

Gender, sex, power and inequalities:  
an investigation of African femininities in the context of  
HIV and AIDS

BY

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## DECLARATION

I, Prim-Rose Makhosazane Shabane, declare that the entirety of the work submitted for this dissertation is my own, and that all the sources and views of authorities used throughout the research have been acknowledged. This work has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

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Professor Deevia Bhana

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

Gender is inherent in all patriarchal cultures given that women and girls in these societies are relegated to a significantly lower status than men and boys. Many researchers acknowledge the importance of addressing gender inequality in order to adequately understand and address HIV and AIDS transmission and prevention. However, there remains in this area a more direct focus on the specific cultural attitudes and practices that expose women and girls to HIV infections. Professionals in the educational field need to specifically address gender norms and roles and their influence on young people's sexual behaviour, particularly, with regards to risky behaviour that often has consequences for women and young girls. Sexuality is part and parcel of young girls' experiences through adulthood which is manifested in personal friendships, relations and social interaction. These encounters constitute sites within which sexual identities are developed, practiced and actively produced through processes of negotiation. As a result of societal influences, these encounters vary immensely between boys and girls because gender inequality has a significant impact on choices available to women and girls, which are often constrained by coercion and violence.

Drawing on qualitative research conducted in a high school in KwaMashu, North of Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal, the study investigated ways in which young girls (16-17) give meaning to sexuality, sexual risks and how gender is embedded within these meanings. The study answered three critical questions: What do young girls regard as risky sexual behaviour? Why do young girls engage in risky sexual activities? How is gender connected to sexual risk? Data came from participants' focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with 12 young girls.

The study revealed that through social and cultural practices some young girls construct complex gendered relations of domination and subordination

that position boys and girls differently, often creating gender inequalities and sexual vulnerability for those gendered as girls. Young girls' vulnerability is characterised by confusing experiences coupled with silences from their parents' side about sexuality. The distinctive experiences are complex tensions and contradictions surrounding constructions of sexuality that are predicated upon unequal power and gender relations characterised by coercion, *ukuthwala* and the control of young girls' sexuality and gendered experiences that put young girls at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS.

The study recommends that parents must communicate with young people (boys and girls) about sexuality. There should be policies that are put in place by all the education stakeholders to address issues of sexuality and gender imbalances within schools. This will help young people to develop the skills needed to adequately negotiate safe sex, avoid risky behaviour and coercive situations, help young people to maintain healthy relationships and address vulnerabilities and promote gender equality and equity in our society.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Many 14 to 17 year old young girls in Lusikisiki, Eastern Cape are victims of *ukuthwalwa* (bride abduction) (Scorgie, 2002). This is a mode of getting wives in this community that is tolerated and not uncommon, where men kidnap young girls in a violent and cruel way and later go to report to the girls' parents. These men see nothing sinister in what they are doing to the young girls. When interviewed by a journalist on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree TV programme, Debora Patta, men in Lusikisiki had this to say:

It is our 'culture', we grew up with it and it can never change." Another one said, "Our fathers said we must take the younger ones because they are pure and inexperienced. If you take the ones who have boyfriends, they will always remember the first boyfriend when you have sex with them.

When the parents were interviewed, it was clear that they support this practice. Some parents were angry at young girls who ran away to a safe place (where girls are taken care of and also sent back to school) called Palmerton, saying that young girls should not just take decisions to leave their husbands.

In another incident that happened in KwaMaphumulo, in KwaZulu-Natal, a 19 year old grade 12 learner was abducted by her boyfriend when she was coming from school. The boyfriend denied the girl a chance to go back to school and write her final examination. When the boyfriend was asked he stated that he had paid *lobolo* for the girl and is not going to allow her to go back and write because she is now his wife. He further stated that although

he did his grade 12 and furthered his education, he will not allow his wife to go back to school (Ngwane, 2011). These parents want cattle and money. It is not unusual in poor South African communities like these ones that a young girl child is the one who is sacrificed. When the young girls were interviewed, they indicated that they do not want to get married to these men at all, but they are struggling without any parental help, as a result they ended up running away and leaving their husbands to a safe place. Some of these girls stated that they are scared of being killed by their husbands wanting their *lobolo* (bride price) back from their parents.

It is imperative to note that this study is not about young girls in Lusikisiki, or their experiences of *ukuthwalwa*, but about girls in KwaZulu-Natal and the ways gender subordinates them just as gender and culture subordinate girls in the examples cited above. Although the young girls in this study are from different contexts, their sexual cultures have in one way or the other been affected by the fact that they are women. Through the responses from the young girls in this study it came out that the practice of *ukuthwalwa* is something that most girls are scared of.

As women, young girls have little say about their lives. Parents often give away their girl children and get *lobolo* (bride price) to reduce poverty. What these parents are doing is against the South African Constitution, which states that every child has a right to proper education (Ngubane, 2010). It seems as if in Lusikisiki particularly and elsewhere in South Africa this right is far from reality. *Ukuthwalwa* destroys and changes the lives of the young girls, for some it is permanent. In a television documentary (Patta, 2011), one of the girls stated that she had been abused and when she reported this to her parents they told her to say nothing about her situation but to persevere and keep her marriage. The young girl revealed that because her husband has been cheating with other women she was now sick and was infected with

Human Immune Virus (HIV) by her husband. She revealed that she was afraid to disclose her status to him but she had opted to run to a safe place (Patta, 2011). The questions remained how many young South African girls experience such abuse without their voices being heard because they are women? What is it about 'culture' that is so important that parents, men in particular, sacrifice their girl child for bride price? When are these men going to realise that they are putting young girls' lives at risk of contracting HIV? It is therefore important to note that the violence and unequal power between men and women that is reflected in the case of Lusikisiki (Sonke Gender Justice, 2008), is one of the root causes of the rapid spread of HIV in South Africa (Ngubane, 2010). Outdated and unhealthy definitions of what it means "to be a man" or "to be a woman" contribute hugely to the problem of HIV and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in South Africa. The adoption of fixed gender roles result in high levels of gender inequality and violence against women and young girls (Pettifor, Rees, Stevens, 2004).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Gender inequality is inherent in all patriarchal cultures given that women and girls in societies are relegated to a significantly lower status than men and boys (Dowsett, 2003; Greig, Peacock, Jewkes & Msimang, 2008; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998). These researchers acknowledge the importance of addressing gender inequality in order to adequately understand and address HIV and AIDS transmission and prevention. In a Sonke Gender Justice Report (2008) it is stated that gender has become a major conceptual tool for understanding the evolving HIV pandemic globally. However, there remains in this area the need to more directly focus on the specific cultural attitudes and practices that expose women and girls to HIV infections (Mhlongo, 2010). Researchers in the educational field especially, have a role to play in addressing gender norms

and roles and how they influence sexual behaviour, particularly with regards to risky behaviour that always has serious consequences for women and young girls. Gender inequality also has a significant impact on the choices available to women and young girls, which are often constrained by coercion and violence (Hoffman, O'Sullivan, Harrison, Dolezal & Monroe-Wise, 2006; Marston & King, 2006). Despite the increase of awareness, prevention strategies, communication and education about HIV and AIDS, countless women and girls are still affected by the twin epidemics, gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS. These high levels of domestic and sexual violence are mostly perpetuated by men. Violence and the unequal power between men and women are seen as one of the root causes of the rapid spread of HIV in South Africa (Sonke Gender Justice, 2008). In spite of all the knowledge in the media, hospitals, schools and in communities, young people still remain vulnerable to the contraction of the disease. For this reason, young people need to know more about their sexuality, how they enact their sexuality, and why they take risks in the context of AIDS, so that we can fight HIV infections.

Therefore, this study investigates the ways in which young girls understand their sexuality and sexual risks and how gender, sex, power and inequalities are embedded in this. The study will be searching for ways in which young people's sexual and gendered identities can be better understood so that they can become agents of change. Understanding alone is not sufficient; research has proven that HIV and AIDS impact largely on teaching and learning (Bhana *et al.*, 2006). The fact that young people are dying whilst in school because of AIDS, has negative impact on the whole teaching and learning process. Therefore, as a teacher I am interested in knowing what puts these young women at risk and then suggest ways in which the young can be helped, in order to assist them to work positively towards understanding their sexuality.

By making young girls understand their sexuality they might be able to deal with different sexual contexts they may find themselves in, thus promoting a healthy sexuality and addressing issues of vulnerability and risk-taking.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

My involvement in the MACAIDS Fund Leadership Initiative project in 2010, which involved an intervention programme with grade 8 boys and girls, prompted my interest in this study. The first aim of the project was to decrease the incidence of sexual coercion as an HIV prevention strategy among teenage boys and girls and its objectives were to develop teenage girls and boys' understandings of sexual coercion as part of gender based violence and its links to HIV infection. The second aim was to develop skills for consensual decision-making with regards to sexuality among teenagers leading to safer sex and relationships. The project aimed at increasing awareness among grade 8 boys and girls about the effects of sexual coercion as part of gender based violence and its links to HIV and AIDS. The involvement of boys in the programme, rather than just working to empower girls, was motivated by the aim to challenge the patriarchal society and its beliefs, and to equip boys with knowledge that would help them choose differently, becoming men that are responsible and respectful to women. If learners, mainly boys, are well equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills they would be in a better position to make wise choices about sex and relationships, which could reduce their vulnerability and the vulnerability of girls to HIV infection and Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

In this project, during the needs analysis phase, it emerged that boys in the group had multiple sexual partners and for these boys it had become a norm to have many girlfriends. Different studies (Dowsett, 2003; Greig, Peacock, Jewkes & Msimang, 2008; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Wood, Maforah & Jewkes,

1998) have indicated that women and girls are put at risk of contracting HIV, owing to patriarchal gender norms in our society. It became clear to me that girls and boys in this context were also at risk of contracting HIV due to this normalised behaviour. Having multiple concurrent partners still continues in our communities even though there are awareness and intervention programmes that are implemented with the intention of helping and empowering young people on issues of HIV and AIDS. In this community men and boys are still trapped in the cultural practices that render women and girls powerless in their ability to practice safe sex. This results in women and girls being constrained by cultural beliefs from challenging gender norms.

As I watched 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree (13 September, 2011) on the practice of *ukuthwalwa* I became interested in understanding what meaning these young girls give to their sexuality and to sexual risk and how gender is embedded in these meanings. I need to do this study hoping that it might contribute in empowering those who are involved in designing HIV and AIDS intervention programmes to address issues of sexuality and the meanings young people give to these. It is important for teachers and all stakeholders in the Department of Education to understand the development of young girls against their social and cultural backgrounds. The study might also influence the choices young people make with regard to their sexual behaviour. Furthermore, it might enlighten the society in terms of understanding how patriarchal practices might put young people at risk.

Another important issue in the South African context is that sex and issues related to sexuality are taboo subjects which parents find difficult to discuss with their children. Young girls in the Lusikisiki example stated abuse and pointed out that they cannot speak about such things with their parents; instead they get told what to do about their sexuality. Ngubane (2010) clearly states that the issue of sexual socialisation plays a crucial role in the way

men and women position themselves and act as social beings. He further states that it is gender not sex that is more powerful and influential in determining behaviour. If this is the case, I therefore argue that studies that will address issues of sexuality and sexual risk are relevant in a country that has high HIV and AIDS prevalence. There are power dynamics that are pronounced in young people's relationships, where gender imbalance is enhanced by a number of factors and different experiences (Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). These may include understanding who the person is and how young girls might view themselves in relation to men and boys.

One of the causes for the unequal balance of power is societal practices which conflict with interventions against HIV and AIDS, such as condom use. The vulnerability of women is still a major issue in our society. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how gender might be impacting on the meanings given by young girls to sexuality and sexual risks. In this study, while I do not ignore existing studies which have tried to unpack how gender, sex, power and inequality put women at risk of contracting HIV, I focus on and thus address HIV related-issues from a unique context which has significant differences from the contexts explored by the existing studies.

Pressures from the society and limitations through which young women have to negotiate when and how they engage in sexual activities impinge directly on how to make decisions about the safety of their sexual engagements and their pleasure. The power of young women to control sexual practices can then play a key role in the transmission or limitation of sexually transmitted diseases. This study seeks to investigate how gender and power are constructed and how this can help to understand how girls view their sexuality and make meanings of these.

### **1.3.1 Research questions**



#### 1.3.1.1 Key Question:

- ❖ How do young African women construct their femininities, and what effect does it have for their sexuality?

#### 1.3.1.2 Sub-questions:

- ❖ What do young township girls regard as risky sexual behaviour?
- ❖ What types of risky behaviours do these young girls engage in?
- ❖ How is gender connected to sexual risk?
- ❖ How do culture and gender intersect to make these young girls vulnerable to HIV?

This study intended to investigate ways in which young girls (16-17) give meaning to sexuality and sexual risks, and how gender is embedded within these meanings. This will help to understand what puts young women at risk of being infected with HIV and AIDS in a township secondary school located in KwaMashu in the Mafukuzela-Ghandi circuit, Pinetown district. I have chosen this school because of convenience as I am teaching in it. Learners in this school come from predominantly disadvantaged backgrounds, where poverty is rife. Young girls (16-17) formed a target population in this study, because research indicates that young women are three times more at risk of contracting HIV than their men counterparts (Marston & King, 2006).

As a teacher I was also interested in knowing what put these young women at risk and also in suggesting what further research is required in order to help work positively towards better sexual health and well being. In addition, I was interested in addressing the crises facing women because of gender inequalities, gender violence and AIDS. This interest emanated from what I have observed in my community and in my school as someone who has to deal with HIV-related issues in my class and as teacher. Countless women

and young girls are affected by the twin epidemics, gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS.

I grew up in a big family and my father's step-brother used to beat his wife and call her names. He used 'culture' as an excuse to abuse her, stating that he had paid *lobolo* to her parents, denying her a good life and money to buy clothing for the children and woman's needs. He used to say a woman and children should respect the head of the household, and that he was a lion and he roared in his house. He said as a man, it was within his 'culture' to do as he wanted and made decisions in his house. At that time it seemed as if my aunt was never bothered that she was abused or else she did not know that she was being abused. She always said she must have done something or did not do it right and that made her husband angry. As a girl, growing up seeing this behaviour I was confused because what was 'culture' for my father's brother was not 'culture' for my father. My father never beat my mother. I had to ask myself, what kind of 'culture' could allow my aunt to be beaten but spared my mother. I was young, growing up confused and I could not do anything nor understand what was going on. When I grew older I vowed I was going to find answers because I could not speak about this to my father because it would have been rude to speak about adults in that manner. I now understand that my aunt was being abused by her husband and 'culture' was used to justify and excuse her husband's abusive behaviour towards her. My father's step-brother used 'culture' to defend gender discrimination and violence towards his family. This behaviour is still perpetuated in our communities by some men who believe that to be a man, one need to engage in violent acts that will prove one's power and domination in terms of gender.

In trying to highlight the problems faced by women and girls, it is also important to draw on my experiences as a teacher. Last year (in 2010), a grade twelve girl died because of AIDS. She was young, beautiful and full of

life; she had just started writing her matric final examinations. She only wrote three papers and fell sick. She was hospitalized for a week and she passed on. As a school we were saddened by her sudden death and felt we did not do much for our young girls. This is not the only girl who has passed away in school but I mention this one because she had at least reached grade twelve and her family was ready to send her to a tertiary institution. During the sermon on the day of her funeral, her uncle told the mourners that her boyfriend had died and she had also died of AIDS. We were all surprised by this revelation and he urged the school to do something about HIV to empower learners, especially girls. I vowed to do something for the girls and I kept my promise.

I am sharing these two stories as a woman, a teacher and a mother because I believe that sexual and domestic violence and HIV and AIDS are everyone's business. The girl died two years ago, but I still ask myself: What makes these girls get involved with men, who infect them with HIV?

In my opinion it seems as if the vulnerability of women and girls in South Africa is perpetuated by the position they find themselves in, in relation to that of men and boys, given that young people constitute a high percentage of South African population (Hallman, 2008). It is then important to investigate what puts young people at risk, particularly young women. According to Hallman (2008), these youth need to know that sexuality is a natural aspect of the transition to adulthood.

#### **1.4 Research Design**

The study employed an interpretive qualitative approach to elicit data on how young girls (16-17) construct their sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS. Due to the fact that the study is interested in finding more depth on how

these young construct their sexuality, qualitative approaches seemed to be relevant. These approaches are concerned with exploring in-depth meaning, as given by the participants.

#### **1.4.1 Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was most effective in allowing the researcher to access data about the young girls' lived experiences in a township secondary school. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions were used as instruments to gather data. These tools were utilised because they allowed for probing to take place whenever possible. According to Cohen *at al.* (2007), interviews enable participants, be they interviewers or interviewees, to discuss their interpretations of the world they live in and express feelings about how they regard situations from their own point of view. Focus group discussions were used to encourage full participation and interaction among members of the group and also to probe for clarity of aspects. The focus group interviews presented valuable information on how participants talked about their lived experiences and how they responded in a situation where they were exposed to the views of and experiences of others.

#### **1.4.2 Location of the Study**

The study was conducted in a secondary school in KwaMashu Township, North of Durban. The school was chosen because the researcher is working in this school. It is amongst low-cost government RDP houses, some of which are in a bad state. Just recently, a shopping mall has been built near the school. The school is multicultural, with most learners from the Shembe religion and a few Christian learners. The Shembe religion has impacted hugely on the lives of young people in this school.

#### **1.4.3 Context of the Research Site**

This secondary school was part of a combined school until 2004, when the school was divided into a primary school and a secondary school. It is situated in one of the poorest areas in Durban, with an enrolment of 1500 learners and a staff of 52 teachers. Learners come from surrounding townships, such as KwaMashu, Bester, Ntuzuma, Lindelani, Newtown, Phoenix, Inhlungwane, Mount Royal and Emzomusha.

