental health situation, it's a burden from our parents; it's a generational curse. We are here (this generation) to break the cycle, to talk about these issues. We only just realised that when parents said, 'there was no money' when we asked, that there really was no money.'

Mama Mirriam's experience was only getting confirmed into the church and taking up service positions. She also reflected on getting married as a rite of passage; she had a white wedding within a church setting. She stated that her family never observed any other rites of passage.

Ruth's rite of passage was her mother talking to her about every physical development that would occur when she was between the ages of 13 and 16. Ruth also stated that she did not attend *kwa komeng* (which is a Northern-Sotho translation of initiation). She did not go to *intonjane* initiation for women (she calls in *komeng*, which is a Northern-Sotho translation). They were only taught *go ipoka* 'own clan praise poetry' at the village where she grew up, *go boka kgosi* 'the praise poetry of chiefs' for them to know where they come from and where they were going (cultural identity). She also stated that watching her mother's strength when she was growing up was the main thing that prepared her to be the woman that she is today.

Ruth's father was deaf, and he worked at a mine. Her mother used to be his interpreter at home and would accompany him to his important commitments and meetings. Ruth's mother also taught her brothers how to be men by teaching them responsibility from a very young age. Christina wanted to go to *letlhakeng* 'the reed' but could not go as she had had Kagiso at an early age. She went on to tell the researcher that AmaSwati attend a reed dance at a remote village (never where the person stays). When she was in school, this information was not shared with them, but she learnt it from her mother at home.

4.12. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, the evidence of the use of African personhood principles and adaptations of lessons that were (and are still) taught at traditional sites by educators and guardians in raising the boys were discussed. This chapter also showed how the school site observes ritualistic processes and performances that signal communitarianism. Educators serve multiple tasks in the school because of staff shortages but they consider their love for the profession of teaching and

the learners as motivation to continue functioning in this way. Educators also function as parents to learners and consider this one of the responsibilities of the profession. At the boys' homes, principles of African personhood were observed, including conviviality within the home and with neighbours, hospitality towards strangers, a welcoming spirit to those whom they encounter and a mutuality of being within their homes.

5.1 Liminality

Most rites of passage take the triphasic sequence stated by Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1979) – separation, liminality and incorporation. In the liminal phase of historical initiation rites, initiates were encouraged (or forced) to ponder on the society of which they were to become a part (Jaskulska, 2015:97). Within a globalised and modernised world, the prompts that adolescents receive are not only from initiation instructors (in this context, parents and peers) but also from music, television, informal education and online worlds.

5.1.1. Person (al) liminality

According to Stahl (2020), liminality can be defined as an intermediary and temporal state in a person's life, and within this experience a person's intuition of their position in the society is remarkably challenged. It is at this point that the person needs their social and metaphysical environment to assist them in finding their place within the society. Through insight obtained from their environment, they find ways in which their place within society can be realigned towards their society's collective flow of harmony and purpose (Stahl, 2020).

The findings from observations in the field site, reflections from the boys' interviews, and from their journal entries suggest that the boys work with education (as discussed in section 4.7), media, technology and sport to negotiate their new positions in society.

5.1.1.1. Technologies, media and social media

The boys chose to engage in social media and the internet for the strengthening and maintenance of social relationships, and to remain updated with their close social environments and worlds that they aspired to inhabit in future. They partook in online games to bond with their friends through competition. Play here was not just for fun, but is also a form of mental stimulation and the boys used them to advance skills in their offline worlds, e.g. soccer and driving. The boys in the study consumed media in the form of music, television and movies for entertainment and they also found people that they looked up to on these mediums. They also learned about varying personhoods and masculinities from the messages that their favourite music, TV shows and movies conveyed. The boys also used the personhoods and masculinities portrayed by their favourite television and movie characters to negotiate their own personhoods and masculinities.

Technologies formed as part of the social environments that the boys inhabited. They explored games together (and when without their friends, they would explore them with virtual strangers); and they related what they watched on television and movies to their offline lives.

Bandile's Favourite game to play online was Master Trucking, a simulator game that shows a virtual reality view of truck drivers' days on the road. The game allows players to drive the truck as if in real time. He enjoyed it because it taught him the different functions of a car and how to navigate arising situations on the road in preparation for him obtaining his driver's license in the future. Bandile also played FIFA 21, a soccer simulation online game that he primarily played with his friends to bond through competing. He also used it to learn new soccer skills and to practice the ones that he had recently learned.

Kagiso played Mini-mercias, Car parking and Mine Craft with virtual players that he had never met because most of his friends did not play. Mini Mercia is a game of fantasy where players get to build characters, form alliances with other players and create their own narratives of the game. The game also includes battling against other players and teams. He said that he did not learn anything from it, but played just for fun. Car parking is a lot like Master Trucking where players can customize their online cars and set up parking driving experiences. MineCraft is a game of exploration where players get to experience automated worlds and can work with other virtual players to play through automated challenges. Much like Bandile, winning was very important to Kagiso when playing online games. He stated that "hates when he loses".

Thebe played online games which were mostly shooting games, namely, Free Fire, and PubG. Free fire is a game of survival where players choose where they want to land on an island and try to find resources and weapons to survive. PubG is almost the same, but is more explicit about the idea that it's a death-match, a survival of the fittest phenomenon. According to Thebe, he played the game for competition between him and his friends, and his aim was always to reach 'professional' status in the games. He said that he and his friends compared one another's statuses (levels reached in games and performance analytics). He used a Tsotsitaal word, 'blind' to explain this: "*nna le dichomitsaka re rata go compara gore ke mang oo blind the most*" "my friends and I like to compare our scores to see whom the best is or the most impressive".

The participants provided reflections of the television shows and movies that they consumed and wrote about the characters that they thought were most like them and those that they look up to. Participants chose their favourite characters on television and movies based on the kind of personhoods and masculinities that they themselves portray and those that they admire.

Thebe enjoyed cooking shows where they bake, cook, and experiment with food. These shows had provided him with the opportunity to also consider a career in cooking. He was therefore also considering becoming a chef in future if the opportunity would avail itself.

Thapelo enjoyed shows on Channel 157, which is a reality TV channel that focuses on varying subjects such as abandoned children looking for their biological parents, sangomas exposing witchcraft, a look inside traditional weddings, and interventions into family disputes. Thapelo stated that these shows were showing him the realities of adulthood and how to navigate them. He provided an example of a show called, *lenyalo le thata* 'marriage is difficult', where the host meets with people in troubled marriages for counselling. Thapelo said that the show had taught him what to expect in marriage and how to navigate the issues that he may encounter when he gets older.

