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Gender, Sexuality and Violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13-year-old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal

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January 2022

Supervisor and Co-Supervisor's Declaration

'As the candidate's supervisor and co-supervisor, we agree/do not agree to the submission of this thesis'.

Signed: 

Supervisor: Professor Deevia Bhana

Date: 28 January 2022

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Co-Supervisor: Dr Shaaista Moosa

Date: 28 January 2022

Declaration

I, Naresa Govender, declare that:

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Dedication

To my beloved mother in heaven, Premilla Govender.

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Father: To my dearest father, this journey has not been easy without mummy by our side but you have always tried to help me as best as you can, despite being critically ill. I appreciate you and love you. You have been both a mother and father to me. You've taught me to be resilient and to place my trust in God. As a gender student, I've witnessed with a happy heart how gender equality has manifested in our household; thank you for helping me with household chores and cooking, your help has seen me to completion.

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Abstract

This ethnographic study is situated at the intersection of gender, sexuality and violence in illuminating the experiences of 12- and 13-year-old girls in a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Rejecting a dominant focus on girls as passive and docile, the thesis illustrates the complex ways through which young femininity is produced, accommodated and challenged in relation to heterosexuality. Given the relative scholarly silence around primary school girls' constructions of heterosexuality in South Africa, the thesis asserts that such girls' investment in heterosexuality is a contradictory pursuit: their desires and active agency are self-evident, but so are the oppressive ways through which their own actions serve male interests. I argue that the primary school context is an active site through which young femininities are produced, as girls reinforce and challenge gender norms.

Firstly, I focus on the expectations and respectability accorded to the 'proper girl' status. Being a proper girl was a dominant expectation and pervaded girls' experiences in their family, community, and school. Proper girl femininity rested on pre-dominant norms founded on sexual docility and subordination to gender and cultural traditions. These norms were emphasized in relation to male power, and the presumption of girls' vulnerability and victimhood in regards to sex and sexual violence. Secondly, and notwithstanding these dominant messages, girls contested proper girl femininity. They drew on particular heterosexual strategies and were subjected to - and subjected themselves to - the societal compulsion towards obligatory heterosexuality. The study shows that girls invested in boys and boyfriends, modified their bodies and dressed and engaged in sexual talk and practices through which their existence as sexual beings was illuminated in direct contrast to proper girl femininity. However, their insistent expressions of sexual agency occurred in the context of rape culture at school. Thus, thirdly, the study highlights detailed accounts, from girls' own perspectives, of the ways in which sexual harassment, violence and inequalities manifested at school through the insidiousness of rape culture. Nearly all the girls interviewed spoke of sexual harassment meted out by boys and other girls, which they either experienced or witnessed. However, girls' attempts to contest and redress rape culture at school were limited as a result of the broader social and cultural system they lived in being based in turn on patriarchal conditions which offered little support for girls' experiences of harassment and violence. In this regard, the girls spoke of how their teachers paid little to no attention to gendered and sexual relations as such within the school environment. Rape culture was

tolerated and normalised. In this way, the school was found to be complicit in the casualisation of gender binaries, gender-based violence and misogyny. Culturally-embedded notions of emphasised femininity were also used as a powerful tool to regulate girls and a means of disassociating them from expressing agency and speaking out about their experiences of sexual violence within the school environment.

Finally, the greatest significance of a study of this nature lies in its contribution to the designing of suitable intervention strategies to support South African primary schoolgirls in their experiences of gender, sexuality and violence. These strategies must take into account the complex and early formations of femininities that are outlined in this study. An approach that recognises girls' pleasurable investments in the development of their own sexuality, as well as their potentially damaging investments, while also underscoring the need for a greater focus on younger girls' femininity in South Africa, is more necessary than ever. This should be a vital and necessary step in working towards ensuring that schoolgirls are equipped with the skills and knowledge to negotiate their sexualities in more positive and gender-equitable ways, rather than in ways that are harmful to their sexual and emotional well-being.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CBD – Central Business District