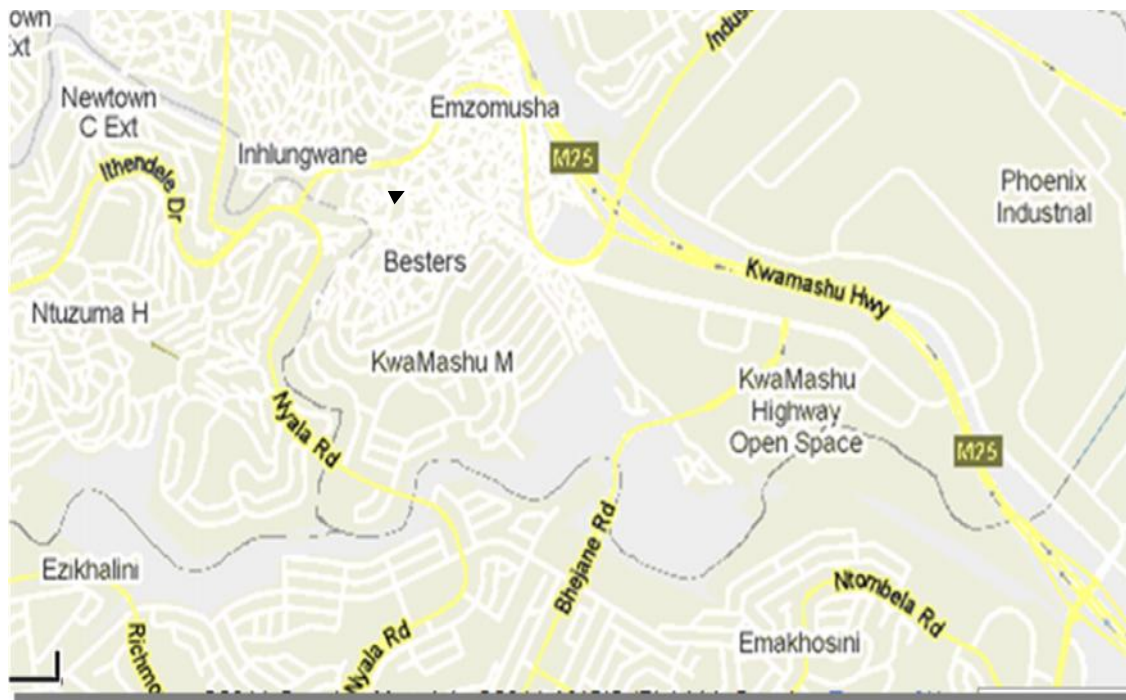


Figure 1 Showing the map of the research site.

### 1.5 Sampling

Purposive sampling was chosen for a specific purpose. The aim was to select a particular group that would generate relevant data about the lived experiences of 12 young girls aged 16–17. Participants were young girls in grade 12, selected randomly from grade 12 classes. I chose these young girls

because according to De Vos *et al.* (2002) and Maree (2007), purposive sampling is mostly used to access people who are ‘knowledgeable’ about particular issues, based on a variety of factors such as power and experiences. As a result of their age and their immediate surroundings, they seemed to have knowledge about what went on in their community and homes.

## **1.6 Chapter Divisions**

Chapter 1 — Introduction

Chapter 2 — Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3 — Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4 — Data Analysis and Discussion

Chapter 5 — Conclusions and Implications

## **1.7 Conclusion**

Some African cultures have a deep influence on the ways in which women and young girls celebrate their sexuality. While ‘culture’ is celebrated in most African communities, cultural beliefs are still used by some men to engage in abusive behaviours and cultural practices that harm women and young girls and expose them to HIV. Culture, gender and women’s rights intersect in complicated ways within South African families. These cultural norms contribute immensely to the spread of HIV and AIDS in South Africa (Ngubane, 2010). Women and young girls have less status and less money (or none) than their counterparts, as well as less power to make their own

decisions with regard to their sexuality. There is an urgent role that all South Africans, particularly men, need to play in combating the spread of HIV, by challenging the ingrained perceptions about cultural values and beliefs when dealing with issues of HIV and AIDS. Women and young girls need to see themselves as equals first so that men see them as equals and treat them as equals.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

The research study seeks to investigate ways in which young girls (16–17) give meaning to sexuality and sexual risks, and how gender is embedded within these meanings. The study also seeks to understand young South African femininities in the context of HIV and AIDS. The literature connected to this study is discussed in this chapter.

##### 2.1.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study investigates the sexual cultures of young girls in the context of HIV and AIDS. It proposes to investigate young girls' lived experiences in a specific context in a Durban township school, by trying to establish what meaning they give to their sexualities. Girls are gendered beings having their own identities and are active participants capable of making their meanings. The social constructionist framework provides the lens for my investigation of the role of gender, sex, power and inequality in shaping these young women's sexuality and how these girls construct their femininities. According to social constructionists, sexuality is defined based on temporal and cultural factors of a particular group (Eadie, 2004). Social constructionists believe that anyone with aspirations to know more about young people's sexual relationships must take into considerations the power dynamics within which beliefs, practices and sexual identities are embedded (Holland *et al.*, 1990). The pressures by the society and constraints through which these young girls negotiate their sexual encounters restrain them from making choices about



their sexual activities (Holland *et al.*, 1990). For these young girls their femininities are constructed in relation to masculinity.

The study is also informed by feminist theory which highlights that individuals occupy conflicting and mobile spaces and therefore do not have any fixed identities. These theorists argue that for a long time the lives and experiences of women have been ignored or misinterpreted (Eadie, 2004). In the heart of the feminist lies the assumption that realities are socially created and that there is a close link between oppression and practices of the individual and society at large (Ngubane, 2010). What goes on in the society and the limitations of being young women pose challenges for young women to negotiate their sexual encounters. This therefore impinges directly on their ability to make wise choices about safer sex and pleasure. Given choices, the power of young women to have control over their sexual encounters can therefore play a huge role in the transmission or limitation of sexually transmitted diseases. This study seeks to investigate how South African township young girls construct their femininities and how this can help us to understand how these girls view their sexuality and make meaning of these. Feminist theory has been used to illustrate the exercise of power which structures social relationships between young men and young women (Holland *et al.*, 1990).

### **2.1.2. The Global State of HIV and AIDS**

It was estimated by a UNAIDS report in 2009 that there were 33.4 million people living with HIV globally (UNAIDS, 2010). Of these, 22.4 million were from the Sub-Saharan Africa and 60% were women. Although the rate of new HIV infections has decreased, the total number of people living with HIV continues to rise (UNAIDS, 2010). While the prevalence of HIV has decreased

in some parts of the world, South Africa still has the highest prevalence of people with HIV in the world (UNAIDS 2010).

### **2.1.3. South Africa**

About 11.3 million South Africans were estimated as living with HIV in 2009, nearly one third (31%) more than the 8.6 million (8.2 million–9.1 million) people living with HIV in the country a decade ago (UNAIDS, 2010). Women and girls are more at risk of getting HIV infections in South Africa, as a result of this more than half of all people living with HIV in this country are women and girls. The UNAIDS (2010) report showed that in South Africa, young women between the ages of 15–24 are as much as eight times more likely to be infected with HIV than men of the age. According to the UNAIDS report (2010), on average in South Africa there are three women infected with HIV for every two men who are infected. This difference is most distinct in the 15–24 age groups, where three young women for every one young man are infected. These statistics put South Africa as the epicentre of the AIDS epidemic. Studies show that 10.2% of South African youth is infected with HIV and AIDS (Bhana & Pattman, 2009). This might be the result of the prevalence of concurrent multiple sexual partners and practices around safe sex where youth choose to use or not to use condoms. According to UNAIDS (2010), protecting women and girls from HIV will mean protecting them against gender based violence. For young girls, an important social reality is risk to HIV and sexual risk; hence this study is investigating ways in which young girls (16–17) give meaning to sexuality and sexual risks, and how gender is embedded within these meanings.

#### 2.1.4 Gender and Power

Understanding gender power and sexual is important in intimate partner relationships. Firstly, the concept of gender has been defined by Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) as the structure of social relations that puts emphasis on the biological differences between men and women, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that also highlights the reproductive characteristics between bodies to social processes. According to Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), gender relations are always constituted in everyday lives and the gender power arrangement of society involves social structures, which all place men in authority over women.

According to this dimension, men are the dominating sex, have more power over women. This can be seen in rape, in women and young girls failing to negotiate sex terms, and in gender based violence. The power imbalances between men and women, combined with the patterns of behaviour among many men often associated with traditional gender roles, suggest that men have a vital role to play in determining the future of the epidemic in Africa (Sonke Gender Justice Network, 2008). Literature also indicates that women and girls have limited social or economic power that they need to put pressure on men to use condoms or to dump partners that put them at risk of contracting HIV (Holland *et al.*, 1990; Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). In these researchers' views, social norms in many communities support the subordinate status of women and girls, giving men power to initiate sex and also give terms of how and when sex should be engaged in, thus making it extremely difficult for women and girls to protect themselves.

Jewkes, Morrell and Christofides (2009) also claim that gender is negotiated in part through relationships of power. These power practices contribute in the organisation of social structures and transactions of the daily lives of men and women. It is these transactions that assist in sustaining and reproducing broader structures of power and inequality. According to Jewkes, Morrell and Christofides (2009), these power relationships are positioned and formed in the practice of health behaviour. As a result of these power practices, men use power and behavioural patterns to demonstrate dominant and hegemonic masculine ideals that clearly establish them as men. According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity is seen as the dominant form of masculinity at a given place and time. It is the socially and culturally glorified gender construction that put women as inferior and shapes men's social relationships with women and other men. Hegemonic masculinity also represents power and authority (Connell, 1995, p.75). Literature clearly indicates that gender and power impact hugely on the choices that exist for women and girls, which are sometimes controlled by men through force and violence (Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Marston & King, 2006).

Sexuality of young people has highlighted imbalances in gender power that put hindrances to South African young women negotiating safe sex (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). According to MacPhail and Campbell (2001), sexuality for men is associated with multiple sexual partners and their masculinity is defined by dominance over women. However, MacPhail and Campbell (2001) state that there has been a trend towards considering the broader social and community contexts in which young people negotiate sexuality. Gender plays a prominent role in shaping the way girls are exposed to risky sexual behaviours (Marston & King, 2006). Women and young girls are still dominated by men and young boys, according to the norms whereby it is accepted for men and boys to be extremely heterosexually active and women and girls to be submissive.

The practice of power entails that young women's experiences of pressured and unwanted sex have become normalised in socio-cultural understandings of gender, love, sex and consent, which devalue women's sexuality (Meenagh, 2011). Male dominance over women in sexual relationships is always seen as normal and expected by the society (Holland *et al.*, 1990; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). This means that it is men and boys who determine when and how sex occurs, which may result in girls experiencing rape, violence and assault within relationships. Wood *et al.* (1999) write in a Western context that in their Women, Risk and AIDS Project they found that women are encouraged to attach themselves socially to young men in order to succeed as conventionally feminine women. Whilst these researchers found that sexual identities of heterosexual women were ideologically constructed, in a context which defined sex in terms of men's drives and needs, there were also wide variations in knowledge and experiences of these women's sexual matters. One variation was that these women lacked a positive sense of their own sexual identities. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) suggest that power imbalance results in men dominating and controlling women. This domination is influenced by cultural values which men abide by and which are also internalised by women (Ngubane, 2010).

### **2.1.5 Sexuality and Culture**

In this study it is important to state that 'culture' means various things and it is the fundamental part of everyday existence in every society. It becomes very crucial to note that one should look at how 'culture' is invoked and constructed in different ways through different discourses.

This study defined 'culture' as an everyday way of living, values, points of identification through shared interests, concerns, which people develop through localised forms of interaction. Through the participants' responses it

became clear that there are cultural productions that reinforce gender inequalities and put men as dominant socially and economically (Bhana, 2011). Through cultural practices that are performed more vigorously in the area where the study took place, some young girls' rights to choose whom, when and how to have sex is infringed upon. 'Culture' in this study is cast as dependent on the performance of specific actions that are considered to be traditional that are contributing hugely to or as primary factors that lead to young people contracting HIV (Hunter, 2010). 'Culture' is seen as being 'good' and 'bad' by some of the participants in the study because there are some cultural practices such as virginity testing and reed ceremony that are not necessarily harmful to these young girls. Some of the young girls wanted to keep themselves as virgins until they find husbands. What this suggests is that 'culture' is not fixed and static but open to contests (Bhana, 2011). According to Ngubane (2010), "culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them" (p. 18). The essential core of 'culture' consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values.

'Culture' is often seen as a factor in various ways that HIV and AIDS have impacted on the South African population (Ngubane, 2010). A further description of 'culture' by Schalkwyk (2002) illustrates the complexity of 'culture':

*Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It also includes factors such as value systems, traditional beliefs and practices which are linked with tradition or religion (p. 1).*

With regards to sex and sexuality, these factors differ from one person to the other, culture to culture and from one context to the other. There are also

varying factors as to when one starts to be sexually active, the number of sexual partners one has and who should negotiate the use of condom (Shisana & Simbayi, 2002). More often, it is found that women are expected to have one partner while men do the opposite and that women have no power to negotiate the use of condom (Holland, *et al.*, 1990). Some of these cultural practices are the ones that encourage vagina dryness in order to enhance friction for the penis and *ukuhlola* (virginity testing) (Kun, 1998). Traditionally, an African family in South Africa is patriarchal where men are seen as the family heads, and women and children are expected to defer to men's authority. In the African context *isithembu* (polygamous marriages) is allowed if the husband has enough money or cattle to pay the *lobolo* (bride price) for each, and to maintain them properly (Ngubane, 2010). Culturally, it is women who leave their maiden families in order to live with their husband's families. This behaviour is based on the fact that it is seen as normal to respect men as heads of families and as community leaders. These practices further perpetuate the inferiority of women when it comes to negotiations in a sexual relationship.

Whereas women are considered to have equal opportunities and have gained some rights in South Africa, there is still an unequal balance of power, not only where law is concerned, but in the everyday relations among women and men (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This is due to the fact that most men believe that they are the custodians of African 'culture' and regard women as inferior, seeing them as their subordinates. They assume that a woman's place is in the home where, her major task is to bear and raise children. Despite the fact that women have gained substantial rights and opportunities in recent years, gender inequality is still very prevalent in most African societies (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). The imbalances therefore seem to reinforce and to continue to promote patriarchy that perpetuates the subordination of women. By so doing 'culture' continues to support women's

subordination through several of its practices and encourage male dominance which increases the acceptance and justification of violence against women. Asserting power over women will give men power to establish “male control and dominance”, not only in relationships, but also in the beliefs and structures of society (Wallace, 2005).

#### **2.1.5.1 *Ukuhlola* (Virginity Testing)**

*Ukuhlola* (the practice of virginity testing) was done from the early twentieth century in KwaZulu-Natal. Many regard *ukuhlola* as the only way to revitalise what they view as lost cultural values (Ngubane, 2010). According to Ngubane (2010), the practice of *ukuhlola* requires the physical examination of a girl in order to determine if her hymen is intact. *Ukuhlola* prevents women from controlling their own bodies and increases their vulnerability to HIV infection (Mhlongo, 2009). Recently it has been said that some young men await the reed ceremony anxiously like the young girls. Their intention is to identify the virgins and rape them, thus making these young girls vulnerable to HIV. Mhlongo (2009) researcher further states that in South Africa *ukuhlola* is mostly common among the Zulu people and to a lesser extent by the Xhosa people.

Many South African girls see *ukuhlola* as a strategy to delay the age of sexual debut and as reduction of vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections and to an extent HIV infection. If it has been verified that a girl is still a virgin this would allow her family to insist on a bigger *lobolo* than a normal bride price at marriage, an additional cow will be given to the girl’s mother. In a case where the girl is found not to be a virgin, her father has to pay a cow to the chief because the girl has shown disrespect not only to her parents but also to the whole community (Mhlongo, 2009).



Scorgie (2002) states that the association of *ukuhlola* with the notion of pride and dignity are commonplace in marriage and indeed central to understanding what is at stake for the *abahloli* (virgin testers). According to Scorgie (2002) if a girl becomes pregnant before marriage she is ostracised by girls who have passed the test, for she is seen as someone who has brought shame and disgrace to herself and her peers. Scorgie (2002) states that nowadays the dignity and pride that virginity is believed to bestow on the individual girl continues to be linked with the avoidance of premarital motherhood. *Ukuhlola* is regarded by some South Africans as the “only way to instil what they view as the lost cultural values of chastity before marriage, modesty, self-respect and pride” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001). Drawing from literature it is evident that ‘culture’ shapes the way things are done and peoples’ understanding of why things should be. What might put young girls at risk is that boys do not go through such practices. The circumcision that has been lately advocated by the Department of Health is supposed to reduce the chances of being infected. Instead, some men believe that circumcision for them means practising unsafe sex because circumcising to them means that they stand fewer chances to be exposed to HIV infections. This misconception is much more deadly than the disease itself.

### **2.1.6 Constructions of Femininities**

Gender order is institutionalised and varies from context to context (Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). These researchers state that gender power inequality and intimate partners’ violence put women at risk of HIV infection. Looking at African women femininities, Ngubane (2010) states that African women are constructed as sexual beings and sex is seen not just as something normal for partners, but as essential for the success of the relationship. Gender norms work in such a way that women are expected to ensure that sex is pleasurable for their partners, preferably, ‘flesh to flesh’.