Kagiso enjoyed soccer and soccer magazine shows on television. He enjoyed watching these sports shows because he identified with the talent that was broadcasted. The player that reminded Kagiso of himself was Keagan Dolly because he was the top goal scorer in Kaizer Chiefs during the fieldwork period of this research. The movie character that Kagiso wanted to be like in future (aspiration) was John Rambo, the character played by Sylvester Stallone in the movie franchise, The Expendables. Stallone plays the leader of the combat team. Kagiso's embodiment of this character was observed in the classroom, where Kagiso appeared to be the leader of his friendship group, while 'Pastor', his best friend, took the role of his co-leader. Kagiso also enjoyed watching music videos on television and online. He stated that his favourite music personality was Zuma, an Amapiano and Kwaito star. He did not only like him for his music, but also because of whom he portrays himself as; as a brand and as a person. He liked him for the humility he showed when he interacted with fans, he said the following, "*Zuma ke motho*", meaning that he shows others his humanity/goodness. His favourite video and song during the data collection phase was Mpura (the late) featuring Kweyama Brothers called *Impilo ya se Sandton* 'The Sandton Life'. He stated that he liked the song mostly for its message. The lyrics from the chorus are as follows:

'Ubaba ushiy' umama ne zingane eziy' 4 (my father left my mother with four children)

Umam'avel' aphelelwa umsebenzi (my mother lost her job)

Behlal' e-roomini ku no mbhed' oy' one (We stayed in a room with one bed)

Umpura wathi iskhathi sok'yophanda (Mpura said, "it's time to go hustle")

Ngcela now'mzal'ahlal' ethembeni (I ask that you also stay in home, my parent)

Ngzo ba phandel' impiloyaseSandton (I will hustle the Sandton life for them)'

The lyrics speak to a desire for upward social and economic mobility. The narrative being told in the song is also similar to his own story of wanting to “take his mother and siblings out of the township”. His mother, Christina also expressed an expectation for Kagiso’s education to afford him the opportunities that are required to make these aspirations possible in her interview. The desire for social and economic mobility in this case comes as a prerequisite to adulthood, interdependence and responsible masculinity. In his interview, Kagiso reflected on his guardians telling him the following about preparation for adulthood and for becoming a man. They have told him “that he should prepare himself for anything because they will not always be around...that anytime can be tea-time” for them to depart from the land of the living. She also said that “he should not depend too much on them.” How Kagiso chooses the music that he listens to in this context is influenced by what he was taught.

The television show that Lesego enjoyed the most on television was *Uzalo*, which plays on SABC 1. It is a drama that is centred around two South African families from a township in Umlazi fighting for territory in the business of hijackings, the dynamics between the families, and the lives of the young men in the families who stand to inherit the legacies of the families. The character that reminded Lesego of himself was Sbu because the character was always making jokes and did not take himself too seriously. The character that Lesego wanted to be like in the future was Nkunzi, because he both took good care of his family and protected it. His favourite movie, *The maze runner* was according to him about people that were created in a lab and were attacked by aliens along the course of a maze. Lesego identified with the main character who seemed like a “loser” in the beginning. This character ultimately became the hero of the movie by outrunning the aliens and saving the other people that he was with. Lesego stated that he had been underestimated many times before, especially when he started out with playing soccer; but because of how much he has practiced, he played better than most of his teammates.

Thebe’s favourite movie was *Ride along*, a 2014 USA movie about a police officer who wants his sister’s boyfriend to prove that he is worthy of his sister. He does this by challenging him to work a shift doing patrol in the city of Atlanta and they end up working on a case together. The main characters are James (Ice Cube), who is feisty and is not easily impressed; and Ben (played by Kevin Hart), who is a talkative security guard who spends most of his free time playing online video games. Ben’s surprising ingenuity leads to an important case, and the movie follows the adventures that emanate from this. Thebe likes the movie because it is funny, and it teaches people what not to do in life. The character that Thebe associated with, Ben, was a comical character who was sometimes called a clown, saved the day with his gaming battle skills, wits and help from other gamers. Ben’s surprising ingenuity also got him and James leads on the

case. The character that Thebe chose to associate with here is similar to him because he is a gamer, he is lighthearted and helpful. Thebe, like Ben, also has hidden talents.

Bandile's favourite movie character was also John Rambo from the action movie, *The Expendables*. Bandile resonated with Rambo's character because of how he helped his friends when they were trapped after they had betrayed him. He related this to a real life situation that happened to him in his soccer team that he shied away from talking about in his interview. The television show that Bandile enjoyed the most was 'The Queen', which is a South African telenovela following the lives of the wealthy Khoza family. The character that reminded Bandile of himself most in the show is Brutus. Bandile considered Brutus as disciplined but also liked making jokes. According to Bandile, Brutus is true to himself and is very proud of his isiZulu heritage. Bandile stated that he also liked that Brutus was a proud um'Xhosa. The traits that Bandile admired in Brutus resembled his curiosity regarding culture, as learning about culture and traditions is his main reason for enjoying Setswana classes in school. Another reason that this character resembles Bandile is because he cherished how his uncle from the village, Uncle Makhado, taught him about his isiXhosa origins since he was a young boy (see section 4.9).

5.1.1.2. Social Media

The boys in the study used Facebook, Tick Tock and Instagram, but they spent most of their time online on Facebook. Bandile, Lesego and Thebe had their own phones, while during the fieldwork period, Kagiso and Thapelo accessed social media on their mothers' phones. Being online regularly was important for the boys and whenever either Thapelo or Kagiso did not have their mothers' phones, they would use their friends' phones to get online. Not all the boys had access to data, but they made plans in order to attain data to access their Facebook pages. Thebe would do chores for her sister and after getting paid, he would buy micro bindles (which start at R5 for 1 gigabyte of data over an hour). The other boys would hotspot their guardians or save up for microbundles. In South African school environments, there is less access to technologies in township schools than in more middle-class schools, but both cohorts are equally interested in them (Van der Merwe, 2017). Both cohorts have also displayed the abilities to master navigation through these technologies (Rufalow, 2020).