CSE – Comprehensive Sexuality Education

DBE – Department of Basic Education

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

KZN – KwaZulu-Natal

LO - Life Orientation

PPS – Penguin Primary School

PTW – Prostitute Through WhatsApp

SA – South Africa

SEM – Sexually Explicit Material

SMT – School Management Team

UK – United Kingdom

UKZN – University of KwaZulu-Natal

USA – United States of America

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Chapter 1

Primary Schoolgirls: Gender, Sexuality and Violence

> "Boys sometimes touch girls anyhow. From behind the boys look at the girls' bums, and then they (the boys) go and touch the girls' bums and spank it. Some girls they don't do anything, other girls push the boys away and say, 'Go away! Don't touch me! I will fuck you up!'" (Karuna).

1.1. Introduction

This thesis entitled: 'Gender, sexuality and violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13-year-old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal', investigates how gender, sexuality and violence feature in, impact and play out on the lives of 12-13-year-old primary schoolgirls. The opening extract above is a clear articulation of the complexity of gendered relations prevalent in the primary school under study, and it accurately reflects its underlying characteristics of subordination and resistance. Specifically, this thesis investigates and presents schoolgirls' experiences of gender, sexuality and violence as a proverbial double-edged sword: on one side, they reproduce dominant gender norms and on the other, they do obviously resist these norms. The sophisticated manner in which primary schoolgirls, between 12-13-years of age, constantly articulate the meanings of their feminised position within gender relations - and how they express sexuality in the construction and negotiation of femininity whilst still living in a society where rape culture remains normalised - is worth exploring and is suggestive of schoolgirls' active agency.

1.2. Backdrop and rationale of the study

Young femininities and sexualities in the primary school environment are seldom the focus of serious research attention. Despite a growing body of South African literature on schoolgirls, sexuality, sexual agency and sexual violence, the onus of scholarship has largely rested on boys and secondary school girls (Bhana, 2012; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). There has so far been some focus on very young children, aged 7-9 (Bhana, 2008; 2013; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019), but schoolgirls aged 12-13 rarely feature in research (see exceptions: Bhana, 2016a; 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Jewnarain, 2020). My study thus contributes

substantially to this emerging body of research. Beyond mere appraisal though, young schoolgirls aged 12-13 rarely feature in research, debate and intervention when it comes to the construction and performance of femininity and sexuality. Therefore, granting attention to how 12–13-year-old schoolgirls make sense of, and directly experience, gender, sexuality and violence in the construction of their femininities are crucial – particularly given the context of dominant gender ideologies and norms which place girls at risk by reproducing the conditions of inequality and violence and overlooking sexual and gender diversity, as well as positive engagements such as desire, pleasure, passion and assertiveness. This thesis then offers a considered examination of the process of constructing femininities as it is played out by 12-13-year-old schoolgirls in their final year of primary schooling, drawing in particular from one ethnographic case-study centred on a primary school setting in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

On a global scale, femininity is usually constructed through the projection of an emphasised aspirational image (as illustrated by Connell (1987)) and the manner in which girls subordinate themselves to it by adjusting their own gender and sexuality. Some of the key tenets of this 'emphasised' version of femininity include passivity, sexual innocence, shyness, subordination to males, and a subscription to compulsory heterosexuality (Bhana, 2016a; Paechter, 2007, 2012; Renold & Ringrose, 2013; Rich, 1980). In this thesis, I consider how femininity is deployed and constructed by girls themselves. Specifically, this approach is based on gleaning girls' own points of view in relation to the construction of femininities and how they come to express femininity as such. By the time girls first attend school, they have already been thoroughly exposed to norms of behavior that skew towards hetero-patriarchy. The dominant gender norms of the home, everyday culture, the larger community, as well as the school itself, all serve to re-enforce an idealized, over-emphasised femininity premised on male power and patriarchal cultural norms (Clowes et al., 2013; Hunter, 2010; Matswetu & Bhana, 2018; Rudwick & Posel, 2015). Connell first coined the term 'emphasised femininity' to describe this unreal image, asserting that it is based on the 'virtue' of compliance and is "central to the pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support; oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (1987, p. 183). Whilst these are obviously not the only messages girls receive during their upbringing, such unavoidable norms too often succeed in firmly positioning girls within subordinate gender roles. However, while socio-cultural influences do hold power by setting the parameters of acceptable femininity, schoolgirls can usually be observed contesting those parameters. Rather than merely

(re)producing dominant gender norms, girls can (and very often do) succeed in rupturing them (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana, 2018; Holland & Harpin, 2015; Paechter, 2010; Pincock, 2018).