Reddy & Dunne's (2007) findings suggest that the dynamics of heterosexual relationships were usually guided by men. Researchers (Bhana & Pillay, 2011) point out that, girls in developing contexts tend to be presented as innocent victims without agency rather than complicit with gender positioning within their school context. Bhana and Pillay (2011) contend that the absence of research about girls being the agents suggests a legitimisation of existing gender norms of masculine and feminine difference. Gender norms often represent violence as a domain where boys realise their masculinity and typical girls are considered helpless and passive (Bhana & Pillay, 2011). These researchers state that "viewing African girls simply as victims of violence not only fragments the knowledge about their schooling experiences, but also creates an analytically unhelpful dichotomy" (p, 67). What they are stating is that "pushing femininity into a binary structure obscures the possibility of multiple forms of femininities" (Bhana & Pillay, 2011, p. 67). In addition these researchers state that putting gender in binary positions as stable categories needs to be challenged, as there is now evidence of variegated forms of femininities as there are masculinities (Bhana & Pillay, 2011).

Jewkes and Morrell (2010) further mention an emerging femininity which challenges the notions of hegemonic masculinities. There is evidence from a study by Gasa (Smith, 2002) in South Africa that political protest brought up spaces for women to challenge gender roles. In this study it was found that young African women activists were militant and proactive, although there were fewer women who participated than men in leadership and militant positions. Modern girls are changing the ways they view themselves and resist the gender order.

Researchers in sexualities and femininities (Holland *et al.*, 1990; MacPhail & Campbell, 2006) describe sexuality in terms of the emotional feelings and issues of power and vulnerability in gendered relationships. In other words it is what people can identify with and believe about sex, what they consider natural, appropriate and pleasing. This teenage stage marks the important transitional one from childhood to adulthood in a gendered way and includes sexual identities in all the cultural and historical variety of people (Holland *et al.*, 1990). These researchers argue that while sexuality cannot be removed from the body, it is a social construction which is ambiguous, and is constituted in social, moral, cultural and legal contexts, whilst potentially experienced as essentially personal (Boyce *et al.*, 2007). Boyce *et al.* (2007) make a distinction between sexuality and sex by stressing its cultural constitution, in contrast to the putatively biological attributes of sex:

*Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (p. 5).*

This means that the positive identities that are available to young heterosexual girls tend to be associated with their social relationships with men as girlfriends, wives, or objects of love (Taylor, 2009, p. 142). In this manner sexuality is socially embedded in multiple social relationships and informed by sometimes contradictory meanings (Salo, 2002).

MacPhail and Campbell (2001) contend that sexuality is multifaceted in nature, and adolescents carry out their sexual lives through experiments and beliefs that have been the result of being members of a particular society and community. Research (Leclerc-Madlala, 2010; UNAIDS, 2008), shows that the age of sexual debut is viewed as an important factor in the prevention of HIV nationally and internationally. According to the Human Sciences Research Council (2008) survey, 45% of all the new HIV infections worldwide are among young people aged between 15 and 24 years of age. For this reason, it becomes important to understand the age at which these young people become sexually active and thus, the age at which they are most at risk of getting infected with HIV. While research (Human Sciences Research Council, 2008) indicates that the median age for sexual debut for South African young men and young women is 17 years, 28% of young girls aged 15 to 19 reported having more than one sexual partner in a year of their first sexual debut (Sonke Gender Justice, 2008). Leclerc-Madlala (2010) points out that this median has changed drastically and young people become sexually active between the ages of 13 to 15 years. This study revealed that young women are being diagnosed as being HIV positive from 13 years. Leclerc-Madlala (2010) points out that the meanings young people make about their sexuality are inseparable from gender power relations and play a huge role in shaping young people's interactions. MacPhail and Campbell (2001) further state that sexuality is multifaceted in nature and adolescents carry out their sexual lives through experiments and beliefs that have been the result of being members of a particular society and community.

Another important issue in South African 'culture' is that sex and issues related to sexuality are taboo subjects and parents find it difficult to discuss with their children. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) clearly state that the issue of sexual socialisation plays a crucial role in the manner men and women place themselves and act as social beings. They further state that it is gender and

not sex which is more powerful and influential in determining behaviour. In my view if a young woman has been raised and taught at an early age that a man leads and controls sexual relations, this woman is likely to comply with whatever the partner says irrespective of whether she likes it or not. If this is the case then this young woman will not be entirely in charge of her body, consequently, she will find it embarrassing to talk freely about sex to her partner. According to Groes-Green (2009), not only is sexuality a sensitive and intimate issue not spoken about freely or readily accessible or perceivable, but it is always ideologically and historically contested. From literature reviewed it seems that meanings young people give to sexuality are fundamentally linked to, and informed by the person the society wants them to be.

### **2.1.7 Social and Peer Norms**

Social pressures have been viewed by researchers as an encouragement for young girls to engage in sex (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998; Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). These researchers also state that there is evidence that young people have influence in the lives of others that makes them vulnerable to sexual risk because of peer influences that becomes very strong. In a study by Wood, Maforah & Jewkes (1998, p. 236) informants stated that “If you want to belong to the group you end up doing it otherwise you will be lonely and nobody wants that”. It was evident that the informants were pressured to engage in sex not because of love of their partners but because there was a pressure of belonging. In Shoba’s view (2009) norms and behaviours of peers affect young people’s sexual behaviours resulting in them taking risks. Young girls engage themselves in risky behaviours for peer acceptance (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998). While Wood, Maforah & Jewkes

(1998) and MacPhail & Campbell (2001) point to the influential roles that the attitudes and beliefs of peers have on other members of the peer group, Holland *et al.* (1990) on the other hand argue that pressures from the society encourage young women not to engage in sex but those who do, do so in the confines of serious and trusting relationships.

### **2.1.8 South African Young Girls and their Vulnerability**

The crucial points that the literature highlights are the prevailing views about young people's attitudes and behaviours, practices such as how they experiment with sex and high turnover of sexual partners (Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). According to these researchers, young people think that they have very slim chances of contracting HIV, but they like to experiment and have as many partners as they can. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) state that young people may face risks, mostly young women, who may find it difficult to negotiate for the use of a condom because they might become scared of violence from their partners. Most young people associate condoms with being unfaithful, lack of love, lack of trust, disease and incompatibility with manliness (Marston & King, 2006; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Statistics highlighted above and findings discussed above reflect that HIV is still destroying the nation even though a number of interventions have been initiated. One of the causes for these, are societal practices which are not reflective of what these interventions are advocating, for example, practices related to women's vulnerability are still a key issue in our society.

### **2.1.9 Sex and Violence**

Jewkes, Morrell and Christofides (2009) state that South African society is characterised by a prominent age and gender hierarchy, which accords young

women relatively little power. These researchers argue that, whilst women are usually willing participants in relationships, they are not willing participants in all sexual acts (Jewkes, Morrell & Christofides, 2009). The imbalance of power in sexual activities and social pressures on young women to guard their reputation lessens the amount of control they have over the practice of safer sex (Holland *et al.*, 1990; Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Marston & King, 2006; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Literature indicates that many women and young girls are coerced in their first sexual intercourse (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Hallman, 2005; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Though there is a variation in the rates of coercion in South Africa, but it seems as if between 10-20% of women and young girls are coerced (Dunkle *et al.*, 2004). Findings from these researchers are that young women who have been coerced in their first encounter usually remain sexually active. Among young people early sexual encounter is related to early sexual relationships and this result in vulnerability to HIV infection. Research shows that it is gender imbalances impact hugely on the age from which penetrative sex commences (Holland *et al.*, 1990; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). This is confirmed by MacPhail and Campbell (2001) and Hallman (2005) who assert that rape may be a strategy to ensure continued men domination over women. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) view rape as a form of violence that occurs between two persons and it is deeply rooted in power inequalities and the ideologies of male domination. Even though the social construction of man is associated with violence, not all men conform to these norms (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). It seems as if to young girls agreement to love is equated specifically with penetrative sex and the willingness to engage in sex (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998).

### 2.1.10 Love, Trust and Condom Use

Literature on the sexuality of young people has shown inequalities in gender power that hinder young women's chances to negotiate condom use during sexual encounters (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Research findings on condom use in South Africa show that "the use of condoms is seen to militate against young men's notions of masculinity and pleasure" (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001, p. 1622). Studies conducted by Eaton *et al.* (2003) have shown that about 50% of young people in South Africa become sexually active at the age of 16 years, whilst 50% to 70% do not use condoms to prevent HIV infection (Hallman, 2005). Gregson *et al.* (2002) declare that levels of infection among young girls are higher than among boys, the reason being that young boys have sex with girls of the same age, whereas girls engage in sex with older men who may be infected with HIV.

Poverty has been mentioned as a driver of HIV infection because many girls get involved with older men ('sugar daddies') who are willing to give money, goods or favours for sex in return and make it hard for young girls to ask for the use of condoms (Ngubane, 2010). The 'sugar daddy' phenomenon, which Leclerc-Madlala (2010) describes as sexual liaisons where young women get involved with older men, denies women any choices to negotiate for a condom. Situations like "limited economic options and powerlessness also may force women into sex work in order to cope with household and economic crisis" (Gregson *et al.*, 2002, p. 1899). Reddy and Dunne (2006) concur with Gregson's view stating that "women are prepared to compromise their agency in a relationship" (p.166) in such a way that they ended up practising unprotected sex in order to keep their relationships much longer. On the other hand, the views of Marston and King (2006) differ; they mention the fact that "women may not suggest condom use for fear of appearing to be



too experienced, or may wish to strengthen the relationship by complying with their partner's desires, thus putting them at risk" (p. 1583).

Hoffman *et al.* (2006), Marston and King (2006), Reddy and Dunne (2006) highlight the fact that young girls may view sex as somewhat strengthening a relationship, or as means to maintain a relationship. Carrying or buying a condom may communicate one's prior sexual experiences, infidelity, or lack of trust in the relationship (Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Marston & King, 2006). In addition, if young women ask their boyfriends to use a condom this might imply that their partners are infected. As a result a condom-free practice is applied and this put their lives at risk (Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Marston & King, 2006). In the views of Gregson *et al.* (2002), this may expose young women to HIV infections. According to Ngubane (2010), the power imbalances present in such relationships might impinge on young women's ability to refuse unsafe sex. As a result this might expose them to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS.

MacPhail and Campbell (2001) and Holland *et al.* (1990) view sexuality for men as associated with numerous sexual partners. According to MacPhail and Campbell (2001), men's masculinity is defined by dominance over women. Condom use is seen to be against their idea of masculinity and against their enjoyment of pleasure. Men view condom use as a tool to be used by those who are already infected by HIV and AIDS or sexually transmitted infections (Holland *et al.*, 1990; Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Young men also believe that one should use a condom when having casual sex and should not be used with your own girlfriend. Marston and King (2006) state that "young men may choose to use a condom with partners they perceive to be **unclean**" (p. 1583). Young men are easily influenced by the views of their peers; in the study by MacPhail

and Campbell (2001) the use of condoms was laughed at and belittled by their friends. Participants in this study continued to say that by using condoms, these young men may be accused of being ignorant. They call young women boring if they want have protected sex and prefer the notion of flesh to flesh sex (MacPhail and Campbell, 2001).

Wood, Maforah and Jewkes (1995) state that using condoms becomes a difficult topic to discuss with women and young girls. Women reported fear that discussing condoms would lead to negative emotional, physical or economic consequence with their partners. There is evidence from the findings of a study by Holland *et al.* (1990) that many women seem to have internalised a negative view of condoms. Marston and King (2006) study revealed that young girls were scared to ask for the use of a condom because this would imply that they thought their partners were infected. Young women in this study argued that condom use “breaks the flow”, makes them “lose momentum”, spoils the event and turns the event into a mechanical, physical activity. These young women viewed sex without a condom as something one does when she is in love, also as a way of showing that they love and trust their boyfriends. Leclerc-Madlala (2010) points out that for South African young people there are strong relations between condom and notions of unfaithfulness, lack of trust, lack of love, disease and incompatibility with being a man.

### **2.1.11 Risky Behaviour**

Young people between the ages 15 to 24 in South Africa account for an estimated 45% of new HIV infections, with young girls facing risks because of gender norms which value sexual ignorance and limited power in sexual relations (Hallman, 2005). At the same time, gender norms that promote risk

taking among young men put both young women and men at risk (Hallman, 2005; Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Young people need to be equipped with information and given services that speak to them, as well as tackling conflicting issues like gender norms and sexuality. This might reduce the risk of HIV infection, sexual transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy.

Even though research shows that there has been an increase in exposure to a number of HIV and AIDS communication programmes from 2005 to 2008, with 90.2% of young people being reached, HIV prevalence remains disproportionately high for females (Human Sciences Research Council, 2008). This disproportionate risk of HIV results from social processes that put women as subordinates. Harrison, Xaba and Kunene (2001) contend that there are power dynamics that are distinct in the relationships of young people, where gender imbalance is enhanced by a number of factors and different experiences. Results from the study by Harrison, Xaba and Kunene (2001) indicate that young men engage in risky behaviour because they thought their risk was low. In the interviews it was clear that they assessed the risk of contracting HIV based on trust and the duration of the relationship. As a result condoms were used inconsistently. From research it seems that young people believe that they are at low risk for HIV infection, but they like to experiment and have many partners as they can. This puts them at risk because mostly young women find it difficult to negotiate for the use of a condom because they become scared of violence from their partners, and, as indicated above, from the negative associations of condoms. All these factors prevent young people from engaging in safer practices.

The general concern is that young people in South Africa tolerate high risk sexual behaviour that puts them at risk of HIV, sexually transmitted infections

and unplanned pregnancies (Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Young men are vulnerable because of cultural expectations that require them to have more than one sexual partner. They are socialised so that they dominate sexual intercourse; as a result young women become dependent on young men's providing for them and they become scared to negotiate the use of condoms because this might end in violence or rejection. This encourages women's dependency and objects for men's lust; at times sex is forced even within marriages (Greig, Peacock, Jewkes & Msimang, 2008; Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Another barrier to safe sex that puts young people at risk seems to be the 'fertility conundrum'; since young women feel under pressure to prove their fertility before marriage, this results in reckless and irresponsible sexual behaviour for both parties concerned (Harrison, Xaba & Kunene, 2001; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010).

Issues of masculinity also play an important role where the socio-cultural constructions of gender entail dominance and violence from men. Young men believe in multiple sexual partners so that they can be seen as being 'a man'. Status, sexual prowess, strong peer pressure and social norms condone sexual violence from young men, impeding safer sex practices whenever they engage in sex (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Some young men also drink a lot and have unsafe sex and put themselves at risk.

Though women are active recipients of prevention messages, owing to patriarchy their voices are not heard. Gender-based violence has been seen as a crucial factor in a society in which expectations of and meanings attached to sex are formed (Mhlongo, 2009; Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998; Dowsett, 2003; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Leclerc-Madlala's study in St.

Wendolins Durban, found that there were many complex strands comprising a web in which sexual activity was embedded.

## **2.2 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the literature both globally and in South African, on the HIV pandemic and the studies done to find out more about HIV and AIDS. Prevention efforts seem the only hope in trying to curb the spreading of HIV infections. It is not biology, but gender differences in sexual socialisation that are more important in influencing who women and men partner with, and when and under which circumstances (Ngubane, 2010, p. 22).

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This qualitative study investigates ways in which young girls (16-17) give meaning to sexuality, sexual risks and how gender is embedded within these meanings in a secondary school in KwaMashu Township, within the Mafukuzela-Ghandi Circuit, Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal. In investigating young girls' sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS, the study wants to establish what meaning young girls give to their sexualities in a specific social context in a township school. These contexts are very important in informing the ways by which femininities are forged; they have effects for the meanings given to sexuality and sexual risk. The study also investigates how the context of poverty, culture and gender inequalities shapes these young girls' meanings. It searches for ways in which we can better understand the young girls' sexual and gendered identities. As a teacher I can help work positively towards better sexual health and wellbeing. By so doing I will be addressing the crisis of gender inequalities, gender violence and the death threat that AIDS has become especially for women and girls.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate ways in which young girls give meaning to sexuality, sexual risks and how gender is embedded within these meanings what in the context of HIV and AIDS. This approach was employed because it is appropriate to depict the unique point of view of each individual. If the study had used a quantitative approach, there may a

tendency to come to definite findings that might not allow for other interpretations while a qualitative approach allows for multiple truths and there can be a chance for other interpretations.

### 3.2.1 The Qualitative Approach

This study employed qualitative approach because researchers in a qualitative research attempt to understand a particular social situation or event through on-going interaction. They seek to explore and understand social reality and cultural meaning and their focus is on interactive processes and events (Maree, 2007). When a researcher is using qualitative research methods it means that researcher can produce findings not arrived at by statistical procedures. The methodology I used is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena (Mhlongo, 2009). That is to say it aims to help us understand the world in which we live in and why things are the way they are. Qualitative methodology is concerned with social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about why people behave the way they do (Creswell, 1994). *How are opinions and attitudes formed? How are people affected by the events that go on around them? How and why have cultures developed in the way they have? What are the differences between the various social groups?* (Creswell, 1994, p. 50). Therefore this study was conducted through an intense and prolonged contact with participants sharing their life situations, in other words this approach was used because depth was required in the study. The in-depth descriptions of what put young women at risk were explored in the study. The aim of the study was to gain a holistic overview of the context under study. Stake (2005) affirms this by saying that contexts are important in this type of research and further states that contexts are situationally constrained, which means that each study is a complex entity embedded in these contexts or backgrounds. Choosing a qualitative approach over a quantitative approach was motivated by the fact

that I wanted to construct a detailed description of social reality. This is because qualitative researchers attend to participants' experiences as whole, not as separate variables (De Vos, Strydom, Fouch, & Delport, 2000). Therefore, the aim of the study is to understand holistically the young girls' experiences. Data generated in this study allowed patterns, themes and categories of analysis to emerge and it was well suited to explore social phenomena (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Maree, 2007) such as the vulnerability of young girls to HIV and AIDS.