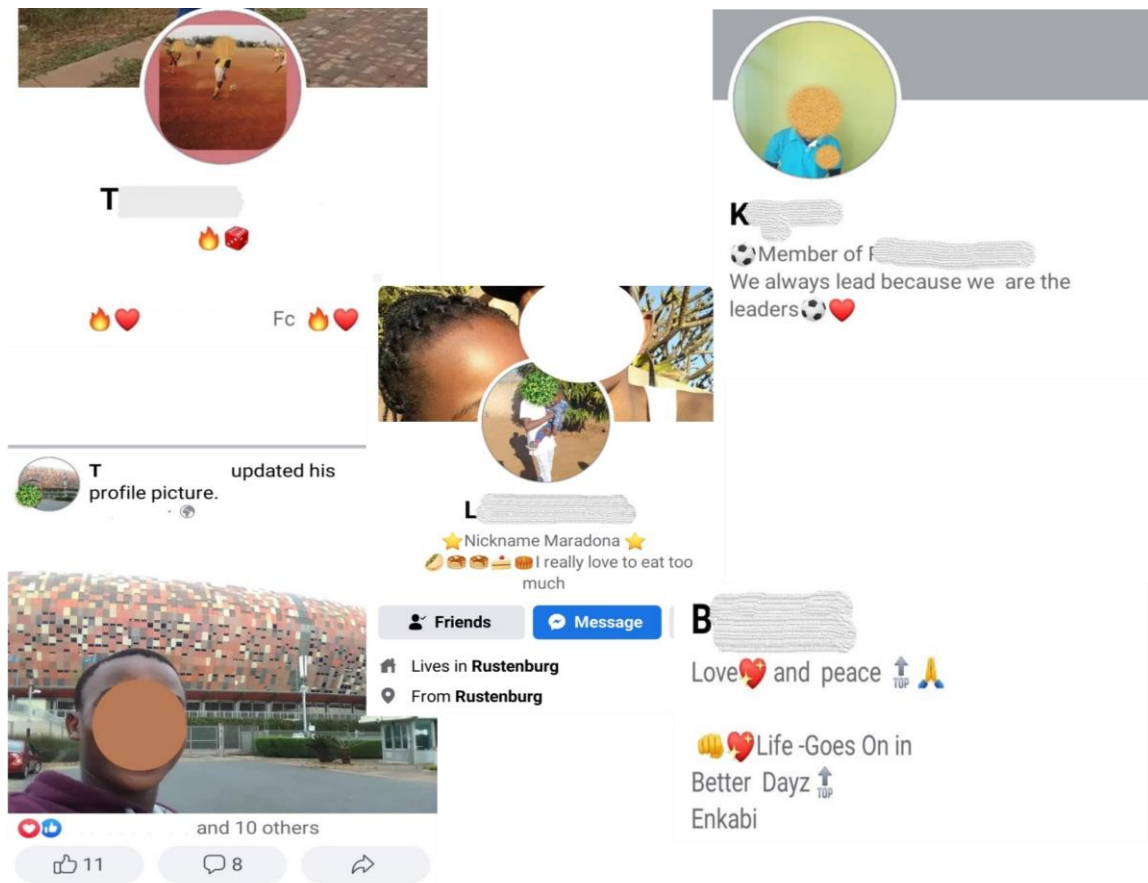


Figure 8 A collage of Participant Profiles on Social Media

The widespread theme in the boys’ social media use was soccer, and the boys had also set up their profiles in ways that would make other users aware of their interests in soccer. Van der Merwe (2017) asserts that the personhoods created by adolescents online are equally significant and relevant to their offline personhoods. Thapelo’s Facebook profile can be seen at the top left corner in figure 8 (above) where he had written his local team’s name with heart and flame emojis around the name of the team (edited out of the picture for the participant’s confidentiality). Hougaard and Rathje (2018: 773) state that adolescents use emojis for “promoting important features of communication such as emotions, mutual understanding, atmosphere, aesthetics and entertainment.” Thapelo used the hearts and flames to express his feelings towards soccer and to exhibit his affiliation with the team. Thapelo’s opening quote to section 5.1.1.3 encapsulated the passion that was also reflected in his online profile. His profile picture was also of himself playing in his uniform at the soccer field close to his house. Kagiso (top-right on figure 8) had also done the same in his Facebook profile (added his team’s name with heart emojis while signalling his affiliation with the soccer team that he belongs to by identifying himself as “member of ...”).

Both boys introduce themselves as soccer players and are proud to be members of their respective soccer teams. These appeared to be the most highlighted aspects of the two boys' personhoods online site activities. Kagiso also made emphasis of his already identified (see section 5.1.1.1) leadership skill and showed users that it was part of his soccer team's ethos. He therefore personified the team in his affiliation and through his strengths. Lesego, whose profile is in the middle of the collage, had written down one of his soccer nicknames, Maradona on his profile. The late Diego Maradona was a highly skilled Argentinian soccer player and according to Lesego, he only associated himself and was associated with the best in soccer by people he knew. As part of the self-identification of being a joker (see section 5.1.1.1), he also described himself as someone who eats too much and had added emojis of his favourite foods for aesthetics and for entertainment (Hougaard & Rathje, 2018: 773).

The boys' online profiles were not only consistent with how they had described themselves, but were also consistent with their observed day to day performances of personhoods and masculinities. Thebe's profile picture (on the bottom-left corner of the collage) was of himself outside FNB Stadium, which is also known as Soccer City, in Johannesburg. His face is blocked for reasons of confidentiality, but he had the most content smile in the picture that signalled his joy of being at a soccer match. Bandile's profile read, "love and peace" with heart emojis and an upward-facing arrow next to the words 'love and peace'. 'Love and peace' is the motto for the PSL (Premier Soccer League) South African soccer team, Kaizer Chiefs. This motto also aligned with his statement in this interview about him wishing that school was more peaceful. He said this when he spoke about some boys who are bullies at school. Bandile's general demeanour is gentle and helpful. This has also been reflected in his mother's description of him (see section 1.4.3.5).

The boys in the study also used their Facebook sites for national and local soccer updates, discussions about matches and to advertise their upcoming matches for support from their friends. Relationships online, outside of their friendship circles, also included those with adults who were also fans and players of soccer. These adults included the boys' uncles, coaches and fathers. Soccer, as seen from the boys' online profiles, was an integral part of who the boys were and what they stood for.

Their use of social media was interdependent as some of them needed to borrow devices in order to get online. Their online presence was based on relationships surrounding soccer, which is also a tool for societal cohesion in the research site.

5.1.1.3. Soccer as a rite of passage: “I am not playing for fun; I am playing to carry my surname at the back of my t-shirt.”

“I’m a person who loves soccer and I don’t want to lose my talent. I spend most of my time at the sports grounds. When I grow up, Lord, I want to be a soccer player. My parents encourage me not to give up on my talent. I am not playing for fun; I am playing to carry my surname at the back of my t-shirt. Training is where we forget about our problems. I am a person who loves their talent and who does not want to lose hope. I beg our Father that my dreams come true.” – Thapelo (15 years old)

According to Armstrong and Giulianotti (1997), soccer is a good place from which to investigate emerging personhoods. They also assert that the creations of personhoods are embedded in meanings made by people at a personal level, between people, within large systems and across countries (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1997). The beginnings of soccer clubs in townships (1926-1940) brought together black people from different economic backgrounds (Medich, et al, 2018). Alegi (2000) identifies soccer as having been a political tool that people within and across townships used to demonstrate to the past apartheid government that they could group themselves and unite without the help of the state.