1.3. Dominant gender norms: Encouraging female passivity

'Emphasised femininity' is here viewed as the particular outline of gendered performance that values female passivity and acquiescence to male power when assessing the essence of femininity (Connell, 1987). The emphasised type of femininity proffers tenets which ultimately position girls as being subordinate to boys, and is, problematically, the version of femininity that is most often idealised and reproduced in society and endorsed by the institutions of the family, the culture, the community and the school. Furthermore, even though emphasised femininity proffers ideals that are transparently more disadvantageous to women and girls, they are explicitly taught to aspire to them, and so their conduct, experiences and identities are consequently shaped by a form of compulsory inferiority.

For example, in South Africa, when women and girls submit to passivity and obligatory heterosexuality, three specific ideals of emphasised femininity play out in constructing unfavourable and inequitable gender performances. Firstly, the scourge of violence within South African society is undeniably linked to an emphasised femininity - a subordinate feminine ideal (Connell, 1987) and a hegemonic masculinity (Ratele, 2015). So, violence (or rape culture, as this thesis refers to it) is utilised by males as a 'valid' means of proclaiming or retaining masculine power (Brownmiller, 1975; Gqola, 2015; Ratele, 2015). Secondly, many South African scholars have highlighted how women are more dependent on males financially, thus the hegemonic construction of men as being financial providers or breadwinners has worked to create an untenably narrow definition of household leadership, centering around the man's capacity to financially provide for the women under his 'care'. As a result, in South Africa, young schoolgirls are often drawn to age-disparate and transactional relationships (Bhana, 2015; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013). In the third instance, the emphasised construction of women as being sexually docile has worked to serve the male sexual prerogative in South Africa which, consequently, has created and sustained numerous untenable resultant social problems (Bhana, 2015; Gibbs et al., 2014).

I highlight the above constructions of masculinity and femininity in particular in order to emphasise the ways in which such categories broadly manifest in South Africa and how abstract patriarchal ideals have lasting consequences on the lives of young girls. Hypersexual

masculinity and docile femininity together result in women and girls' heightened risk in regards to the torments of rape culture. Brownmiller (1975) has stated that a 'rape culture' exists when heterosexual violence by males remains normalised as part of a projected gendered human nature whereby victims are subsequently deemed responsible for their individual attacks (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). In order for young schoolgirls to be uplifted from cultures of rape, it is vital to outline how schoolgirls are implicated at the epicentre of South Africa's social ills. In a bid to pinpoint the social activities which underpin young female sexuality and sexual activity, I have here carefully compiled and presented a literature review on the various ways in which sexuality features in these young schoolgirls' lives. This study also seeks to problematise the dominant discourses of childhood innocence by demonstrating that schoolboys and schoolgirls are not sexually docile. Instead, sexuality, together with further aspects of human social growth, forms a crucial part of learners' daily cultures (Bhana, 2016a; Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Renold, 2005, 2006, 2007; Renold et al., 2015).

Another key focus of this thesis is its emphasis on schoolgirls' acts of agency, both sexual and otherwise. However, even though it is crucial to highlight schoolgirls' sexual agency (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana, 2018; Pincock, 2018) through the positive constructs of sexuality that are present in their lives, it is equally important to discuss the ramifications of early sexual debuts and acts of agency. Thus, I first discuss how agency manifests in the lives of young schoolgirls and thereafter I outline media reports and studies that locate young women in many of South Africa's waves of social distress (teenage pregnancy, age-disparate and transactional relationships, HIV/AIDS and rape) so as to emphasise the renewed need for research concerning young primary schoolgirls of the 12-13 age cohort.