### **3.2.2 The Interpretivist Paradigm**

The study was positioned in the interpretivist paradigm since in this paradigm there is a need for the researcher to interpret and make meanings of what has been researched. Researchers in the interpretive paradigm seek to understand how each person experiences his personal development (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Their main aim is to understand the subjective world of human experiences (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). When conducting research the researcher tries to understand why the participants think and behave in particular ways. This study is about investigating how young people understand and make meaning of their sexuality; in this way I am trying to understand the subjective world of their experiences. One of the assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm is that it is based in human life and can only be understood from a person's subjective experiences, by studying people in their social contexts. It becomes possible to understand and interpret the construction of social life; the richness, depth and complexities of phenomena facilitate an understanding of how human beings assign meaning to phenomena and various social contexts. These social contexts affect the way people behave. Finally, the social world does not exist as an entity by itself, it



is influenced by human knowledge (Creswell, 2007; Maree, 2007). Using the interpretivist lens seemed appropriate in answering the research questions.

My experience as teacher in a KwaMashu Township secondary school has drawn my attention to the risky sexual behaviours of learners. One example is, this year (2010), in my grade 12 class, six young girls fell pregnant in the middle of term two. When they were called to the principal's office to be asked to bring their parents (this is because four of them were close friends and the principal was worried), it then became apparent that they were impregnated by their working boyfriends and they were not able to tell them to condomise. This again revealed that these girls were not in a situation where they could choose what was best for them.

My other observation is that the school and the community are unwilling to address issues of gender imbalances and members of these institutions claim that young women are to blame for the high rate of teenage pregnancy in school. This is also drawn from the knowledge I have about people from this area. Parents of learners in this school have put pressure on school management to change and contextualise the Department of Education's Policy on teenage pregnancy to suit the community because they think girls are to blame for falling pregnant whilst they are still at school. The community agreed that girls who fall pregnant are to be sent home for the rest of their pregnancy until they have delivered and can come back to school later. No teacher is allowed to accommodate pregnant learners. As soon as the learner is showing signs of pregnancy, the principal is expected to call the parents and the girl leaves the school. This alone proves that the community refuses to address gender inequalities. Only girls have to suffer the consequences, while boys remain at school and nothing is said about their behaviour. The pressing cultural challenges, gender inequality and power impact hugely on the choices available to these school girls. This means that

young girls in relationships with young boys have no say in their sexual engagements and these young girls are at a higher risk of HIV infection. I therefore argue that the reason I chose to work with the African girls, 16-17 was strongly determined by the context within which my school and the girls' environment were situated. Their everyday experiences will help in answering the research question.

### **3.2.3 The School Context**

The research site is a school situated in a predominantly black community in an informal settlement place with low cost housing and shacks. The reason why I chose this school is dual. Firstly, I am a teacher in it and it was easy for me to access. Secondly, it made sense to conduct a study in a school where learners and I were familiar with each other so that we could always make time within the school time. Most of all learners agreed to participate in the study because they knew me.

Poverty in this community is rife. Most adult people in this area make clear their strong beliefs in culture and tradition. This statement is drawn from the experiences I had within the classroom as a class teacher. Parents would come and ask for learners to be absent away for a number of days just because the family needed to do a certain ritual or to go to Moria, where all Shembe followers go every February for the whole month. Since most learners in this school come from homes where everyone is a Shembe believer, every year in February we have low numbers of learners in class. The Shembe religion has its fundamental teachings based on tradition and culture. Men practise polygamy within their church and they pick women and girls from the church in a type of arranged of marriage.

Members of the community do not believe in HIV and using condoms, but only believe in their traditional ways of doing things. This is evident because multiple relationships are commonplace for men in this community – a practice that appears to be normalised. I draw this from my experience as a teacher who has knowledge of some of what happens in this community and also from the information provided by both boys and girls from this community during the engagement with them. In a project in 2010 that implemented a HIV prevention plan with a group of learners from this school, a recurrent theme was the role of traditional and cultural beliefs. I therefore have knowledge about the fact that HIV is not seen as having anything to do with the many wives that men in this community have, but with those women who are loose and having extra-marital affairs. This behaviour seems to form the basis for most young people in this area and it might be possible that the beliefs, understandings and practices are perpetuated in school by young people.

### **3.2.4 Sampling**

Participants in this study were purposively sampled in order to acquire in-depth responses regarding their experiences and how they make meaning to their sexuality. Patton (2002) defines purposive sampling as a sampling method which seeks to identify participants based on pre-selected criteria. This sampling strategy is considered suitable for a qualitative study, De Vos *et al.* (2002) & Maree (2007) and they state that purposive sampling allows for the desired group as key informants to provide rich and in-depth information. Purposive sampling was appropriate because I did not wish to generalize the results beyond the sampled group. Using this method was advantageous as I chose a specific group of participants which was easy to manage and control. The disadvantage is that it is going to be impossible to generalize the results.

I initially targeted six girls 16-17 from three grade twelve classes, but I had to interview another six girls. They formed a target population in this study, because research indicates that young women are three times more at risk of contracting HIV than their men counterparts (Marston & King, 2006). In trying to highlight the problems faced by women and girls, it is also important to draw on my experiences as a teacher. Last year a grade twelve learner (girl) died because of AIDS. She was young, beautiful and full of life; she had just started writing her final examinations. She only wrote three papers and she fell sick and died. She was hospitalized for a week and she passed on. As a school we were saddened by her death and felt we did not do much for our young people (boys and girls) because this was not the only girl who passed away in school in that year. I mention this one because she had at least reached grade twelve and her family was ready to send her to on tertiary studies. Her dreams were about to be realised. During the sermon on her funeral day, her uncle told the mourners that her boyfriend and child had already died of AIDS and she had also died of AIDS. We were all surprised by this revelation. He urged the school to do something about HIV and AIDS to empower girls especially with necessary skills. He stated that the odds are against them and that the community played a huge role in what was happening in their area at present. After that day I vowed to do something for the girls in the school. I kept my promise, and today am doing a study that will shed light on what put these young girls at risk of getting infected with HIV and died of AIDS. Given the fact that young people constitute a high percentage of the South African population, it is important to investigate what puts young people at risk, particularly young women.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

After the necessary permission was granted by the school and the principal allowed me to interview girls from any grade, I chose to limit the selection to

Grade 12 for the reasons of convenience and also because there were a lot of girls that were 16-17 in the whole school. I went from class to class asking if those girls who were 16 if they could take part in the study that I was conducting in the school. About 20 girls showed interest and I gave them consent forms and letters requesting their parents' permission to interview them in my study. Out of the 20, seven brought back the signed consent letters and those were the ones I decided to interview. On the day of the interviews I was expecting seven girls, but only six came. After doing the first interviews and focus group, when I wanted to make meaning of my data, I found out that I needed to go back and did a second interview. With the second group I only did focus group discussion. I therefore ended up interviewing 12 girls. One of the challenges I faced at this point in my research was the teacher's strike. As I have mentioned, I am a teacher in this school and I was a grade 12 teacher in 2010. This meant that during the time I wanted to conduct my study, as a teacher I was supposed to be doing the catch-up programme with the matriculants. This nearly disturbed the dates set for the interviews because some teachers were having lessons until late. All my participants were attending afternoon and Saturday classes. The third term was about to end and the fourth term nearing. I knew that I was going to be denied permission to do these interviews in the fourth term under the terms of the Department of Education policy. I decided to do the interviews on Saturdays because at least on these days learners went home after lunch. After the participants were assured complete confidentiality and anonymity, the interviews commenced. These were conducted over two consecutive Saturdays. On the last day one learner decided not to come to school. As a result of this I only managed to have six face-face individual interviews. The seventh learner managed to join in only the focus group discussion. The duration of interviews ranged between 20 to 30 minutes and the focus group discussion took 60 minutes. Individual interviews were conducted in my form

classroom; the focus group was done in one of the computer laboratories in school.

### 3.3.1 Individual Interviews

The data used in this study is based on interviews with 12 girls altogether. The first face-to-face interview was with 6 girls and a focus group discussion was also employed in the first interviews and also in the second round of group interviews. After collecting this data I read and made meaning of the data and found that there was a need for me to return to the field and interview further six girls. Though both the interviewer and the interviewees were both Zulu-speaking, the interviews were conducted in English. This was motivated by the language policy in our school. The policy demands that educators speak in English with learners. The fact that these girls were matriculants also prompted me to do the interviews in English. During the interviews learners would code-switch; because of this case translation took place before transcription. Interviews were utilised because Cohen *et al.* (2000) state that qualitative approach uses interviews, documents analysis and participants observation to collect data which are therefore used to understand the phenomena. Interviews and group discussions as tools to gather data are seen by De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2002) as instruments that have greater flexibility. Face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used as the data production methods because they are flexible, and participants are able “to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 111).

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain a detailed picture of participants’ beliefs, perceptions or account of their experiences. In addition

semi-structured interviews allowed face-to-face interaction between me and the participants so that I was able to access participants' experiences as expressed in their own words through their experiences. Even though I am their teacher and this could have prevented participants to give out information on what they perceive as taboo issues, using semi-structured interviews assisted as questions were rephrased to make it easier for participants to respond. Interviews were audio-taped after I had sought permission from the participants. Recording the interviews provided more opportunity for the participants to listen to what they said during the interviews and after transcriptions to check if they were not mis-interpreted. During the interviews I was able to ask additional questions to clarify some responses from the participants, as a result, I was accessing what was 'inside the participants' minds' (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Using interviews allowed me to understand the young girls' conceptions, belief experiences and the interpretations of their world (Newman, 2000). For the duration of the interviews I found that some participants found it difficult to speak freely to me about sex and boyfriends. I had to probe in order to get information.

During the last interview with the last participant, I found at the end of 15 minutes that the dictaphone had stopped recording. I was very disappointed by this because this meant that I had to start from the beginning and it was getting late. I asked the participant if we could still do another 20 minutes interview. She told me to call her mother and told her she was with me and was going to be late. I did that and I promised her mother to drive her home after we finished our interview. This incident taught me to be prepared for any situation where technology was concerned. It happened that I was too engrossed in the interview and forgot to check if the batteries were still alive.

### 3.3.2 Focus Group Discussion

The first focus group discussion took place on the third Saturday after the last interviews, whilst the second one took place after four weeks of the actual scheduled time for interviews. This was the direct discussion among a group of six learners, the first group that I had already interviewed, with the purpose of collecting in-depth qualitative data about what the group perceives, their attitudes and their experiences on a defined topic (Maree, 2007). Moreover, the goal of the focus group discussion as Marrelli (2008) states was to encourage full contribution and communication among group members and also to probe for clarity of aspects. The focus group interview provided valuable information on how participants talked about a topic and how they responded in a situation where they were exposed to the views of and experiences of others (Maree, 2007). Although participants responded positively during the focus group, it was very difficult to start the conversation at first. When muffins, juice and snacks were put on the table by one of the learners, tensions were eased and I could see some smiles. This gesture helped a lot to make them focus on food and be relaxed to share information. Even though they were all from grade 12 and in the same school, there was no evidence that they were well acquainted with each other. It was not easy for them to freely share their personal and private information with the others present. Food became a good distraction and ice-breaker, and after that the conversation flew in the room.

What was apparent during the focus group was that participants became much more free to debate and discuss issues rather than in the individual interviews. The platform allowed them to share information without any inhibitions, unlike the individual interviews. Allen (2005) points out that focus groups provide a forum for the participants to shape their own sexual identities by disclosing or concealing their sexual selves. One participant shared that she was not engaging in sex with



her boyfriend. From the facial expressions from some of the girls, their gestures suggested that this participant was lying because others looked at her in a particular way without saying a word and she changed her statement. Although the girls were not acquaintances but most of them come from the same area and their actions suggested that they might know something about each other that was not communicated verbally, but through their actions. Even though I noticed that I did not ask follow up questions, not wanting to embarrass the other girl. This was very interesting to me because the way they responded to questions helped to get richer information than in the first interview. As Maree (2007) states, focus group interviews encourage debate and conflict, and the group dynamics assist in data generation. Here the participants engaged in discussion with each other rather than directing their responses solely to me. Ngubane (2010) mentions that in focus group interviews, participants are able to build on each other's ideas and comments. This was the case with these focus group discussions. Each participant was able to build on what others had said to impress her point. Therefore, the focus group discussion provided in-depth information that was not attainable from individual interviews.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Data analysis requires thorough personal control and responsibility from the researcher and thorough transcription of text, taking words apart, sentences and paragraphs in order to make sense of, interpret and theorise that data (Henning *et al.*, 2004). According to Cohen, *et al.* (2007), the purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the data from the perspective of the participants. Bearing this idea in mind I employed a descriptive analysis technique outlined by Tesch (1990) to generate themes and similarities.

The first step when analysing data was to listen to interviews, writing down word for word of what was said during the interviews. This was the most difficult task because I had to do it more than once as the recordings were

sometimes not clear. I managed to finish the transcription within the allocated time. I took the transcripts to school to give to my twelve participants to check if it was what they had said during the interviews and to make changes where they deemed necessary. When I got these back I started looking for themes that emerged from the transcription. I started writing down themes, notes and comments when necessary to remind myself of what I needed to do. Creswell (2007) & Maree (2007) state that “analysis means a close or systematic study or separation of a whole parts for study”. This means that as the researcher I was looking at the categories and patterns that emerged from the raw data. The inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) resulted in these themes:

- Gender, power and inequality
- Gender roles and inequalities
- Poverty, sex and vulnerability
- Gender and culture
- Changing roles

### 3.5 Validity

One of the purposes of validating data is to ensure that data is dependable, confirmable and can be generalised (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). However it is difficult to do that in qualitative research, because according to Slonim-Nevo & Nevo (2009), the qualitative approach gives subjective findings that are not based on rigorous investigation, and lacks procedures that guarantees validity, reliability and generalisability because findings (writing up) cannot fully capture emotions and people’s lived experiences through writing. Even though Slonim-Nevo & Nevo (2009) talk about the issues of subjectivity in the findings, there are measures that are used in qualitative research such as trustworthiness to validate the data. Issues of validity in this study depended on what was done during transcribing and after.

It was not easy to tackle issues of validity in this study. To make my data valid, two methods of data collection were used, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion. This is called triangulation. Creswell (2008); Maree (2007) and Bryman (2004) define triangulation as a method where a researcher uses two methods of collecting data concurrently about the same phenomenon, and where the data from both methods is compared and contrasted and the different findings to produce a well-validated conclusion. Data gathered using the first method and second method gave valid responses from the participants. Findings in a qualitative study are generated and can be authenticated and are trusted as peoples' lived experiences. They can contain participants' quotes and the researcher's experiences during the research (Ivankova, Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this type of study the personal experiences, beliefs and value systems of the participants lend bias and subjectivity to the data. However, a qualitative study accepts data as the truth because they are lived experiences of participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Maree, 2007). The fact that triangulation was used as a typical strategy (test) for improving the validity and reliability of research findings, assisted in making the data valid. Triangulation was also used to evaluate and also to control bias and establishing valid propositions of the participants' responses (Henning, Van Rensberg & Smit, 2004). Since the aim of the study was to explore how young people understand and make meaning about their sexuality; what they shared during the interviews was accepted as their perspective because it was an expression of their lived experiences.

### **3.6 Ethical Measures**

The sensitive nature of the study raised salient ethical issues which I carefully considered before and during the study. Given that I was studying young girls and this is a very sensitive issue, considerations were taken to adhere to ethical measures as outlined by the ethical regulations of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I wrote a letter to the school principal asking for permission to enter the school and conduct the research. I also wrote letters to learners' parents asking to interview their children at school. The third letter was to individual participants. Since I was studying very sensitive issues I explained clearly and fully to the 20 learners who volunteered to take part in the study. This was done so they can explain to their parents the nature of the study. Those parents who agreed to their children partaking in the study were also given consent forms to sign. In the letters parents were informed in detail of how and why the research was conducted. Participants were assured about confidentiality and the safeguards applied, such as the use of pseudonyms for utmost confidentiality. Thus anonymity was upheld in order to protect the participants' privacy. In order to make sure that safety and the participants' rights were considered, they were informed about the voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality before the interviews started (Cohen *et. al.*, 2000).

### **3.7 Limitations of the Study**

It has been stated that qualitative research studies the phenomena using the viewpoint of the participants. Owing to this, one of the limitations of this study was that findings only apply to the sample used. This means that since the study was conducted in one secondary school located in KwaMashu, findings of the study cannot be generalised to all girls in KwaMashu Township schools, in the Pinetown District or in South Africa as a whole. As a teacher in the same school I have interacted with these participants before with no

purpose of researching until I intended to do this study. This might have affected the study as the participants might have been eager to respond positively in order to please their teacher. In this way my position of power could have affected responses from interviews. Participants could have been too afraid or too eager to give information. Fischer (1993) defines this behaviour as social desirability bias, when the participants knowingly give an inaccurate answer in order to present a favourable impression. In addition my tendency to seek out answers that supported my preconceived perceptions potentially limited or distorted the trustworthiness and validity of this study (Szulanski, Cappetta & Jansen, 2004). Another limitation was time. Conducting this study was problematic since I am a full time teacher and participants are full time learners. Finding time that was suitable for all of us was a challenge.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the strategies that I embarked upon to complete the study. It further discussed the appropriateness and positive aspects of making use of the research design employed the data collection and analysis procedures, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. These were presented to ensure credibility of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three presented a deep examination of qualitative research. It was also clarified in Chapter Three that the study utilised qualitative methods to investigate ways in which young girls (16-17) give meaning to sexuality and sexual risks, and how gender is embedded within these meanings. Furthermore, it was pointed out that data was to be analysed by categorising data and arranging it in themes. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion. Provisions of the detailed discussion of the data analysis will be presented and supporting evidence will be shown through the direct quotes from the interviews and the group discussions by the participants.