During the fieldwork process of this research, soccer was the most popular sport in Tlhabane and in surrounding villages and townships. Residents of Tlhabane had formed soccer teams as early as the 1940s (Jele, 2019). The most renowned teams in the history of Tlhabane were City Blacks FC, Royals FC, and Wallabies FC. Wallabies FC were most celebrated in the township and played between 1960s and 1980s. Other teams were established after the 1980s and they were grouped according to varying sections of the township (according to where players stayed) (Jele, 2019). Soccer brings the communities of Tlhabane and surrounding areas together and by boys and young men being at the centre of the sport, they attain their place in the community in their transitional stages of becoming men. Mosavel et al (2015) contend that society cohesion reduces undesirable effects and that it fosters resilience in members of the society. In the research site, investing time and support into the boys’ soccer activities increased the boys’ motivation and hope for bright futures. It also provided the boys with belonging and a sense of purpose.

All of the participants in this study had a passion for soccer, and were supported and encouraged by their educators and their guardians. Outside of education, the meanings made around soccer in the research site seem to point to soccer as being a rite of passage in the production of healthy personhoods and masculinities. And like education, perceptions around it were that it was another doorway to social, cultural and economic upward mobility. These perceptions of upward mobility

were not only based on creating material opportunities, but creating men that are wise, gentle with others, respectable, disciplined and respectful of others.

When I first met Lesego during my first visit to his house, he expressed an interest in joining a soccer team. He had asked that since there were no sporting activities at The School during that time (because of adherence to Covid-19 regulations), that I help him find a local team to play for. The team that I found unfortunately asked for R150 per month for membership, of which his guardians could not afford. He held onto his goal and saved up money from his SASSA social grant money for a few months to buy himself soccer boots. When I went for his interview, he told me that he had found a team to play for. He had been seen playing soccer at a street near the main road at his village and they had approached him to invite him to join the local soccer team. He had grown closer to his teammates and he had earned himself a new name that he proudly put on his Facebook profile, Jordi Alba. He expressed that his soccer techniques had improved and that he was the Jordi Alba of his team. Jordi Alba Ramos is a Spanish player from the team Inter Milan who is currently in retirement from soccer, but like the late Diego Maradona was known to be a highly skilled player during his career. Lesego's grandfather encouraged his love for soccer because he also played when he was a boy and when he was a young man. He watches soccer matches with him and his two nephews while engaging in competitive talk regarding opposing teams. The lessons that he has learned thus far from soccer are to "not focus on bad things", to "not be in street things" and to "focus on soccer to avoid bad things". His other favourite player at the time of our interview was Lionel Messi the Argentinian player, Lionel Messi who plays for the Argentina national team and for Paris Saint-Germain. He liked him because according to Lesego, "if someone hurts him on the field, he forgives and does not fight". In Lesego's case, soccer was a bonding mechanism between him, his grandfather and his nephews as they enjoyed watching soccer matches together. Lesego also appreciated those moments because that was when his grandfather would pass on soccer knowledge to him and his nephews. Soccer also exposed him to non-violent masculinities to Lesego and through it, he got to follow his grandmother Mirriam advice to "not go to shebeens, that he must be dignified" (quoted from the interview with guardian regarding what she had told Lesego about preparing for adulthood).

Thapelo started playing soccer when he was 10 years old, had played in local championships with his local soccer team (in Sunrise Park) and was planning to play professionally in future. In his interview, he expressed how sports had taught him not to take drugs, to always be in the best physical state, to be disciplined and not to 'hang around' bad company. His favourite player was also Lionel Messi because of Messi's "perfect plays" and because he "creates opportunities for other players in the team to have chances to play their part". Watching and playing soccer was

highly encouraged at Thapelo’s home for all siblings, and Thapelo had also helped his younger brother to join his team as part of the U13 boys. Thapelo’s coach, Moriti, lived close to Tshepang’s home, and I got to meet him to briefly talk about the team during a home visit to Thapelo’s house. Moriti was a great influence to Thapelo’s motivation as he had also enlisted him as a coach for the junior teams. During the Saturday afternoon that I met Moriti, several boys were at his yard after practice looking to watch the next soccer match with him on his big screen TV. He stated that through coaching, he had become like a father to some of the boys who did not have fathers. He also stated that he opened the doors of his home to them and spent time with them at the sports grounds so that they did not loiter around the streets and fall into unhealthy habits.



Figure 9 Thapelo at a soccer match - "Have you ever seen a Fiat Uno engine?"

Bandile had also recently joined a local team in Tlhabane at the time of his interview. His family supported his membership in the team and at the time of his interview. They had also reduced the amount of chores that he was responsible for during the week so that he would have time to go to soccer practice. The same neighbours that are mentioned in Chapter 4 (the neighbours who are like brothers to Bandile’s mother) also encouraged him to play. Bandile and these gentlemen watched soccer matches together and bonded mostly through this activity. Bandile’s favourite player was Cristiano Ronaldo because, according to him, “Ronaldo always concentrates even when he is going through personal struggles” and that this is what makes him a ‘game changer’.

Bandile's key lessons from soccer are discipline, mutual respect and forgiveness (learned from when either he or his team members made any mistakes on the soccer field).

Thebe did not play for any local soccer team. His challenges with mobility from the stroke restricted him from enrolling in a team since there are unfortunately not any teams for physically challenged players. He did, however, also "love soccer with all his heart", as his sister has said in her interview. Thebe's neighbourhood friends were also very supportive of him playing soccer with them and paid no attention to his injury. Mosavel et al (2015:252) report that youth that were raised in interdependent societies have an inclination towards altruism. Societal cohesion produces helpful conduct and healthy relationships with resilience.

Thebe therefore took part in street soccer which was played informally by him and his friends around his neighbourhood streets. When they played soccer in the streets, they sometimes contributed money and challenged other boys to a match, and vice-versa. Whichever team won received all of the money that was collected. For spectators who placed bets, winnings were distributed according to which side/ team won the match. When they wanted to have structured matches, they went to the Noord sport centre, where there was also a soccer field. They collected other boys and created an informal team to play against formal teams that practiced at the field. According to Thebe, his group of friends were sometimes afraid to challenge these teams because the players were so refined in their skills, but they played with them regardless.