1.4. Agency in the lives of young girls

Agency, whether sexual or otherwise, holds the innate capacity to empower women and girls. Bay-Cheng (2019) and Bhana (2018) remind us that we must be careful not to amplify, or condense, young girl's active agency. The goal should not be to help young girls become more agentic, but rather to remind ourselves that all work on young girls should be directed towards improving our understanding and sensitivity towards how they are already agentic beings (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana 2018; Pincock, 2018). The analysis pursued by this study demonstrates that schoolgirls, once again, confront a double-edged sword. As such, schoolgirls' experiences of reproduction and resistance are illustrated throughout, without ever romanticising young schoolgirls' agency. In this regard, Klocker (2007) uses the concept of thick and thin agency.

By this, Klocker suggests that, despite girls' agency to act and do, they are also always constrained by the broader socio-cultural context. Within an environment wherein rape culture is normalised through hetero-patriarchal and cultural norms, girls' capacities are viewed as 'thin': their agency is possible, but limited. Conversely, when young women and girls assert themselves and do recognise their autonomy to choose from an extensive range of options, their agency is viewed as 'thick'. The concept of 'thick and thin' agency is then extremely significant as it serves as a distinct indicator, cautioning us that though it is vital to identify young schoolgirls' active agency, it is equally vital to acknowledge how multifaceted and nuanced rape culture can be when manifesting within the everyday domains of gender and sexuality. This brings us to the point that agency for schoolgirls varies, is intricate, and includes, as Harris and Dobson remind us, "unheroic struggle, creativity, and/or non-resistant actions" (2015, p. 153). Schoolgirls' reproductions of, and resistance to, hegemonic or dominant discourse and norms remains complex and reflective of agency, even if schoolgirls' motives and outcomes may diverge.

In this research study, the schoolgirls in question expressed agency in various domains: through their reproduction of, and resistance to, dominant gender norms in relation to being a passive, compliant girl, and through dating, dressing, engaging in sexual talk and practices, and through the very manner in which they co-existed in and contested rape culture in the primary school. Importantly, Bay-Cheng (2019) highlights that agency has less to do with an individual's character, but instead pertains more in relation to their life circumstances. These life circumstances, embedded within local material settings, profoundly shape girls' experiences (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana, 2017a) which can variously produce agency, limit it (as in Bhana's conceptualisation of 'lite agency'), remove possibilities to act, or else prove beneficial to the well-being of girls. Understanding and acknowledging young girls' early exploration and experiences of sexuality in this way may suggest that girls are agents, but their broader material and social situations always hold a great deal of sway in shaping what is possible for them to do and to be. And together with girls' sexual agency comes their inherent vulnerability. Thus, I directly discuss the ramifications of sexual violence on the lives of young girls, as agency alone is not sufficient to eradicate the rape culture that persists in South African society.

1.4.1. Young girls: Sexual activity, sexual agency and sexual risk

1.4.1.1.Teenage pregnancy

Sexual activity amongst teenagers is widespread in South Africa, with children as young as 13 consistently experimenting with sex (Bhana, 2016a). Girls aged 15-19 account for nearly 12% of the mothers of registered births (Statistics South Africa, 2018), and the mean age for sexual debut is 16 (Mushwana et al., 2015). Recent statistics have further shown that, within the year 2018 alone, 97,143 teenagers gave birth, and the logged Live Births statement showed that a total of 3,261 schoolgirls aged between 10 and 14 became registered mothers (Statistics South Africa, 2018). These statistics alert us to how teenage pregnancy continues to be a complex problem with several causative factors: poverty, gendered inequalities, gender-based violence, substance abuse, limited access to birth control measures and issues surrounding the termination of pregnancies. At the top of this list are the major culprits of low, incoherent and erroneous use of contraceptives and insufficient public healthcare (Christofides et al., 2014; Morrell et al., 2012; Willan, 2013). The latter scholars have demonstrated too how persistent poverty in South Africa heaps up further burdens and sources of risk for teenagers, presenting them with limited information with which to formulate optimal choices, in addition to less encouragement to shield themselves against early pregnancy. For instance, Mushwana et al's. (2015) study affirmed that inadequate sexual knowledge, peer pressure and erratic attitudes pertaining to sex all make their own contributions towards augmenting the high pregnancy rate amongst teenage girls in South Africa. It seems fair to say that young girls should be taught explicitly that, while sexual activity and sexual agency are normal elements of teenage life, early pregnancy tends to hobble educational aspirations and amplifies the existing financial hardships of learners in a context of elevated heights of poverty and unemployment (UNFPA, 2015). On the other hand, just as Singh and Hamid (2015) have established, even amidst major social distress, such aspects can also correspondingly merge to instil more agency through increasing sexual knowledge and health outcomes, as teenage mothers become more self-conscious and self-questioning through their experiences and so make attempts to flee poverty by completing their education.