From the data collected a number of themes emerged which provided an insight into these young girls' lived experiences. Some of these themes also emerged from the literature whilst others challenged what the literature presented. The aim of the study is to investigate the ways in which young girls understand their sexuality and sexual risks and how gender, sex, power and inequalities are embedded on this. The study will be searching for ways in which young people's sexual and gendered identities can be better understood so that they can become agents of change. One key question was explored with four sub-questions. The key question was: How do young African women construct their femininities, and what effect does it have for their sexuality? The sub-questions were as follows: (1) What do young township girls regard as risky sexual behaviour? (2) What types of risky behaviours do these young girls engage in? (3) How is gender connected to

sexual risk? (4) How do culture and gender intersect to make these young girls vulnerable to HIV? After the responses the following themes emerged from the data collected: (1) gender, power and inequality; (2) gender roles and inequality; (3) poverty, sex and vulnerability; (4) gender and culture; and (5) changing roles.

## 4.2 Gender Power and Inequalities

It was clear from the participants' accounts that gender power inequalities shape the ways in which these young girls construct the meaning around sexuality. Since decision making has traditionally been located with males and women accorded a lower status than their counterparts, responses from the participants showed that gender power still plays a huge role in their lives. This is the result of socialisation where men are believed to be powerful and dominating over women and young girls, and women, seen as inferior and being subordinate should therefore be under males' control. The unequal power relations between these sexes, particularly when it comes to social choices over their lives, have impacted negatively on some of these young girls in this study. The following dialogue illustrates:

**Interviewer:** *How old is the boy? (Referring to her brother)*

**Phumi:** *He is ten years old.*

**Interviewer:** *How does it feel to have a younger brother and two sisters?*

**Phumi:** *It is a wonderful thing because my parents waited a long time to get a boy and they tried a number of times. They were only getting girls, so it is a wonderful thing.*

**Interviewer:** *Do they treat your brother in a different way than you?*

**Phumi:** *Of course they do, he is the only boy and he is the youngest, He is an heir at home and to the family, I say this because at home there is no boy.*

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel with him being treated in a different way?*

**Phumi:** *Sometimes it makes me feel sad but I do understand because he is the only boy, and in our culture boys are treated differently from girls.*

**Interviewer:** *Who told you that boys should be treated differently?*

**Phumi:** *I can say it is the culture at home because my father treats him in a different way, but my mom tries in every way to make us equal.*

The extract above illustrates what the literature revealed in Chapter Two about the nature of gender power and inequality as social constructions. Phumi's account about what goes on in her home clearly indicates the connectedness between power and the social processes in the construction, production or reproduction and regulation of gender inequalities (Jewkes, Morrell & Christofides, 2009). Young as he is, Phumi's brother seems to be reared differently by his family. Even though Phumi sometimes feels saddened by the way her brother is treated, she reports the situation as driven by her parents' values, especially her father's and it makes her sad. In her 'Zulu culture', her family believes that her brother (boys) should be treated in a different way from the sisters because he is a boy. In an interview with the second participant, the following emerged:



**Interviewer:** *Does the treatment of your brother make you feel sad?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Ja, and I'm sure you see in most families your parents like your brothers more than you because they think boys are better than girls.*

**Interviewer:** *Why?*

**Mpumelelo:** *That's what they think we do, so it's not right because they are always thinking what are you going to do, not knowing if you are really going to do it so it's not right because you don't feel right, you know people are judging you and all that stuff...and I think they just forget that most of the boys they do bad things because us as young woman we do homework and all the house work, but boys just go around and sit on streets, using drugs and all those stuff but they just forget that and say, oh you know, he is my only son and they forget that their only son does all those bad things and they look at you like you are the only girl, you have to do this and that they forget that now we are all the same.*

From the above excerpts we can identify which beliefs are integral to the upbringing of these boys. From young ages, the participants' brothers are inducted into masculine rituals through the sisters' doing everything for them. It may seem as if these families prepare them to assume their roles of being powerful men in their houses (Bhana, 2010). While the girls in the family are constructed as members of a subordinate social group, Phumi's brother is accorded a higher social status which recognises him as an heir, from a very tender age.

From Phumi's account it has become a task for her mother to treat her boy equal to her girls. As an African woman, Phumi's mother is finding difficulty in treating her boy like girls. 'Trying' suggests that there is an element of difficulty for Phumi's mother to bring up her son like she does with her

daughters. Mpumelelo also shares her dissatisfaction about what her parents do regarding the rearing of his brother differently from hers. All the bad things her brother does mean nothing to her parents. These two participants quietly resist what is going on at their homes. This therefore confirms that gender inequality plays a huge role in the rules and decisions Phumi and Mpumelelo's parents make about children rearing in their families (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

During the interviews participants also indicated that men use power to have sex with them; as argued by Holland *et al.*, (1990), imbalances in gender power do not allow young women from asking for safer sexual encounters. For example:

**A) Interviewer:** *And then they engage in sex?*

**Learners:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** *Unprotected sex?*

**Learners:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** *Do they ever try to say please use a condom. What do they say, do they ever try?*

**Ncami:** *They do try but men have power, they have power over women and young girls, a man who is 25 years you can't say no, because he is an older person, you just say yes.*

**Nondu:** *I think other people are afraid to lose their boyfriends if they don't give it (sex) to them.*

**Noxolo:** *Yes, some of them are afraid, if I don't have sex with him I am going to lose him.*

**Busi:** *You know what Miss, it is always men first and women last, some women feel that they always have to obey man and feel like they don't have rights.*

**B) Nomvuyo:** *Yes, but they engage in sex, not willingly but because...*

**Interviewer:** *Do you mean to say guys you young people engage in sex not because you want to, is that what you are saying?*

**Learners:** *Yes.*

**Nomfundo:** *At times you even scared to tell them if you don't want to do anything like it, he will be calling you saying he is outside and I must come so even if you don't feel like going you just have to because you are afraid of what will happen.*

The price some young girls pay for rejecting or refusing sex is to lose their boyfriends or violence. Interestingly, this might mean that it is under men's rules, when and how to have pleasure and also under men's control that the sexual act should occur. Women, young and old, married and unmarried, often feel they have little to say (Anderson, 2009, p. 132). From these responses it becomes clear that notions of hegemony give some men a license to have sex and also to use power and engage in unprotected sex. Even though it is clear that some young girls take risks by engaging in unprotected sex, the reason they give is that sometimes they are coerced into sex and therefore are afraid not to engage in it as this might make them lose their boyfriends.

In the above excerpt, the expression from the participants' responses suggests that girls and women's inferior status allows them limited or no power to protect themselves by insisting for the use of condoms or refusing sex (Ngubane, 2010). It is the imbalance of power between men and women together with the patterns of unwanted behaviour that put women and young girls at risk of HIV and AIDS. This suggests that men's behaviour needs to be addressed because they play a crucial role in shaping the future of the epidemic in South Africa (Sonke Gender Justice Network, 2008). The above participants' accounts reveal that gender and power impact immensely on the choices available to women and young girls, and these choices are always constrained by coercion and violence (Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Marston & King, 2006). When Nomfundo was asked what would happen if she did not go, she stated that the boyfriend would sometimes become violent.

Nomvuyo, one of the participants, stated that boys sometimes coerced girls because they think girls want sex. What is being said alleged here by Nomvuyo is that it is not just about power, it is also that boys have a belief that girls' resistance is only token. During the group discussions, it became apparent that participants were intensely affected by the power imbalances and inequalities within their relationships, to such an extent that Nondu even wished to be a boy because she feels that boys' voices are heard and girls' voices are not heard. The recurrent theme around gender power inequalities and the need to obey and respect everything that the men say within the relationships is further reinforced in the extract below. One participant (Nothando) even made a biblical reference and also stated that it is natural for men to make decisions. What came out from the young girls' accounts correlate with what the literature revealed about men being viewed as traditionally the decision-makers in the relationships and having power and control over women (Ngubane, 2010). To illustrate, in the focus group discussion, the following emerged:

**Interviewer:** *So, you are equal in your relationships and you don't feel pressed sometimes to do things you do not want?*

**Xolo:** *There will always be this thing that a man is a man.*

**Sandiswa:** *At times you just feel that you have to do things because you respect your man and, if he says something, you do it because he is the man.*

**Interviewer:** *Why?*

**Nomfundo:** *He has needs.*

**Nothando:** *He says I'm a man I have needs.*

**Interviewer:** *But you don't believe in that, that men have needs?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Yes, sometimes that is why they approach you because they have needs...*

**Nothando:** *It's even in the biblical reference; in the Bible it says a woman must obey her man's rules.*

**Lungi:** *But Miss, it nature to do that*

**Interviewer:** *It's natural for you to allow men to make decisions for you?*

**Learners:** *Hmmmmm... (Uncertain)*

**Nothando:** *Women don't have the power.*

**Interviewer:** *Women don't have the power?*

**Nothando:** *Yes, men have the power.*

**Interviewer:** *Men have power?*

**Learners:** *Yes.*

**Nomfundo:** *If you are married they say I am the one who paid the cows so you have to respect me.*

**Lungi:** *They say I married you.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you all feel the same?*

**Learners:** *Yes we feel the same.*

Through the participants' responses it became evident that women and young girls have limited sexual power within their relationships and some of these young girls have limited control over their sexual activities. The lack of sexual power limits the choices available for young girls to make decisions within their relationships. This inequality is influenced by what goes on in the community and what Connell (1995) terms the "socially, culturally exalted and dominant gender construction that subordinates femininities (p. 75). These negative experiences appear to be fundamental to these young girls' constructions of femininities and the way they understand their sexualities.

### 4.3. Gender Roles and Inequalities

There are social norms which dictate that women and girls differ from men and boys in Southern Africa (Morojele, 2009). Through their accounts some participants confirmed this statement by stating that social norms in their communities contribute hugely on how young girls remain in subordinate positions from birth and for the rest of their lives. According to Morojele (2009), society constructs girls as subordinate groups and boys are given power to control. These young girls' responses elucidated how unfair and oppressing gender roles are towards some young African girls. In the case of young girls in this study it seems as if gender norms influence the way in which family members experience life.

#### 4.3.1 "I got home at about half-past seven and the pots were dirty waiting for me to cook"

The above sub-topic illustrates how gender roles are mapped out in these young girls' families. In the interviews and group discussions it came out that while girls are at school, their brothers sit at home and wait for them to come back to cook and clean the house. This suggests that parents in these families are responsible for mapping out roles for boys and girls. These unequal gender roles were also evident in a study by Morojele (2009) conducted in three Lesotho primary schools where he found that girls' and boys' social lives were characterised by segregation, organised mainly along gender lines. From the participants' accounts, they go to school every morning and as learners in high school they are in school early in the morning until late, studying, whilst their brothers sit at home and wait for the girls to come home and expect them to do the house chores. All girls from this study shared their dissatisfaction about the roles they play at home compared to those of their brothers. It is clear that being a young girl in some African

families is shaping the opportunities offered to these African young girls, the roles they need to play and the relationships they will establish with their families and relationships with their boyfriends.

**A) Interviewer:** *What do they say when you find them sitting?*

**Nondu:** *They say it is my job to do the house work. They sometimes don't even clean and I have to come back from school and do the cleaning.*

**Busi:** *My neighbour has three or four boys, the girl usually does everything. She washes for her brothers. They do nothing, they just hang-around on the streets.*

**B) Nothando:** *Uhhhh... I just think for me being a girl is just, well the way I was raised, I was told that you supposed to stay at home, do house chores and go to school and do anything as a girl. I mean I was raised by a single parent so my mom tried her best to give us what we want, so I just think being a girl you stay at home, don't have lots of friends.*

**Nomfundo:** *I also have a brother and he is working, right, so he doesn't do anything in the house, even on weekends I have to wash for him you know and I have to do everything...*

**Noxolo:** *Well at home they think he is like very young, he is 10 years old, but I don't think he is so young because he does the eating and he talks too much.*

**Interviewer:** *What does he do?*

**Noxolo:** *What he cannot do is make up his bed, cleaning up the house all those basic things you know.*



**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about all this?*

**Noxolo:** *Sometimes I get home and cry because sometimes I come home late from school and I find him sitting, eating chips watching TV. So I'm like tired, I have homework and to study but I have to clean up, so I get so irritated. I even write myself a little note to make me feel better but then I realise these are temporary things but what I think makes him do things is because my parents don't pay attention to what he does, they only think I'm the one who is supposed to do everything at home all the chores, but absolutely not.*

**Mpumelelo:** *Well it doesn't feel good you know because at home it is believed that girls do everything so it's not right, it's just not right because sometimes you come back from school late but you have to do the house chores which is bad but I also need to do homework at the same time so it's just not good, it's not right.*

**Interviewer:** *Why?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Ja, and I'm sure you see in most families your parents like your brothers more than you because they think boys are better than girls and should be treated differently.*

These extracts also point out how gender roles are played out in some African homes. Rather than boys being helpful at home they choose to hang around and not help their sisters. The mapping of gender roles by some parents from these families as accounted by the participants in the above extracts seem to be a problematic situation for most African young girls. Young girls' limited options and the relative powerlessness seems to have forced these young girls into subordinate positions in order to cope with household responsibilities (Smith, 2002). This is evident in one of the

participants' response when she stated that, "They want me to pass, they want my future, but they can't help me clean"! Her brothers seem to have good aspirations for her and wish a bright future for her. On the other hand they cannot do the house chores as a way of helping her achieve good results. By so doing, the double standards of gender roles have been internalised and enforced by her brothers (Anderson, 2009). This suggests boys in these families are learning gender roles in early childhood and they might carry these attitudes into adulthood. As a result of the stereotypical gender differences displayed by the young girls' brothers, these girls find it frustrating and sometimes are in tears because of their brother's behaviour and parental complicity. This behaviour has had considerable implications for the experiences of the young girls in this study. The participants' accounts provide a clear indication that gender is socially constructed and it differentiates the power, roles, responsibilities, and obligations between women and young girls and those of men and boys in society (Turmen, 2003). What this means is that people are born males and females but learn to become boys and girls, and then men and women. As a result this learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles between men and women (Turmen, 2003).

#### **4.4 Poverty, Sex and Vulnerability**

Literature reviewed in Chapter Two highlighted young people's attitudes and behaviours regarding their sexual activities. Even though Booyesen & Summerton (2002) state that there is little evidence that poverty is associated with risky sexual behaviour, accounts from the participants indicate that some girls engage in risky behaviours because they are poor. It has been mentioned in the previous chapter (Chapter Three) that most of the learners from this study come from disadvantaged backgrounds, the low-cost houses in the area where the school is located. In such a context, many children are

exposed to intimate relationships with adults (“sugar Daddies”) for survival. The accounts from the group discussions shed very interesting information about these young girls. Even though some specifically mentioned that they do not have “sugar daddies” they (young girls) are aware that some of the girls in school have relations with older men because of money. Their responses also display knowledge about making wise choices and choosing not to engage with older men. All participants in this study stated that it all depends on the person’s mind set, if they do it because they want to be cool with their friends, then it becomes the individuals’ problem.

#### 4.4.1” We Do Like Money”

All the girls from the one-on-one interview and both group discussions voiced opinions consistent with the literature on poverty and the spread of HIV in South Africa. Findings from the study by Bhana & Pattman (2011) show that poverty and being marginalised play a huge role in the choices available for girls. The study highlighted that young girls’ ideals of love are “tied to their aspirations towards middle-class consumerism, for these girls love becomes inseparable from the idealisation of men who provide” (Bhana, & Pattman, 2011, p. 961). Participants’ responses from my study also clearly indicated that there are contributing factors that encourage young girls to engage with older men. Their accounts bear evidence.

**A) Interviewer:** *Why do you do it?*

**Mtshali:** *Most of the girls do it because they need money.*

**Interviewer:** *How?*

**Mtshali:** *They get older men who are working to get them things that they want.*

**Interviewer:** *What is wrong with older men?*

**Nothando:** *You know why, you can't expect an older person to not ask you to have sex.*

**Phumi:** *To add on Mtshali's point, yes money is the issue, but when a person keeps buying you nice things they will eventually want something in return and that will be sex.*

**Interviewer:** *Without thinking about the risk?*

**Mtshali:** *I do think about the risk but he buys me everything*

**Interviewer:** *So you think about the risks but he buys you everything? What are others saying?*

**Nondu:** *I think it comes from the background, if you are poor and need something like your friends have who are wearing nice things, so you also desire to be like your friends or being in the same league. Therefore you do take risks.*

**B) Interviewer:** *So these girls are involved in those sugar-daddy kind relationships right?*

**Learners:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** *So what else do you guys do, that is risky?*

**Nomvuyo:** *Ok Miss, first thing is we are engaging in sex and the little time we get we are going around and satisfying ourselves, there is nothing wrong with that because our parents are over protective and the time we get, we have to make ourselves happy and be with our boyfriends.*

**C) Mpumelelo:** *But others do it due to circumstances you forget that.*

**Interviewer:** *What circumstances?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Like other girls date older people than them just because they want money.*

**Interviewer:** *Older people?*

**Learners:** *Yes.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you girls do that?*

**Learners:** *no, no, no.*

**Mpumelelo:** *They say he gives me money to buy food, clothes and all that stuff because sometimes they think that okay my mum is a single parent, we are suffering at home, let me just date him because he will give me money to assist my mum at home so let me just date him...then the guy will be like having sex with me because I do everything for you then you are going to feel guilty that he does everything for me, what do I have in return for him.*

D) **Lungi:** *A younger guy can't buy you everything you want but an older guy will, he will take you out to the movies and do stuff, buy you stuff.*

**Interviewer:** *and then?*

**Noxolo:** *But also you are being used.*

**Interviewer:** *How are you being used? How is he using you?*

**Noxolo:** *He is using you because he will want something in return.*

**Interviewer:** *What is something?*

**Noxolo:** *Sex.*

**Interviewer:** *What is wrong with sex?*

**Nothando:** *He is old and because first you are going to be used because that man has a wife whom he loves.*

**Noxolo:** *Even if you say no, he won't listen because he wants something in return because he spent his money on you.*

From some participants' accounts it came out clearly that poverty plays a huge role in the spread of HIV. Young girls revealed that if they go out with young boys their age, these boys will not buy them stuff or take them to movies because they do not have money. They rather prefer older men, who will take care of them financially. Participants were aware that when older men give them money and material stuff they expect sexual favours in return.