The quote at the beginning of this section is from Thapelo's identity collage page where he was asked to write down who he considers himself to be either in words, a drawing or through a collage. Thapelo not only identified with the sport, but he incorporated his family in his imagined future success in professional soccer. As much as soccer is important to the communities where Thapelo stays and studies, he considered it an important part of how he will contribute as a responsible member of his family and community in his adulthood. Soccer, in this case is an interdependent and intersubjective discipline much like how *tiro* 'work' is described in the discussion of the process of 'becoming' in African personhood (see section 1.2). All guardians believed in the boys' dreams and goals to either play professionally in future or to be involved in soccer activities, making soccer a practice in the boys' lives that is nurtured and celebrated much like the procedures of boys' initiation ceremonies (see section 2.9). Furthermore, each of the participants thought soccer to be a necessary part of their adolescence and therefore tried their best to get involved in the sporting activity, specifically at the apex of their transition to manhood. On these accounts, soccer and what it means for the boys' growth and futures can therefore be considered a part of Tlhabane and surrounding areas' local knowledge (the principles that give way to legal sensibility within a context).

5.2. Classrooms

Within the period of liminality, there are opportunities for adolescents to consider what they take from what they have learnt from all prompts and these decisions become the apex from which they will act out their roles as adults and, in the context of this study, personhoods and masculinities. Turner (1974:58) states the following:

“Ritual symbols of this phase, though some represent inversion of normal reality, characteristically fall into two types: those of effacement and those of ambiguity or paradox. Hence, in many societies the liminal initiands are often considered to be dark, invisible, like a planet in eclipse or the moon between phases.”

For this reason, being at a point of adjournment, people in the liminal stage of rites of passage gravitate towards one another socially. Turner (1987:16) calls this group cohesion *communitas*. As this group is formed within a temporary and non-formal organisation, *communitas* is also seen as an ‘opposition to structure’ (Lipska, 2021:12).

Finnan et al. (2003:416), in *Powerful Learning Environments: The Critical Link Between School and Classroom Cultures*, report that educators have power over the classroom culture as they oversee the values and principles instilled in the classroom. This is partly true in the classroom settings in The School. Though the educators may base their facilitation of classroom activities on the school rules/school culture, the learners find ways to create and maintain desired ways of being that are specific to their group setting (Figure 10).



Figure 10 Classroom setting (Photo taken by author: 20 July 2021)

Using Turner's (1982, 1986) ideas on liminality in ritual and social drama, how learners navigate and take agency of learning and of their classroom environment through ritualised individual and group performances are illustrated. Gallego (2001:957) and Valli and Chambliss (2007:58) in their studies of classroom cultures regard observing classroom practices as key to identifying how culture applies to learning, functions served by each part, and how different cultures are constructed.

The researcher was assigned to assist the English teacher with one group of Grade 8 learners and one group of Grade 9 learners. Mr Mothuloe had six groups of Grade 8 learners and five groups of Grade 9 learners. The following sections are based on the results of the classroom ethnography.

5.2.1. Grade 8

This classroom had a jovial classroom environment and what unfolds in this section illustrates the possible source thereof. The Grade 8 group, even the other classes for which the researcher had stepped in for substitution, were playful. One of the educators who was interviewed for this study, Queen B, affectionately calls this group *dipopae* 'cartoon characters named after Popeye, the Sailor Man'. In the assembly event that took place before the emergency closing of schools due to increased cases of COVID-19 infections (July 2021), they were told to go home and play while

the Grade 10 to 12 learners were briefed about WhatsApp and online resources that would be sent to them and the importance of keeping updated with them.

5.2.2. Networks in the Classroom

According to the researcher's observations of the classroom setting, the learners located themselves with other learners who had similar interests in the classroom. During morning sessions with educators checking the register, the classroom educator would assign places for the learners, but the learners would revert to places close to the learners with similar interests as the day progressed. These arrangements would usually comprise two to six members.

The proxemic arrangements made it easy for the learners to share stationery, information and textbooks (as there were sometimes not enough textbooks because some learners did not return them after the previous year or because there was no new stock brought in for the new year). As the Grade 8 learners all came from different primary schools, according to learners, these relationships were new and had begun in this classroom space.

There were five groups – characterised as Group A, B, C, D and E without any order of importance but just for classification – and one learner who did not belong in any of the groups but was friendly with the other learners in the Grade 8 group that the researcher was teaching. Group A had four boys who did not talk much in class but, when there was a free period, they would gather and talk among themselves. To hear their responses when asked a question in front of the class, they spoke in such a low register that the researcher needed to get closer to them.

Group B consisted of four girls, two of whom were in the tutorial group that the researcher had arranged for the COVID-19 emergency lockdown (from 26 July 2021). This group was not always together but would do work together when there was group work and would communicate regarding school work during free periods. Two of the girls liked making jokes and would not be as stressed as the other two over the schoolwork. The other two were consistent in asking for clarification of work, even work from other educators, and would raise their hands to answer questions in class.

Group C comprised three boys who would hardly talk in class and would not respond when asked questions in front of other learners. After the researcher had engaged with them individually, they responded with respect and were more vocal when asked questions within their group. One of the learners in the group was very good at technical drawing and the researcher had on two occasions found him drawing for other learners outside his group; after probing, he claimed that they were not as talented as he was.

Group D consisted of two girls and three boys; they sat at the back of the classroom at the far right. One of the girls was very enthusiastic about the subject material (asking and answering questions), while the other girl sat next to her and copied her friend's work, even after being warned against the practice. The boys in front of them would usually have to face backwards to join them to talk, get information or borrow stationery. The boys consisted of two who were considered by their classmates as 'handsome' – one only attended class once a week and one openly expressed his dislike for school and was also absent for a few days a week – and one who was consistently quiet and busy with his schoolwork. He was usually found laughing at the jokes that his male counterparts were making.

Group E was made up of four boys and one girl. This group was scattered around the classroom because, with every lesson, educators would reassign them to different places in the classroom because of the 'disruptions' that they would cause when sitting next to one another.

The classroom setup and commitment towards groups, relationships and activities of the groups show the importance of belonging within this stage of the learners' school life and come across as a feature of the classroom culture at this phase. The two girls who were part of Group B and worked with the researcher in tutorials stated that belonging was a serious concern for them as freshmen. They also mentioned that though they had school relationships with the other two girls, they were still observing the other groups and negotiating with whom else they would 'click'.

In all the interviews with the Grade 8 main participants of this study, they all expressed that their friendships in school were relatively new. Lesego, one of the Grade 9 participants of this study, also said that some friendships that he had were carried over from primary school and that he had still been trying out different friendship groups in Grade 8 and had not yet settled into secure friendships until the end of Grade 9. The following statements are based on the observation of activities within the groups in the classroom space.