This therefore means that young girls may face the risk of contracting HIV and sexually transmitted infections just because they are poor. Even though they are aware of the risks involved, when the man provides food and the girl is helping a struggling single mother to put food on the table, they are willing to face those risks. They even stated that sometimes it might be difficult to refuse sex just because an older person will not listen to a younger person's terms of sex. What happens in these types of relationships confirms what is stated by Holland *et al.* (1990), Hoffman *et al.* (2006), MacPhail and Campbell (2006) and Leclerc-Madlala (2010) about poverty being mentioned as a driver in the spread of HIV in South Africa. Young girls from poor backgrounds wanting to fit in a particular group are pressured to have boyfriends who will support and buy stuff for them. It is not just because these young girls are slightly less likely to have the necessary knowledge about HIV and AIDS, which of course, in itself increases the vulnerability of young girls to HIV, rather, the girls are forced by circumstances that they view as beyond their control, because of their poor backgrounds. These accounts are related to what Leclerc-Madlala termed "the 'sugar daddy' phenomenon". Leclerc-Madlala (2010) describes this phenomenon as sexual liaisons where young women get involved with older men who deny these women any choices for safe sex. Data from the group discussions revealed that almost all participants are susceptible to teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV because of the intergenerational sexual relationships they engage in and also because of the limited choices they have to negotiate safer sex.

Furthermore, what was also evident from the interviews and group discussions was that sexual power plays a pivotal role in these relationships where they become dependent on a provider. The participants spoke about risks they may face, but what seems to be more important is pressure to belong to a certain group and the need to have fancy stuff. Material stuff and

money seem to pressure young girl into engaging in risky behaviours that put them at risk for contracting HIV. This resonates with what researchers (Caraël & Glynn, 2007 Hoffman *et al.*, 2006; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010) state about the high levels of risky sexual behaviour in South African youth. These researchers express concern about young people in South Africa and the extent to which they take high risk sexual behaviour that puts them at risk of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies. From what these young girls mentioned it became clear that the love of money might threaten the young girls' futures as they are willing to face risks due to gender norms which value sexual ignorance and limited power in sexual relations (Hallman, 2005).

While almost all young girls stated that they sometimes engage in sex with older men, there were some participants who revealed that they prefer to be with boys their age because communication is better with them, unlike with older men. One of the reasons mentioned by Sne for not liking older men was the myth about people with HIV sleeping with virgins to cure the disease. She seemed scared that these men might want to sleep with young girls just to cure themselves, in the process infecting the young girl.

**A) Lungi:** *It's better being with someone who is younger than an older person, because you can talk to someone who is the same age, you can tell him that I don't want this but an older person you can't tell him.*

**Interviewer:** *Why?*

**Lungi:** *You are scared.*

**Interviewer:** *Excuse me, so you can't talk to an old man.*



**Nothando:** *No, I can talk to him.*

**Nomfundo:** *At times you are even scared to tell them (older men) if you don't want to do anything, like he will be calling you. saying he is outside and I must come so even if I don't feel like going you just have to because you are afraid of what will happen.*

**B) Sne:** *If I am young and dating a man with a car, that man is employed or has a wife. I don't think it's right to date sugar daddies.*

**Interviewer:** *Why?*

**Sne:** *Other sugar daddies or older men believe that if you sleep with a virgin you will be cured from HIV, so, some believe in that and they date young girls.*

**Interviewer:** *And then what we must do?*

**Sne:** *We must stop pressuring our friends into doing things that are bad, like talking about boyfriends who provide us with money, forgetting that there is something else that they want in return from us.*

**Busi:** *It is important that we enjoy being kids, how is it going to help us to give ourselves to older men for materialistic things instead of being content and have poor boyfriends who respects and adore us.*

For these participants, having a relationship with older men scares them more and they prefer someone their age who will be able to listen to them when there is something they do not like in the relationship. It is important

according to Sne, to note that these older men will always have a hidden agenda, they give money and they will want something in return.

#### 4.4.2 “They don’t actually tell you to have it, but they will talk about it”

What is discussed below has a strong resonance with what researchers like Wood, Maforah & Jewkes (1998), Harrison, Xaba and Kunene (2001), MacPhail and Campbell (2001), Jewkes & Morrell (2010) and Leclerc-Madlala (2010) conclude when they state that social pressures are encouraging young girls to engage in sex. It is evident from what is discussed in these extracts that peer pressure has a major influence in the lives of some young people. Although these young girls stated that there is no verbal and physical exertion of pressure, the absence of verbal and physical pressures becomes the real pressure to these young girls to share in order for them to be able to contribute and be streetwise about sexual matters within their circle of friends. Though engaging in unprotected sex risks exposure to HIV infections, other sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies, peer norms force these young girls to engage in such sexual activities.

**A) Phumi:** *It is also peer-pressure Miss, and being accepted in that group.*

**Busi:** *They will say, “Yesterday I had it and it was nice.”*

**Busi:** *You have to share something with them also.*

**Ncami:** *And contribute to the conversation and not be quiet.*

**Learners:** *We become curious.*

**Interviewer:** *We know curiosity killed the cat, but do we really need to be curious by using our bodies?*

**Busi:** *That’s the problem Miss, we don’t think, we just act at the spur of the moment, and not thinking what we are getting ourselves into.*

**B) Noxolo:** *Yes, but they engage in sex, not willingly but because...*

**Interviewer:** *Do you mean to say guys you young people engage in sex not because you want to, is that what you are saying?*

**Noxolo:** *Yes, but because they want to impress their boyfriends so they do that.*

Busi and Ncami speak of sharing and contributing in order to belong, this correlates with what has been discussed in Chapter Two (Review of Literature) about the pressures of belonging in youth circles. One example which highlights the point about sharing and contributing made by a participant in the study by Wood, Maforah and Jewkes (1998) was that young people are pressured by the fact they need to share and they end up doing sex; if they do not they become too lonely because they lose friends. This is one of the reasons given by the young people in this study. Another important issue that came out was that of being curious. This reveals that there is an element of negligence from some young people and as a result they want to experiment with their bodies irrespective of the consequences. This has been summed up by Busi when stating that young people do not think but they seem to use feelings instead of thinking, not realising the dangers of their actions. It is evident that these young girls have normalised a situation that can turn out to be destructive. Their actions resonate with Shoba (2009) where he states that the norms and behaviours of peers have a negative effect on young people's sexual behaviours which results in taking risks. Peer acceptance seems to be the most pivotal aspect in these young girls' relations and they are willing to have relationships so that they can be able to share (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998). This extract confirms how influential the attitudes and beliefs of peers to one another, some young girls in this study engage in risky behaviours for peer acceptance.

What came out from the interviews and group discussions was the impact of poverty and peer pressure on young girls and the need to belong. Circumstantial forces such as poverty and peer pressure influence young girls' choices; as a result of these the young girls resort to taking risks that will expose them to HIV and sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies.

#### **4.5. Gender and Culture**

As reported above, in the literature, the notions of 'culture' is often viewed as a factor contributing immensely to the spread of HIV and AIDS and also in perpetuating gender inequality. As a result there are specific negative aspects of 'culture' that impact hugely on the South African population, particularly young girls and women. Phumi during a one-one interview clearly stated how culture sometimes makes them (African girls) "fools". Even in the group discussions some girls mentioned the fact as African girls they feel that culture is "squeezing them in a bowl".

##### **4.5.1 "Culture Promotes Inequality"**

Some participants' accounts revealed the role of 'culture' in relation to HIV and AIDS in the lives of the young South African girls. Factors such as Shembe religion and *ukuthwalwa* impinge on the young girls choices in a relationship. Some of these factors vary from beliefs and values concerning sexuality, including the time when one wants to be sexually active and the number of sexual partners one might have and also the issue of condom use. The participants' responses revealed that culture still places men as dominant and women as subordinates. The following dialogue illustrates:

**A) Interviewer:** *What would you do if you have a relationship where your husband is traditional like your father is, who believes that culture is important?*

**Phumi:** *Since I was brought up with culture I will eventually maybe obey his rules because it's cultural that if you are a woman you must respect your man, respect your body. You should respect everyone in the community and then I think I should obey his rules.*

**Phumi:** *That's why I will not get married because I was brought up by culture and I said, my mentality tells me something else that culture, well I don't want to use this word, but it sometimes makes us fools.*

**Interviewer:** *By us you refer to women?*

**Phumi:** *Yes it makes women to feel like fools because if you get beaten up by the man, you will say, oh no, he loves me, he is not hurting me. You tend to shift all the blame to you because he is the man and you are supposed to respect him and obey whatever he says or whatever he does.*

**Interviewer:** *Is it ok then to say uhm..., culture can sometimes be used to defend gender inequality, like now you are saying it's culture, do you think it's ok to say culture must be blamed for inequalities?*

**Phumi:** *Yes, culture is the main thing that makes us to have inequality because most people who have power are men; we were taught that we should obey all what the man is saying, so I can say our culture promotes inequalities.*

**Interviewer:** *But you are doing that at home, like you know better you are educated, but you are perpetuating this (gender inequality) you are telling your brother that he is the man, so he must be treated differently.*

**Phumi:** *Not exactly, but I have to obey my parents; maybe I can do this in my own house. I respect my parents and all that they say, if they say my brother should be treated differently, that is fine.*

B) **Nomvuyo:** *What I say is if you're a girl you need to know how to respect yourself, that is the most important thing because you can't be going around doing things, like sleeping with boys and all that stuff, so respecting yourself is important because you like, I don't think you should sleep with someone who you think is perfect because boys are not perfect, you might think that someone is perfect but he's not. So I think respecting yourself is an important thing if you are a girl.*

Even though there has been a shift in the way women are seen and treated in South Africa in terms of equal opportunities and rights, there still exists the unequal balance of power, not only where law is concerned, but in the daily interactions among women and men (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This has a strong resonance with what young girls in this study said during their interview. Phumi seems like a girl who is torn between two very important things, her 'culture' and her freedom from this 'culture'. Whilst she is still under her father's house she feels she needs to obey the rules and do what her father (head of the family) says; on the other hand she wants to defy the same 'culture' by deciding that when she gets her freedom (i.e. when she is older) she will not get married and be under a man's control. It is also clear from Phumi's account that if she were to marry she would obey her husband's rules as a man. The contradiction in her views might be caused by the fact

that in an African 'culture' a man is seen as superior and the head of the family. Whilst under her father's supervision, Phumi is complicit in perpetuating gender inequality, but when she gets older and being able to make her own decisions she will challenge the same 'culture' by fighting for her independence, that is not being tied down to a man as a wife. Her resistance to the 'culture' might result from the fact that that Phumi is getting educated and hears views about women empowerment. The reason why Phumi seems to be obeying her father's rules might emanate from the fact that she sees her father as the custodian of an African 'culture' and this should be elevated as long as she is within his walls. At age sixteen, Phumi already knows that as a woman she is a subordinate and she has to obey a man. What happens in Phumi's house affirms what Wallace (2005) stated about how 'culture' continues to endorse the subordination of women through many of its practices and promotes male dominance, which increases the acceptance and justification of violence against women. It is clear in this excerpt that these young girls are articulating their discontent with inequality. Literature has indicated that women and young girls are sometimes coerced by their partners and beaten up for sex (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Hallman, 2005; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). This therefore illustrates that many cultural practices entail behaviours which are risky, in particular sexual practices which are common in African populations (Seathre & Stadler, 2009).

**A) Nothando:** *Sometimes you have to forget about culture, these days you have not to think too much about culture. Sometimes culture can make you do stuff you don't want to do.*

**Interviewer:** *Stuff like what?*

**Nothando:** *Like have sex because a woman is supposed to give her man...also having to share one husband with many wives.*

**Interviewer:** *What's wrong with that?*

**Nothando:** *With HIV then you don't, firstly because he is your husband, he will tell you I can't use a condom we are married, you are going to get HIV even if you didn't want to.*

**Interviewer:** *So in other words you are saying that our culture sometimes is not good for us?*

**Ayanda:** *Especially, these days with HIV and other diseases.*

**B) Sandiswa:** *We also like squeezed in this bowl of culture, bibles and life out there, we don't know what we must tolerate or what we must really follow.*

**Interviewer:** *So you are saying to me that you pressured by culture to do things that you are doing as African woman?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Yes, sometimes we are, sometimes for instance when you going to church you get older men choosing small girls to be their wives and you can't say no because your parents force you to do it.*

**Slindile:** *No they don't force you.*

**Mpumelelo:** *You don't know what happens to those girls.*

**Slindile:** *I know I go to KaShembe.*



**Mpumelelo:** *Maybe your mother doesn't force you but some parents do.*

**Interviewer:** *Some parents do and then what's the risk now, why are you saying it's not good, what will happen to that young girl?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Maybe that person has HIV and she has to fall pregnant at a young age, she is married.*

**Nomfundo:** *And you find that she doesn't love him, she is just doing it and most of the time you find that an older man will say I am older than you, you have to obey my rules you must do this and say nothing, I'm the one older than you and I must teach you how to be my wife and you will be the wife I want... can you imagine miss sleeping with an older guy?*

**Mpumelelo:** *Sometime Miss you find girls like us, like she (Slindile) said KaShembe; there are men who want to take you as their wife. Most men take them (young girls) to be a second wife and when they approach you they say, I'm going to love you, my wife is old now. You have to get love and all that stuff and you get taken thinking that this man will do everything for you.*

**Nomvuyo:** *You find that most of the time in the Eastern Cape, young girls are taken (ukuthwalwa) and they are forced to marry older men and their fathers say they must marry these men because they want lobolo in return. A girl is there as an investment for men and a boy must get the girl and that is that.*

**Nothando:** *Miss, you see the culture, you see what's happening?*

It has been mentioned in Chapter Three of this study that there are 'cultural' practices in the community where the study was conducted which are

common and have been accepted and normalised by the community. These practices are *ukuhlola* (virginity testing), *isithembu* (polygamy), *ukuthwalwa* (bride abduction) and *umkhosi womhlanga* (reed ceremony). Young girls in this study spoke extensively about how they feel about these practices. It was evident from the young girls' responses that cultural practices expose them to HIV and teenage pregnancy; because of 'culture' their parents are willing to trade them for *ilobolo* (bride price). Hunter (2005) also points out that African parents' sometimes put heavy stake in their daughter's future *ilobolo*. This is evident when young girls stated that in one of the churches (*Shembe*) girls are picked from church in an arranged-type of marriage by older men. Even though one of the participants, Slindile, stated that girls are not forced to marry older men, Mpumelelo asserted that in fact young girls are forced to marry older men. It has been stated in Chapter Three that one of the reasons why there is a need for the study was the practice of picking young girls from the church in this community. Men practise polygamy within their church and they choose women and young girls from the church as they like and are willing to pay huge *ilobolo* to the bride's parents. This religion grounds its beliefs on culture and traditions, which is why polygamy is not viewed as a problem by the young girls' parents.

The participants revealed that the inequality within their relationships is influenced by what goes on in the community and what Connell (1995) termed the "socially, culturally exalted and dominant gender construction that subordinates femininities as well as other forms of masculinity and shapes men's social relationships with women and other men, thus representing power and authority over women"(p.75). Then there are cultural norms among the African people which encourage male dominance and result in women being treated as subordinates, such as in the case of the young girls who are pressured to marry older men irrespective of whether they infected with HIV or not. These norms are embedded within cultural values and beliefs

that a father as *umnumzana* (the head of the family) has a right to choose who his daughter is marrying (Hunter, 2005). The norms contribute immensely to the continuing spread of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. It seems as if it does not matter what the young girls want or whether they are in love with these older men but their parents expect them to marry for the sake of *ilobolo*. In a case of *ukuthwalwa*, it is clear that love also plays no role in the matter but only what the parents want from the groom. 'Culture' is viewed as a contributing factor to the increase of the vulnerability of these young girls to HIV in this study. The power imbalance that defines gender relations and sexual interactions affects young girls' choices about matters of sexual engagements within their relationships.