5.2.3. Conviviality

Within each group, members would contribute towards one another's progress in completing learning activities or towards the group's academic progress. Within Group A, two boys would speak (though softly) for the others in the group if there were any group activities. The boys in the group would also gaze in unison when one of them was asked a question. The group members would approach one another if they were unclear on anything and would not ask the researcher as the educator. They would rather try to figure things out as a group if any of them did not have the answer.

In Group B, the two girls who had volunteered to join the tutorial group were consistent in being up to date with the subject material and the other two girls would find guidance from them on how to do some of the work. The tutorial girls willingly shared their corrections with the other two girls but only looked to one another, the girl who did not belong to any group or the teacher for clarity on tasks and the subject material. The tutorial girls would however not share their stationery with the other girls, only with one another.

The boys in Group C struggled with stationery but used what they had among themselves. If they did not have anything to work with, they would either ask Group A members, come up with a plan (e.g. if they needed loose paper, they would take some out from the middle of their other scripts) or would not do the task until they were asked why they were not working. It also became a habit to check on them as often as possible.

Phakiso, who was initially one of the main participants of the study, was in Group D. He was closest with the two 'handsome' boys in the classroom. The workbook of the student who was absent most of the time during fieldwork only had one entry of work by the time the researcher left The School. In marking a test, the researcher found that he had copied Phakiso's work word-for-word. Phakiso and the girl who sat behind him (Palesa, for this discussion) would freely lend their books to the two boys, not only for correction but also to help them catch up with their work. Palesa was not well-liked by the rest of the group because of what most learners called *go phapha* 'being forward' because she would ask the most questions in class and would volunteer to answer most questions in the classroom context.

Kagiso, one of the main participants of this study, was in Group E. Group E was known for being the 'jokers' of the classroom and would take most chances in postponing school tasks and speaking on behalf of the whole class (saying that they were either 'too tired from earlier classes' or that 'the school feeding programme had served a heavy meal'). He would snatch the girls' pens and when the girls would tell on him, his whole group would start to make jokes about the girls, either mumbling or saying these jokes aloud. He would also throw the girls' books through a hole in the ceiling because he was taller than they were.

The only girl in Group E would stay out when break times ended and would hang around the communal taps outside, teasing any other learner who was within sight. She would not wear the school skirt and opted for school pants that she would usually pull up to cover her stomach and walk funnily around the classroom after coming back from the lunch break. She responded to *malome* and owned the name as she said: "Sure, *ke nna malome* 'my name is uncle'; I think I remind everyone of their favourite uncle".

Another member of the group would claim to have ‘forgotten’ his books at home, or he would present new books with no writing in them. In one session where the researcher was with them just to invigilate, she let the class take a breather to chat and catch up with their friends. She sat with their group just to get to know them and asked them why they behaved the way that they did and if they behaved like that at home. Kagiso said that school was the only place where he felt true freedom; it was a place where he could just be.

In his interview, he said that he wanted to be well-behaved and that he could keep quiet, but the problems started when he sat with people or was with people. He stated that he liked creating a cheerful environment, filled with laughter and chatty to always show that there were people there. “*Ke rata vibe* ‘I appreciate a vibe’”, he stated. The other learners in the group said that they had strict parents and hardly went out after school. Uncle said that when she did anything wrong at home, she got punished physically and that she acted any way she wanted to at school because there were no repercussions at school, just a mild scolding and warning.

5.2.4. English as a second language and classroom resistance

A topic/situation that got students to be in consensus about something (most and not all, and this narrative was led by the more influential groups in the classroom) was that of the language of instruction.

The Grade 8 group were not particularly fond of learning in the English classroom. Learners attached a general stigma to any learner attempting to answer questions and read aloud in English. In this setting, only the educator was seen as eligible to do so. Learners were also more comfortable with the educator reading for them (when they had to do comprehension exercises and poem readings) and then translating the story for them into Setswana.

As the lessons continued, the researcher realised that most of the learners could not read English out loud and that they refrained from speaking the language in the classroom because they could not pronounce some words in what was known as ‘standard’ English. Most of the learners, from information obtained from the learners, had come from primary schools that were not English medium and were more fluent and confident in reading and writing in Setswana as their first language. There were also visible power dynamics that were identified in this classroom space, which are discussed later in this section.

From observation, humour was used cathartically by learners to make light of this language barrier to learning; they either repeated what a learner was attempting to say in English in mimicry or giggled as a learner struggled with some words while reading aloud. In one of the interactions in

the classroom, the researcher asked why it was important for them to learn English. One of the girls responded in English, saying “Other people don’t know how to speak ...” The whole class interrupted loudly, “*uh, uh. lyho, o maka*” ‘you are lying’. When she completed her response with “...Setswana so we must know English”, the group had already assumed that she was attacking their proficiency in English. One learner said “*yho, ba botlhe re itse English?*”, which means, “Oh, so now we’re all supposed to know how to speak English”, and the whole class laughed. One learner made fun of her mimicking her voice, “I think people who don’t know Setswana must know English” and the whole group laughed. Some learners would label their classmates as someone who *yo o ratang go itira lekgowa* ‘likes to make themselves out to be a white person’ and other learners would laugh at the notion.

5.2.5. Grade 9

Upon the researcher’s arrival at the Grade 9 class, Lerato, a short, expressive young lady, full of life, came to shake her hand and introduced her officially to the other learners. The classroom had four rows of desks; the two rows on the left were for the quiet learners and those on the right side were for the more vocal learners. Lerato and some of the other learners called the setup heaven versus hell (meaning that the quiet side on the left were the ‘residents of heaven’ and the ones on the right side were ‘residents of hell’). Lesego was located on the right side of the classroom, while Thapelo was located within the group on the left. The educators had been asked about this setup and they have said that the class educator set this up to maintain order in the classroom. If the learners on the right would not cooperate, it would allow the educator to work with the learners on the left side for the duration of the class period.

Once the researcher became familiar with the learners as the weeks progressed, she found that some learners on the quiet side were not as quiet as described and the more ‘vocal’ learners were not as vocal. Some learners chose to adhere to the conventions on each side and found themselves belonging to the group as they had been assigned to the group by figures of authority (educators). Lerato would infiltrate all groups and would not have one designated seat.

During free periods, there was intermingling between the two groups and from the researcher’s observation, more learners from the right side would ‘visit’ the left side and form groups. Girls would visit and form groups with girls and likewise with the boys. Girl groups would talk about hair, do each other’s hair, talk about things that happened during break time, the shows that they had seen on television the night before and what they thought would happen next on the shows.

The boys would talk about soccer matches, argue about who the best players were, new cars that had come out, which cars performed better in speed and agility and the best-revamped taxi in

Tlhabane and surrounding areas. Taxi drivers take pride in the sound systems, mag wheels and paintwork of their taxis. They stylise taxis often to signal their 'ownership' of the vehicle even though the ownership is not official. As learners used the taxis to travel to and from school and to town on weekends and saw them throughout the day as they scouted for customers who were travelling locally or to town, taxis were a big topic among the boys in the township.

The exchange of stationery and information was not limited to smaller groups as with the Grade 8 learners. Learners in the Grade 9 class would raise their hands to borrow pens, pencils and rulers from the teacher or ask to borrow the listed items from other learners. In cases where textbooks needed to be shared, they would share with their immediate neighbours. There were however instances where learners would report stolen stationery and, in these cases, students would know who had taken the item. When the researcher found out about this, she carried extra blue pens so that learners who did not have one could get one from her directly. Regarding information, a very small portion of the class would feel free to ask questions when unclear on anything.

Bonding between learners was mostly through verbal humour and the learners bonded with the researcher through such humour as they found that she was drawn to it – she could not help but laugh at the delivery. When one of the learners heard her laughing incessantly at one time, he said, *“Go o ka nna mo klaseng e Ma’am, oo tlhanya”* “if you continue teaching this class for a long time, you will go crazy’.” This signalled that this was a way of life in the classroom; jokes and verbal duelling were a part of their classroom culture.

While the researcher was at The School, she also saw that educators who made jokes related better with the learners. In one instance, an educator walked into the classroom and came to ask for a specific learner. As one of the learners interrogated her about the learner’s surname and appearance and asked for descriptions, she said, *“wena wa lwala, tlhe, maam, motho o wa lwala o”*, which means, “You are sick, ma’am, this person is crazy”. As the learner kept probing, the educator said, *“hey, ke thaka yaago wena? Ga ke nkoiko wa’go autlwe”*, which means “hey, am I your age mate? I’m not your grandmother, do you hear me?” The girl and the whole class laughed as the educator joined in. It dawned on her that humour was part of school culture and that it was one of the underlying flows that eased tensions, encouraged resilience and strengthened relationships.

Some of the teasing that occurred in the classroom included learners making fun of one another’s hygiene, *Maam, o rekele o Jik a kgonoo tlhapa* ‘Ma’am please buy this one Jik (bleach) so that he will be able to bathe’. When the researcher asked some learners making a noise why they did

not try to keep quiet like some of the quiet learners, one of them said, “Ga gona batho”, that’s why ‘there is nobody there that is why’. ”*Ga gona batho* is an informal metaphor that means that someone does not think or is dim-witted, much like the English idiom, ‘there’s nobody home’. One of the quiet learners mildly said, “*O tla swaba* ‘you will regret it’.”

When one learner claimed to have known the researcher from the past, another learner said, “*O ke ntate mogolo o, kgale o moruta. O nale ditlogolo, o motona* ‘this one is an old man, you’ve been teaching him for a while, he has nieces and nephews, he’s old’.” An example of a verbal duel would go thus: “*O ska ba bona ba ntse yana, maam, ba tlhapetswe ke sanitiser, ba e nwa* ‘don’t be fooled by them, Ma’am, they’re all drunk on sanitiser; they drink it’.” In response, one of the learners said, “*Ska mmona a le jaana, o jela ko morago ga ditiolet* ‘don’t be fooled by him, he eats behind the toilets.’”

One of the other learners commented as follows, “*Ska swa, ga kena R5 ya matshediso* ‘don’t die, I don’t have R5 for bereavement comfort money (*matshediso* is money, a visitation, any food item, or anything provided to bereaved families during the early stages of grief)’.” The statements and responses would have laughter in between and none of the learners showed any signs of being offended that they were at the other end of the joke.

This kind of teasing is referred to as *go gwara* ‘to duel verbally’. According to Maribe and Brookes (2014: 207),

Gwara ‘teasing [verbal duelling]’ occurs in male group interactions on street corners in this township community and among pre-adolescent boys and occasionally pre-adolescent girls. It is a performance genre that plays an important role in male sociability. Its explicit function is to entertain and amuse. However, it also functions as a way of exploring and negotiating social status, hierarchies and alignments in friendship groups. *Gwara* is sometimes a playful way of challenging the dominant member in the group and in increasing one’s status by demonstrating linguistic superiority. It is a test of skill, self-control and maintaining face. To master the game, there has to be a certain level of linguistic wit, speedy response and knowing how and when to deliver a punchline. *Gwara* involves exchanges between two verbal duellers as well as audience participation. Creativity, originality, profanity, timing and being able to respond to an insult while keeping one’s dignity and self-control are key skills.

This practice resembles the folk African American practice called the Dozens, explored by Dollard (1939) and Abrahams (1962). In an African context, similar versions of *gwara* have been explored like, *izichothozo*, the isiNdebele folklore insult duelling game as explored by Ndlovu (2015) and Kenyan *mchongoano* as explored by Kihara (2015).

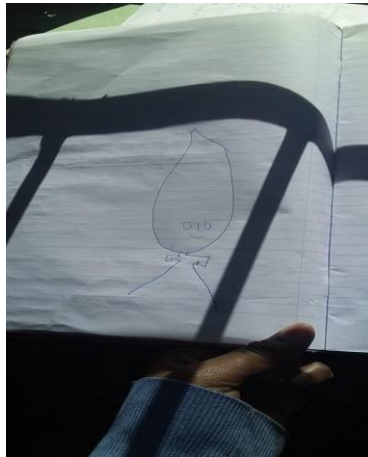


Figure 11 Caricature mocking a friend (Photo taken by author: 17 September 2021)

The researcher found this drawing being passed around among one of the groups of boys, with bouts of laughter all around. When she asked what was funny, she was told that this was one of her classmates. When it was said aloud, it turned out that the learner knew about this depiction and, while laughing along, said, “*mara lona la tella* ‘but you guys are disrespectful’.”

5.3 Bonding through Humour: The Teacher as the Joke

An incident broke the ice between the researcher and her Grade 9 class. She was in a hurry to leave the classroom as she had exceeded the lesson time and the next educator had just walked in. She hurriedly collected scripts from the learners and Lerato helped her carry them out. The floor was freshly buffed, and she was wearing pumps. She lost her balance while walking, slipped and fell. As Thato was coming up behind her, she tripped over her and fell. They both fortunately did not sustain any injury. They lay there on the floor laughing, as did the educator and the rest of the class.

As the day progressed, some educators had heard of this incident and asked the researcher if she was okay –some of course laughing with and at me. This became an icebreaker between the researcher and the educators with whom she had not yet grown familiar or close. One educator came up with a song to the tune of one of the poems that was well-known in the school, “Me and

Lerato my friend, we ran together, we fell together”. She, in turn, made fun of the researcher with the song every time she saw her, whether they were busy working or not.