#### 4.5.2 Culture, Gender and Sexuality

While it is evident from Phumi's account that her 'culture' promotes inequalities and she wants to escape from it when she gets older, culture on the other hand has been praised by Sne. Even though Phumi has contrasting views about her 'culture', Sne's account clearly indicates that she is proud of her culture even though it is sometimes different from context to context. Sne embraces what 'culture' has done and is doing for her. In this extract Sne reveals that she has a boyfriend but theirs is not a sexual relationship. She stated that she is willing to wait and to keep her virginity until she gets married. What is apparent from Sne's account is that there is inconsistency in the cultural message:

**Interviewer:** *How old is your boyfriend?*

**Sne:** *18 years.*

**Interviewer:** *Oh, not the same age as you, do you kiss?*

**Sne:** *(Laughing) Yes.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you have sex?*

**Interviewer:** *So, you don't have sex?*

**Sne:** *No, I'm still young.*

**Interviewer:** *You are still young? Some of your classmates have children and you say you are young for that. Explain to me.*

**Sne:** *We have been brought up differently at home and I can't copy another person's culture, I believe in my culture. It's because of my culture and we believe that a young girl should stay a virgin until they get married (*intombazane esencane kufanele ihlale iyintombi ize igane*).*

The above excerpt illustrates positive 'culture' from Sne's point of view. Clearly, her account reveals that culture in the context of the study is not just one set of norms, but that there are competing notions of 'culture'. Schalkwyk (2002) confirms this by stating that culture is complex and has different characteristics depending on a particular society or social group. Although Sne and Phumi are African young girls, the way they view culture depends on their family backgrounds and their social group, hence, the different views about culture. Phumi was born in the North of KwaZulu-Natal and Sne is originally from Eastern Cape. The difference in viewing 'culture' might be the fact that they come from totally different cultural contexts. Sne states that she has been brought up differently and she believes in her 'culture'. 'Culture' might be oppressive to some young girls but Sne seems to be holding on to it to save her virginity. There seems to be no element of force from Sne's account from her parents to impress on virginity but through her account it seems as if she is willing to wait until she is 22 and then she can engage in sex. This is not only going help her keep her virginity but will also reduce her chances of getting HIV when she is still young. Sne and Phumi's deep connections with their culture are congruent to Seathre and Stadler's (2009)

study in “A Tale of Two “Cultures” in Orange Farm”. In this study, although cultural factors were thought to play a role in contracting HIV, this was only in instances where individuals still participated in traditional practices. Moreover, culture was thought to be able to play both a positive and negative role in the HIV and AIDS pandemic. What transpired in Seathre and Stadler’s (2009) study seems to be the case with some participants in this study; ‘culture’ seems to play both positive and negative roles.

It was fascinating to note that participants kept on having different views about ‘culture’. Almost all of these young girls were explicit about their feelings and views about culture. What emerged was that these young girls were passionate about virginity and status as virgins. They view virginity as something that will be rewarded after marriage by husbands. Gupta (2000) highlighted the fact that the traditional norm of virginity for unmarried girls that exists in many societies, paradoxically, increases young women’s risk of infection because it restricts their ability to ask for information about sex out of fear that they will be thought to be sexually active (p.2). Accounts from these girls revealed that they have abundant knowledge about HIV and what it entails, but virginity to them means a lot.

**A) Interviewer:** *Do you think your virginity is important?*

**Phumi:** *Yes, very important.*

**Interviewer:** *If you lose your virginity before you get married?*

**Phumi:** *Nooo... I would kill myself.*

**B) Nomvuyo:** *So to me being a girl is just going to a reed ceremony as an African woman.*

**Interviewer:** *Reed ceremony?*

**Nomvuyo:** *Yes, reed ceremony, not engaging yourself in sex, but dating, dating to me is not a problem because I do date, not that I'm proud of that but, but ja.*

**Sandiswa:** *I think if the reed ceremony did not exist so many teenagers would be pregnant by now because some are forced to go there, others have the desire to go there, they say if I wasn't going to a reed ceremony they would do something.*

**Interviewer:** *So you mean to say that among the girls that are going to the reed ceremony there are girls that are forced and there are girls that are doing it willingly.*

**Learners:** *Yes.*

While negative experiences appears to be fundamental to these young girls' constructions of femininities and the way they understand their sexuality, the participants are willing and passionate about waiting for the right time to have sex. Even though Gupta (2000) stated that the traditional norm of virginity puts young girls at risk of rape and sexual coercion in high prevalence countries, because of the erroneous belief that sex with a virgin can cleanse a man of infection, and because of the erotic imagery that surrounds the innocence and passivity associated with virginity (p.2), the passion for these young girls to keep themselves virgins is also strong.

Although this study did not explore more about whether these young girls practice alternative sexual behaviours to preserve their virginity, such as *ukusoma (thigh sex)*, it was clear that most of them are willing to wait for the right time, voluntarily by abstaining. Phumi even stated that she would resort to ending her life if she cannot be a virgin when she turns 21. One good reason she stated was the fact that it is wrong to have sex before one gets married because when they do it with their husbands, they might be remembering their first boyfriends, then they will despise their husbands if they are not good because the husbands cannot do it better than their first boyfriends. Busi supported this view by stating:

**A) Busi:** *This is what our mothers said no sex without marriage. I believe one must keep one's virginity until the age of 21 when they get married.*

**Interviewer:** *So, if you don't get married until you are thirty, then you should have it?*

**Ncami:** *But I think you should just wait until you get married so that your husband will trust you and see that you have managed to keep yourself. But when you are 21 you might look at it in a way that says, now that I am 21, I can do it. Just because now it's in your mind and you not thinking if you are emotionally ready for it and then you get hurt.*

**Phumi:** *It has to come with how well you have developed, because not all of us want to get married but at the end we all want to have sex, but then if she is 21 or 22 thinking about having sex, she must think if she is emotionally ready.*

**Ncami:** *You should also note that not all of us develop equally at the same time. For example, my younger sister started her periods at the age of 11 and yet I started at 15, so it's got to do with the level of development.*

**Interviewer:** *So, it does not have to do with age, but the level of development and what you want as an individual?*

**Learners:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** *So, you can have it now or at a later stage so as you are ready.*

**Ncami:** *I favour sex after marriage.*

**B) Interviewer:** *When is the right time to have sex?*

**Ayanda:** *When you have everything.*

**Interviewer:** *Everything, when do you have everything?*

**Lungi:** *Not exactly when you have everything but when you know you can face the consequences of having sex, you know that if you fall pregnant you going to take care of your baby even if the guy leaves you.*

**Interviewer:** *When you are 21, that's what you said, Lungi?*



**Lungi:** *I think after marriage*

**Interviewer:** *After marriage, other people?*

**Nothando:** *What if I don't get married?*

**Interviewer:** *Then if you don't get married what is the right time to engage in sex?*

**Noxolo:** *When you independent, when you are not dependent on your parents.*

**Interviewer:** *When you are not depending on your parents?*

**Nomvuyo:** *I think when you are ready for it and ready for the consequences.*

**Interviewer:** *But you are 16 and you are growing up now guys, when you kiss your boyfriend there is that feeling that I can have it...*

**Sandiswa:** *I can think that I am ready now but it's not the right time.*

**Interviewer:** *When is the right time?*

**Sandiswa:** *When you independent.*

These young girls are willing to listen to their mothers' teachings about sex even though they have many influences that might change their perceptions about sex. In the interviews there was evidence that suggested that some of the girls or their peers were having sex. Three very crucial things were revealed by this excerpt, the teachings from mothers about virginity, trust

from husbands if one managed to keep herself a virgin for the husband and the level of emotional and physical development and readiness to engage in sex.

#### 4.5.3 Sex, Fear of Pregnancy, HIV and Condom Use

Waiting is also viewed by these young girls as a binding element that the husband will commend and maybe give respect because they have managed to keep themselves intact for the husbands. What some participants stated is that a girl needs to be emotionally ready to be active in sexual activities. When asked what is stopping them from having sex with their boyfriends, the girls responded by stating:

**Interviewer:** *When do you think you will be ready?*

**Phumi:** *When I am matured enough, when I can take the big decisions, when I know that I engage in sex I will know the consequences that I will face.*

**Ncami:** *Because I know that as much as we talk (about sex), but we are not ready to take parental responsibilities. He is young and not getting any income also his background is not good.*

**Interviewer:** *So, if your boyfriend tells you that he will leave you if you don't want to have sex with him, what will you say?*

**Sne:** *I will let him leave me simply because I cannot go against the rules of my culture. Also I might get pregnant or get HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.*

**Interviewer:** *What's wrong with having a baby?*

**Sne:** *I'm still young and cannot afford the child.*

**Nomfundo:** *If you going to have sex there are some consequences, you going to be HIV positive, you going to be pregnant, you going to get STI's and all those things, they are afraid to tell us that.*

It is not only the level of maturity that is important, but the responsibilities that come with having sex. According to Ncami if she falls pregnant the boy might not be able to support the child and they are not ready to be parents. Ncami also cautions that thinking about sex does not mean that one is emotionally ready as might get hurt (pregnant) if you engage at an early stage. Young girls in the study have real fear for pregnancy. These young girls found teen pregnancy very frightening because they see themselves as very young for parenthood. The participants viewed teenage pregnancy as a challenge that can be a stumbling block in their careers. The participants saw pregnancy as something that will hinder their future. There were those who were totally against involving themselves in sexual intercourse because they are afraid of early pregnancy and contracting HIV.

The issues of love, trust and the use of condoms were discussed and participants revealed that boys believe that having unprotected sex is the sign of love and trust.

**Nothando:** *Yes that is what they say, because you love me why don't you prove it, just prove it...because I really love him let me just give myself just once.*

**Interviewer:** *But when you engage in sex do you have protected sex or just sex?*

**Nomvuyo:** *Many of the youngsters, the youth, they don't use condoms.*

**Interviewer:** *They don't use condoms?*

**Noxolo:** *Yes, if you use a condom they don't feel the skin that shows that you don't love him that much.*

**Interviewer:** *If you use a condom you don't really love them?*

**Sandiswa:** *Yes, you don't really love him that much ja, you don't trust me do you think I'm sick yes.*

**Interviewer:** *That's why then the teenage pregnancy is so high in this school.*

**Learners:** *Yes.*

In the discussions it was revealed that this level of development varies from one girl to the other. If this is the case what is emotional and physical readiness? From what some of these young girls discussed, it is evident that their passion for being virgins and the status it might give them have emanated from the fact that virginity is seen as a cultural value of chastity

before marriage, modesty, self-respect and pride, therefore, these young girls have viewed virginity as the only way to re-instil these values (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001). Even though this is what the study finds out, the reality is very different, not all girls view virginity testing as valuable. Within the study the girls are claiming to be virgins and to have sex when they are ready

**Busi:** *I feel and I know the need to keep myself until I find someone appropriate for marriage. I also dream to keep myself until the age of 21, make my family proud and also my community.*

Almost all the participants stated that is good to wait and have sex when they are above 21 years old. Their willingness to wait reveals the agency from these young girls to change the status quo. Unplanned pregnancies were not seen as an option by young girls. Contrary to what these young girls are saying is the reality of the high number of pregnancies in the school. Young girls see their education and their future as very important and the only vehicles to their freedom. If these girls are all advocating for education, how come there are still high rates of teenage pregnancy in South African schools.

#### 4.6 Changing Roles

The data collected also showed that these young girls do want to change what has been seen as normal and challenge it. One emergent theme was changing roles, which seemed to be emphasised by all participants. When the participants were asked about their culture and if it can be changed to correct what it has done to women and young girls, they responded by stating that women and girls should be independent so that they would not feel as subordinate to men.

**A) Interviewer:** *So, in your relationships do you feel you are equal?*

**Ncami:** *I would say we are equal, because he has asked me for sex once and I told him I am not ready then he said why, we argued about it but he ended up respecting my decision.*

**Mtshali:** *Sometimes I feel like I am able to control him because when I tell him to do this he does it.*

**B) Nomfundo:** *If I don't feel like doing it I won't do it I just tell him nah I don't feel like doing this.*

**Interviewer:** *And then that is ok with him?*

**Nomfundo:** *it works for me.*

**Nomvuyo:** *That is why we usually dump guys because the guy I was recently dating was so forceful, he would say I have to visit him if you don't you will get a slap or if I am standing with my choir mates he says I am going to slap you, you're standing with boys. I just say you know what I know myself, if you could just stand for who I am because you can't change who I am but you can maybe change what I am by beating me, but you can't change who I am, if you can't stand for who I am then just get over it.*

**C) Nothando:** *Yes I believe so, any woman can say no to any man you have the right to say no. and I actually think that you are the boss of yourself, if a man tells you, you must do that and you say hell no, I don't want to do it and you won't do it, putting your foot down saying you won't do cause I don't want to do it and you must do what you want to do without involving me.*

**Sandiswa:** *Yes you must know what you want in life, what you want to be, and what kind of a person you want to be*

**Interviewer:** *But we see people being controlled in their relationships, girls being beaten by their boyfriends*

**Nomvuyo:** *By knowing what you want to be, what you want in life, you won't let that happen, you won't allow it to happen if you have a dream.*

**Phumi:** *I believe and I think it is a relationship where there is lots of love, caring, no beating and understanding each other.*

The above excerpts provide evidence that some of these young girls want to resist boys and protect their agency. Ncami and her boyfriend are sixteen; at this stage hormones are raging; this is often seen as the young people's debut time to have sex, but Ncami is willing to wait because she feels she is not ready to have sex. What this means is that young people from this study see themselves as sexual beings and are also able to control their sexual experimentation until such time they feel responsible. With all participants a need was expressed for them to change what the society has long viewed as normal. Some of the participants' accounts reveal this:

**Nondu:** *In a relationship I think being equal with my partner is important.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you like material stuff, do you want your man to buy you stuff?*

**Phumi:** *I would love that but not now because that will make me go under circumstances that I will not be able to handle because my boyfriend buys me some clothes and something that is very expensive. I will have to pay him back in some way and that is sleeping with him of course. I do like material things but right now no...*

**Interviewer:** *Even if he promises to take you to Cape Town for a trip if you have sex, you will deny him?*

**Phumi:** *I think we should tell ourselves that whatever the man says, he is lying. When he says those things, those big promises and you don't want to sleep with him, he will leave you like that. There will be no Cape Town, no Carvella shoes or designer clothes, he just want you to sleep with you and that's all.*

**Nondu:** *I will tell him to forget about it (sex) because it's not really about him, it's about both of us, what we both want not what he wants.*

#### 4.6.1 “Love yourself first before you love others to bits”

Almost all participants emphasised the fact that it is important for them as young girls to love who they are because they will not expect this from anyone. These young girls see the need of becoming agents of social transformation and by so doing they will form part of the solution to combating the HIV and AIDS epidemic (Ngubane, 2010). Young girls want their individual sexualities to be defined by who they are and what they believe in, instead of whom they have sex with, in what ways, why, under what circumstances, and with what outcomes (Gupta, 2000). Loving who they are seems an answer for these young girls to defeat explicit and implicit rules that are imposed by their society, as defined by one's gender, age, economic status, ethnicity and other factors (Gupta, 2000). The discussion about what the participants expect from their boyfriends shed information about how girls want their rights, power and agency.

**A) Interviewer:** *What do you expect from your boyfriend?*

**Busi:** *Respect and recognition that I am here, I am also human.*



**Interviewer:** *You are human?*

**Busi:** *That I also have emotions, thoughts and...*

**Nondu:** *A person who will listen to my voice, where I will be able to raise my voice and discuss, allow me to do my choices and him to have his choices. A person who is not abusive.*

What came out from this extract was that respect is important and the fact that Busi stated that she is also a human being, meaning she has a right to say something about how and what she feels and also to make her own decisions since she can think about things. From this extract it is clear that Busi wants to overcome the insurmountable barriers of gender and sexual inequality, by wanting respect from her boyfriend and by the recognition she wants to change the cultural norms that create the damaging gender disparities and roles that subordinate women and young girls (Gupta, 2000).

**Phumi:** *If he is a man, he has to wait for me if he loves me, if he doesn't then he must just go I don't care.*

**Nomfundo:** *We are not saying no to sex because we don't like it...*

**Interviewer:** *Why are you saying no?*

**Nomfundo:** *Because we know what we want in life.*

Participants feel the need for women and young girls to show that they also have rights and these rights give them choices about their sexualities and sexual activities. Young girls in this study strongly feel that most boys do not respect girls and as a result of this, girls are pressured to do things that they

do not want. They all stated that because they have mapped out their career paths they will hold on and wait because they have dreams in life.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Although internationally and nationally patriarchal attitudes are changing, it seems as if the young girls in this study are challenging issues of gender inequalities. The study revealed that gender power inequalities are perpetrated by the imbalances between men and boys, women and girls. Despite the fact that the social and economic status and cultural expectations of women and young girls increase the risk of their vulnerability to HIV, other sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy, some of these young girls are willing to wait until maturity before they engage in sex with their boyfriends whilst others are having relationships with older men. Some of these young girls' lower status in their community do leave them more exposed to gender inequalities; but at the same time there are those who, instead it threatens the power dynamics in their relationships. Some of the young girls are aware of all that is happening but they want to be agents to challenge the status quo. This may be the result of the changes taking place in South Africa when it comes to gender issues or the fact that these young girls are empowered by the women they see in as public figures. It may also mean that young girls in this study want to continue their education or take employment. In this way they are willing to wait until age 21 before they are tied down by commitments and child rearing.

The study found that young girls are able and willing to take control in their relationships. Some of them view their 'culture' as very important in keeping them as virgins. One might ask is the change plausible, bearing in mind the context of GBV and unequal gender power relations. Having a positive attitude being positive about their virginity could be seen as a way of

abstinence, hence, keeping them safe from contracting HIV. Whereas ‘culture’ is criticised by some girls, who say it oppresses women and make them “fools”, some participants stated that culture influences the way some of these girls view themselves in relation to men. They did not state that keeping themselves as virgins is a pressured cultural belief but from their accounts it became clear that it is a strategy that will help these young girls delay the age of sexual debut and also reduce their vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections and HIV infection.

Even though these young girls revealed the agency for them to make changes, when it comes to their sexuality and sexual risk, there was evidence from the data that young people are vulnerable to HIV because they like material things and also because of pressure from other young people to belong to a particular circle of friends. Participants clearly stated the importance of standing up for themselves and doing things they believe in and not what they desire because they are forced by any circumstances. The emphasis is to enjoy being children and to be content and having a boyfriend who will respect them.

The next chapter will draw conclusions of this study by giving the summary of the whole study and also making recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate ways in which young girls (16–17) give meaning to sexuality, sexual risks and how gender is embedded within these meanings. This was done by answering one key research question and four sub-questions. The key question read thus: How do young African women construct their femininities, and what effect does it have for their sexuality? The sub-questions were as follows: (1) What do young township girls regard as risky sexual behaviour? (2) What types of risky behaviours do these young girls engage in? (3) How is gender connected to sexual risk? (4) How do culture and gender intersect to make these young girls vulnerable to HIV? In the previous chapter qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was analysed, interpreted and discussed. This chapter (Chapter Five) will firstly address the summary of the entire research. Secondly, conclusions deduced from the findings will be presented; these conclusions are responses to the main research questions of the study. Thirdly, the limitations of the research will be highlighted. Finally this chapter will offer recommendations for further research.

#### 5.2 Summary of the Research

In Chapter One the problem statement, the need for the study, the participants and the context of the research site where my participants were drawn from and the research design were presented. Chapter Two gave a detailed review of relevant literature around issues of gender, power, sex and inequalities and HIV and AIDS globally and in South Africa. In Chapter Three

the methodological processes that were adopted for data collection in the study were described. Since this study is gendered it utilised gender power theories and social construction theory as lenses with which to frame the data gathering and analysis. This qualitative study also utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews and group discussions as data collection instruments. Chapter Four presented analysis and interpretation of the findings. This was done through themes that emerged from the data collected. The findings revealed that the even though young girls like to be assertive about their sexuality, the unequal power relations and GBV sometimes prevent them from being free when it comes to sex. Their agency to challenge the status quo in their communities when it comes to their sexuality, sexual risks and the meanings they make about their sexuality and issues of HIV and AIDS is sometimes hindered by their societal standing. It was also clear that these young girls want to be well respected by their boyfriends and to enjoy dating without the pressures of sex, if they do engage it should something both partners will agree upon.

### **5.3 Summary of Findings**

The key findings that emerged from the data analysis in this study are presented in the following paragraphs. These findings are presented and summarised in relation to the research questions of this study. Four key findings emerged from the data analysis. These are (1) gender roles and the familiarity of gender roles; (2) contestations and girls' agency; (3) knowledge of condoms and HIV; and (4) girls ideas about prevention.

#### **5.3.1 Gender Roles and the Familiarity of Gender Roles**

The research questions asked were, how is gender is connected to sexual risk and how do culture and gender intersect to make these young girls

vulnerable to HIV? The study revealed that young girls 16–17 in this study are aware of the gender roles and the responsibilities attached to them as females and how these roles lead to gender subordination. Given their unequal status in their families, communities, relationships and societies, the roles they have to play are fitting into the dominant patriarchal ideology that men are the power and providers (Gupta, 2010). Many of the relationships they have engaged in are inherently unequal; power is vested in men in terms of decisions about sex, money, bride price, culture and providing in a relationship (Ngubane, 2010). The unequal balance of power put some of the young girls at risk of contracting HIV, because when they are fitting into these roles of love and trust they sometimes engage in unprotected sex.

In these young girls' views the gendered inequalities emanate from the notions of 'culture'. They stated that to some extent culture played a crucial role in making them to be more submissive to men. The culture, which is mostly constructed and developed through social interaction with families and communities has been labelled to be more supportive and favouring to men in such a way that some of these young girls have started to say in "my culture" (Gupta, 2010). It is this "my culture" that makes these young girls to be more reserved in sexual negotiation with their boyfriends, thus ending up engaging in the risky sexual behaviours.

On the other hand there had been divergent views on culture. From the above perspective it came out that 'culture', according to some girls was oppressive and making them fools. Even though there were different views about culture, some girls seemed to embrace aspects of what they saw as their culture by stating that it supports them in maintaining their virginity. In this case, 'culture' could be seen as one way of helping girls to avoid sexual risk behaviours.

Despite the gender inequalities and culture, young girls during the interviews revealed that some of them are trapped by poverty and are vulnerable to HIV due to this poverty. Girls in this study revealed that many young girls, not themselves, like money and they have relationships and they have intergenerational sex with men, who, in return give them money or buy these girls material stuff. If these young girls want to be seen as flashy, stylish and attractive to men they engage in these relationships and men provide financial support. Some of these young girls associate love with money and wealth. During the interviews young girls in my study revealed that they were aware that having multiple partners, unprotected sex and engaging in relationship with older man was putting them at risks of contracting HIV but for those that are from poor backgrounds life is not easy and they sometimes choose to take risks. In young girls' views, it is difficult to refuse or to challenge these older men to use condoms when they ask for sex. In most cases sex in these relationships is risky because condoms are not used more often. In addition the study confirms what was stated by Hoffman *et al.*, (2006) and Leclerc-Madlala (2010) that talking about sex within their circle of friends sometimes pressures young girls to experiment with sex practically. This therefore suggests that among other reasons why young girls engage in sexual risky behaviours, is peer pressure. It is because of circumstances like this that I argue that young girls are most vulnerable to the disease because of peer pressure and men having coercive power.

### **5.3.2 Contestation and Girls' Agency**

The first two sub-questions brought about these two remaining findings. These were what do young township girls regard as risky sexual behaviour and what types of risky behaviours do these young girls engage in? The study revealed that young girls view going out with 'sugar daddies' as a risky behaviour. Even though some of the young girls in this study stated that they

engage in risky sexual activities, not all participants agreed to this statement. This finding concurred with what the reviewed literature stated. Evidence from their responses suggested that some and their peers are having sex. What also came out was that although young girls would want to engage in safe sex, sometimes the imbalance of power in their relationships pressed them to engage in sex without condoms. It was evident that, whilst these young girls are aware of the gender, power and inequalities and their risky sexual behaviours within their relationships, they are taking a stand against being viewed as passive recipients. They showed will and power of enacting agency, stating that they are determined to challenge the status quo and can determine what they want about their lives. Developing the 'self' is one of the ways to challenge negative influences. By so doing, these young girls are resisting gender roles and boys, but protecting their agency. Resisting boys means that these young girls will be able to reach their goal and this will help them realise their dreams. Even though they view themselves as sexual beings, they also want to control their sexual activities until such time that they are ready.

### **5.3.3 Girls' Ideas about Prevention**

As a solution young girls want to contest and challenge the status quo, young girls stated that it is crucial to become agents of social transformation. These young girls want their individual sexualities to be defined by who they are rather than whom they have sex with. The study found that young girls want love, trust and respect from their boyfriends. They want rights and power and also aspire towards this equality that South Africans are having in the Constitution. This seemed very important for these young girls and all of them want to be respected and loved. Young girls also emphasized that it is crucial for them to protect and to take care of themselves first before they love others. This suggests that issues around sex, boyfriend and sexuality



are going to be negotiated. Even though these young girls are under social and cultural pressure to behave in certain way that will legitimise subordination and being well aware of gender-based violence and the gender inequality, theirs is to strive and make meaning of who they young by not being hesitant about expressing their sexualities. As a result of this type of regulation, Indian girls may be hesitant about expressing their sexualities because of shame and guilt attached to sexual behaviour.

#### **5.3.4 Knowledge of Condoms and HIV**

In South Africa, HIV and AIDS have had catastrophic consequences, in particular for young Africans in townships. Research indicates that in township areas, rates of HIV are double those in urban and rural areas (Leclerc-Madlala, 2010). Findings from this study revealed that young girls are knowledgeable about condoms and HIV. Therefore, while a lot has been said about young people not having adequate information about HIV and AIDS, in KwaMashu Township these young girls have high degrees of knowledge and stated that they will reject boyfriends with multiple partners and will use condoms if they do engage in sex. The question remains, is this possible and realistic in the socio-cultural contexts in which they find themselves? Through their responses it is evident that they want to use the knowledge they have to their favour. To make it easier for young girl, men need to be workshopped and taught the power does not make a man, but the good deeds do.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

1. The study only focussed on young African girls in the township and how they construct their femininities. A study that will look at young girls in urban or rural areas, different age groups and different

nationalities might yield different findings even though the participants will also be young people. This is because this study was specific to this sample, that only African girls were sampled, and therefore that they cannot represent all young people that 16-17.

2. The power dynamics between the researcher and the participants might have influenced the responses during the data collection process. It might be possible that responses given were not the true reflection of what is truly going on in the lives of young people.

## 5.5 Implications

In order to combat the spread of HIV and AIDS schools have a critical role to play. Young people must be made aware that they have a huge role to play a huge in changing behaviours and the direction HIV and AIDS should take. The following suggestions are made hoping that some of the issues that came out can be addressed.

- ❖ There should be more intervention programmes that speak directly to the specific context and such programmes should be designed to empower both men and boys and women and girls in order for them to understand their gender not as a sign to show their unequal statuses but as a sign to understand their sexuality and what it means to be a “man” or a “woman”
- ❖ While the notions of ‘culture’ is seen as oppressive, there are aspects of it to be retained since some young people believe that there are those aspects that promote their virginity and keep them safe against risky sexual behaviours. On the other hand there should be more protection policies put in place to safeguard young girls against the

cultural practices which are more oppressive to them, especially, to young African girls (16-17).

- ❖ There should be gender sensitive policies that are put in place by the Department of Education to address sexuality and reproductive health among young people in schools and also to make boys and girls aware about issues of gender imbalances. These policies should be context-specific and be flexible and implementable.
  
- ❖ Young people (girls) need to be emancipated on how they can deal with issues of poverty before they use these issues as excuses for committing themselves in risky sexual behaviours.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The study reveals that power has historically been vested in men and this has had a tremendous effect on how young girls understand their sexuality. The different ways in which men have controlled women and girls have led women into subordination and dependency on men as the sole providers (Ngubane, 2010). Although this has been a challenge to women and young girls in particular, girls in this study are taking a stand against being seen as subordinates. In the context of KwaMashu Township, young girls are constructing their femininities in different ways. They want to become agents of social change and their sexuality is critical to them so that they can address the specific social realities within their communities. The possibilities of these youths realising their dreams are doubled. They seemed to have a lot of information about issues happening in and around them. Although challenges will always be there, with the information and the will to succeed, they are for-armed. Since knowledge is power, equipping them with relevant strategies might be a way of removing the barriers they might find blocking

their way. Doing a study on African femininities, sexual behaviours and how culture and gender intersect to make young girls vulnerable HIV, especially township girls, is imperative that we have a comprehensive understanding of their sexuality within their context so that we will provide relevant guidelines for safe sexual practices and to ensure that policies put in place are culture sensitive. Since sexuality is socially and culturally constructed, it is imperative to understand what put young girls at risk against their social and cultural backgrounds. The study reveals how young girls construct and give meanings to their sexuality, and sexual risks; which in turn compels us as adults and teachers to reflect on our teaching and to ask ourselves a very important question: How much do we contribute in reinforcing the gender inequality. In ignoring the young girl's request to be acknowledged as agents in changing the status quo are we trying to preserve the notions of cultural beliefs or are we protecting ourselves when believing that our young girls will remain subordinates? The study is contributing practical knowledge that will provide young girls with strategies to prevent them from contracting HIV. Thus providing opportunities for them to grapple with the social implications of the disease with a positive attitude knowing gender inequality, GBV and HIV is everyone's concern. Through the participants experiences some young girls elsewhere in the world can better understand that the sources of pleasure can be both pleasurable and dangerous in their own lives.

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## APPENDIX I- : Interview schedule

- What attracts girls to boys? / What type of boys do you find attractive?
- Do you have a boyfriend? / How long has your relationship lasted? Do you love him? Do you think of him as your future husband?
- What do you do with your boyfriend to entertain yourselves?
- What do you expect from your boyfriend? Are material things important in a relationship?
- How many boyfriends do you have? How many boyfriends have you had? Why did you break up with the others?
- What do you think about having sex at this age? At what age do girls generally start having sex in this community?
- Do you have sex with your boyfriend? Do you know of anyone of your age that is sexually active?
- What motivated you/them to have sex for the first time?
- Is it protected sex? What type of protection do you know of?
- Do you discuss safe-sex practices with your girlfriend? Do you discuss it with your friends?
- What do you regard as risky sexual behaviour?
- What do you think about using a condom?
- For some young women, their first sexual experience was not consensual because their boyfriends forced them to sleep with them. Do you think this is the right thing? Do you know of anybody who has been forced by his boyfriend to sleep with her?
- Have you ever been in control in the relationship, about when and how to have sex?
- In the Zulu culture it is generally accepted for men to have multiple partners. Is it right? How does it put people at risk?
- Some men think that women should be used for the satisfaction of male sexual desire at any given time. What do you think about that?
- Has culture contributed to what is happening to young girls in your community, in terms of choosing the terms for your sexual activities?
- What does it mean to be a young girl growing up in this community? How do you define womanhood?
- Have you ever felt pressured to do something that you don't like because you are a girl? How did that make you feel?
- If you were pressured, was it you are a girl?
- Do you have a role model? Why do you look up to that person?



- Do you talk freely to your parents about issues of sexuality?
- Some people say TV, cellular telephones (Mxit, Facebook, etc.) exposes young people to too much sex and leads to them engaging in sex. What do you think about that?
- The Life Orientation programme offered at school helps learners in protecting themselves from HIV and AIDS and other diseases. Has it done that for you and your friends? Are you taught relevant skills?

APPENDIX 2: Request to the principal to conduct research at the school

LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL REQUESTING PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LEARNERS AT SCHOOL

P.O. Box 1149  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201

The Principal

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Prim-Rose Makhosazane Shabane and a student at the University of KwaZulu Natal. I am in the process of studying towards the completion of my Masters Degree at this University. In completing my dissertation I am required to conduct research on a particular topic. I therefore, request permission to interview 12 learners at your school. Any information revealed to me by these learners during interviews will be treated with the strictest of confidence and will only be utilised for the purpose of this study.

Thanking you in anticipation for your help.

Yours Faithfully

P. M. Shabane (Educator)

APPENDIX 3: Request to the parents/guardians requesting their daughters/wards to participate in the study

Letter of consent

LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE PARENTS/ GUARDIANS REQUESTING PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW THEIR CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

P.O. Box 1149  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201

Dear Parent/s/ Guardian/s

My name is Prim-Rose Makhosazane Shabane. I am studying towards Masters Degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of my professional development, I am required to do a mini dissertation to complete my degree. The aim of the study is to investigate ways in which young African township girls (16-17) give meaning to their sexuality, sexual risks and how gender is connected within these meanings.

I therefore, request that your child participate in this study. I will conduct interviews and focus group discussions that will be audio-taped and transcribed with your child's permission. Your child has a right to withdraw from the study at any moment if she desires to do so. Information gathered during interviews and group discussions will only be used for the purpose of this study and nothing more. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity during interviews and in the study.

Parent/s/ Guardian/s are requested to sign an informed consent form to indicate that they have agreed to let their child participate in the study.

Thanking you in advance for your help.

Yours Faithfully

P. M. Shabane (Educator)

APPENDIX 4: LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE LEARNERS REQUESTING  
PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW THEM AT SCHOOL

P.O. Box 1149  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201

Dear Participant

My name is Prim-rose Makhosazane Shabane. I am studying towards Masters Degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As a part of my professional development, I am required to do a mini dissertation to complete my degree. The aim of the study is to investigate ways in which young African township girls (16-17) give meaning to their sexuality, sexual risks and how gender is connected within these meanings.

I therefore, request that you participate in this study. I will conduct interviews and focus group discussions that will be audio-taped and transcribed with your permission. As a participant you have a right to withdraw from the study at any moment if you desire to do so. Information gathered during interviews and group discussions will only be used for the purpose of this study and nothing more. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity during interviews and in the study.

Participants are requested to sign an informed consent form to indicate that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Thanking you in advance for your help.

---

Yours Faithfully

-----  
P. M. Shabane (Educator)

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APPENDIX 5: LEARNER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full names of participant)  
hereby confirm that I understand the research project and I consent to  
participating in the research project

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time,  
should I desire to do so.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 6: PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full names of parents) hereby confirm that I understand the research project that my child has to partake in and I consent that she participates in the research project

I also understand that my child is at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time, should she desire to do so.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

---

## APPENDIX 7: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

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sshrec@ukzn.ac.za

13 SEPTEMBER 2010

Ms. P Shabane (205512426)  
Education Studies

Dear Ms. Shabane

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0088/08C**  
**PROJECT TITLE: Gender, sex, power and Inequalities: an investigation of African femininities in the context of HIV and AIDS**

**NEED FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL WAIVED**

I wish to inform you that the need for ethical review has been waived because this protocol forms part of a broader research protocol which has already received ethical clearance (HSS/0088/08).

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor – Prof. D Bhana  
cc. Mr. N Memela

Postal Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Facsimile: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

## APPENDIX 8: EDITOR'S LETTER

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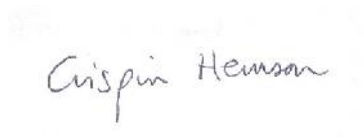
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18<sup>th</sup> October 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to record that I have edited the Masters dissertation by Prim-Rose Makhosazane Shabane, titled:

**Gender, sex, power and inequalities: an investigation of African femininities in the context of HIV and AIDS**



Crispin Hemson