Anthropologists, Howard and Kennedy (2006) in a USA ethnography report that humour within the school setting can be used as a way of building and maintaining group cohesion. It can also be argued that the act of embarrassing students who go against the grain of what the rest of the group is doing, can also be seen as a form of hazing, which according to Howard and Kennedy (2006) is a way in which the group in power initiates ‘outcasts’ into their group.

5.4 Summary and Conclusion

In Chapter 5 how learners in the stage of adolescence form *communitas* to experience school in a community was discussed. The learners form what anthropologists of education call classroom communities and within these communities, there is interdependence. Conviviality is shown within these classroom communities to exchange forms of capital to either get schoolwork completed together or to exchange instruments. Learners are also mutually supportive of one another’s positions and views within a united group context. Humour is used by learners cathartically when things are not going well and as a bonding mechanism; humour serves as part of school and classroom culture.

This thesis has demonstrated the varying ways in which meaning is made by boys in a township school and by their social environments. Through a multi-sited approach, the research observed and interpreted the terrains that boys move along and the artefacts that they drew their construction of personhoods and masculinities from. The investigation began at the school site where practices and precepts of conviviality, religiosity, *seriti* 'dignity' and *botho* "humanity/the state of being a good person' were observed as tenets which management, educators and support staff used to prepare learners for incorporation into adult society and functions. These tenets were also identified as reflecting those of African personhood and were discussed in reference to scholarship on African philosophy and anthropology.

Educators in this space considered teaching as a labour of love. Educators believed that they had the responsibility to be like kin to their learners. This study also showed that learners in the stage of adolescence within this context formed *communitas* as they went through the stage of liminality to get through school. The learners formed what anthropologists of education call classroom communities and within these communities, there was interdependence. Conviviality was shown within classroom communities through the exchanging of forms of capital by either completing school work together or by exchanging learning instruments. Learners were also mutually supportive of one another's positions and views within a united group context. Humour was used cathartically by learners when things were not going well and as a bonding mechanism. Humour also serves as part of school and classroom culture.

The investigation thereafter followed the boys to their homes. At the homes of the boys who participated in the study, principles of African personhood, including conviviality within the home and with neighbours, hospitality and a welcoming spirit towards strangers, and a mutuality of being within their homes, were observed. Rites of passage amongst the participants in this study were family-centred: how a man should take care of himself and how he should take care of his family were at the centre of conversations regarding preparations for becoming men and conversation concerning personhoods.

Guardians and educators taught the boys similar tenets of African personhood at home and at school, respectively and simultaneously. Responsibility and care were central to what was taught at home while doing well in formal education was taught as being instrumental in achieving social and economic mobility. Hygiene, non-violence, choosing good company and respecting others were taught at school in preparation for manhood. When the products of these aspired

masculinities and personhoods were combined, the idealised responsible Tlhabane man could be imagined.

The school site and the home site in this context were observed as the imagined spaces (metaphorical initiation ritual sites) of being separated from their 'free will', while liminality was the process of choice in learning what adults were teaching the boys, choices to learn and choosing to use what they had learned. Within the stage of liminality, the boys had also set their moral compasses around tenets of *botho*, a feature of African personhood. Masculinities and personhoods were therefore performed differently across varying spaces according to what participants negotiated as either appropriate for the situation, or according to what outcome they would want to have emanated from the interactions. This was observed across spaces: the kinds of personhoods and masculinity that some boys performed at home were not identical to those that they performed at school. Personhoods and masculinities were therefore tools for affirming 'acceptable' personas, and were ways used by the boys to navigate the research site according to the circular societal knowledge that they had acquired.

Rites of passage were where personhood and masculinity met in the research site. Organised and ceremonial rites of passage, where they had been performed, were traditional and some were celebrated according to religious (Christian) 'confirmations' of being incorporated into adulthood in the church. These were both gendered as highlights were made on how a man must behave and included the values to which a boy must strive towards. School and soccer were however identified as unspoken rites of passage in this thesis. They both exhibit the procedures and the essence of what traditional initiation schools usually teach boys in their transitions to becoming men. As stated earlier in this conclusion, tenets of African personhood were taught in preparation for adulthood at The School, and the importance of succeeding in studies in order to be able to provide for one's self and for loved ones was deeply emphasized. Soccer trained boys in dignity, discipline, teamwork, interdependence and in group cohesion. The societies where the boys stayed incorporated the boys into meaningful roles of contributing to their society by supporting them in soccer, and by including them in the preservation of the sport as part of the township and surrounding areas' culture.

Masculinity and personhood in this research site were therefore created with the local environment. Even whilst choosing types of music, games, movies, and television shows to consume, the boys chose content that resembled their personal circumstances, environments and ways of life. They also consumed content that assisted them in building the skills they required in daily life (like driving and soccer). Television, music and social media opened up a world where the boys could envision their dreams clear. They offered sites of imagination that

they could use to articulate where they wanted to be in the future. These imagined future realities were based on what their educators and guardians had idealised as the picture of success. Masculinities that the boys identified with from television and from music resemble their real life personas and those that they admired resembled the kinds of masculinities that were esteemed in their society.

The boys' aspirations for completing basic education, prowess in soccer and therefore, 'upwardly socially and economically mobile lives' also mirrored what had been taught to them by their guardians, educators and sports as being successful masculinity and personhood. This thesis therefore supports Qambela (2021) who offers a counterargument against the idea that traditional forms of initiation, though still dominant in the construction of African masculinities, are not the only determinants of stature and associations between men. According to Qambela (2022: 48), social class and employment (2021:1) assume more importance in a man's path to constructing their masculinity. The factors that guardians and educators emphasised as integral in preparing the boys to become men were focused on the boys being able to financially support themselves and their loved ones in the future. Though this aligned with what was taught at traditional initiations, it was more closely aligned with adults wanting the boys to overcome existing social and economic challenges. Furthermore, the world's adaptation towards neoliberalism has produced new priorities in terms of who boys aspire and are encouraged to aspire to be. Money (and therefore attaining a job) and social standing currently play a larger role than traditional status in the construction of masculinities. Tenets of traditional and religious initiation practices are however still observed in preparing boys for manhood, for example, even though education and soccer have a social status and possible economic status attached to them, the boys' dignity, discipline and respect for others are still highly prioritised.

The recommendation that I would offer policymakers as a result of the findings of this study is to consider the importance of including technologies as part of all school structures in order to combine the zeal that some learners have for technologies with formal learning. I would also re-emphasise Mfecane's work (2018; 2020) that recommends that students of masculinity include situational (Mfecane, 2018) elements like the understanding of local knowledge in the research, considerations and discussions surrounding constructions of African masculinity amongst boys and men.

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