1.4.1.2. Age-disparate and transactional relationships

In Eastern and Southern Africa, scholars Ayton and Pavlicova and Karim (2020), together with the WHO (2016), have noted how age-disparate transactional relationships often contribute to young women being classified as a more speculative population within the HIV and AIDS

epidemic. This greater susceptibility to HIV and AIDS infections is driven partly, as Dellar et al. write, by the inherent power-disparity in relations with elder male partners (2018). Similarly, research over the past decade has consistently shown that age-disparate relationships are fundamentally transactional, and usually serve to increase the peril of teenage pregnancy, as well as HIV and AIDS-prevalence amongst young women. Within the South African context, a nascent literature has grown up focusing on the ways in which age-disparate sexual relationships are inextricably linked to circumstances of material exchange (Bhana, 2015; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013). When young schoolgirls struggled to meet their (or their family's) immediate substantial needs, they habitually made trade-offs amid their own well-being and financial safety. Transacting sex for substantial goods leads young schoolgirls to view harmful relationships as being somewhat unavoidable, allowing them to engage in multiple sexual encounters as a matter of course, and sometimes pushing them to associate with several older men at a time. It is under these conditions that schoolgirls themselves navigate a very narrow passage in negotiating safe sex, and come to run the high risk of becoming pregnant and/or acquiring HIV or AIDS.

Globally, South Africa is ranked as the country with the peak number of citizens with active HIV or AIDS (UNAIDS, 2021). Emphasised femininity, along with hegemonic masculinities premised on masculine sexual compulsion and aggression. invariably works in contrast to the country's attempts to condense the HIV and AIDS acquisition rates (Gibbs et al., 2015). Young women aged between 15-24 largely contribute to the maximum prevalence levels of HIV and AIDS acquisition in the country (UNAIDS, 2021), and several scholars pinpoint gendered violence in South Africa as an underlying factor that places women and girls in particular at greater risk of HIV acquisition (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Abdool Karim & Baxter, 2016). In the same vein, Reddy and Dunne have put forth the conclusion that, "conventional femininity is an unsafe sexual identity that needs to be challenged in order to achieve gender equity in personal relationships, and crucially to reduce vulnerability to contracting HIV" (2007, p. 160).

Studies have noted that the motivations for age-disparate relationships and transactional sex are complex and various. Majola (2015) has written about the causes and details of how young schoolgirls come to engage in sex with 'sugar daddies', or otherwise have transactional sex. They found that gifts or money are often exchanged for sex (Majola, 2015), while research carried out by Ranganathan et al. (2018) discovered that the accomplishment of mental and social desires - for instance, the desire to fit into a peer cluster – account for a range of key

incentives for young girls to firstly acquire specific retail goods and, accordingly, to participate in transactional sexual activities. They also found that young schoolgirls who engaged in transactional sexual activity had a much greater probability of employing the arrangement to consume entertainment items (movie tickets, for example) rather than more practical items, such as food and groceries. Ranganathan et al. (2018) also stated that the items that schoolgirls considered as 'needs' were robustly predisposed by peer pressure and cravings for enhanced status(es). These studies pertaining to age-disparate transactional relationships offer us great insights into relationships with sugar daddies, as it is conclusively noted that young girls obtain commodities associated with a contemporary lifestyle - for instance, items linked to personal improvement and amusement (Majola, 2015; Ranganathan et al, 2018). These are just some of the ways in which girls make calculated decisions and attempt to assert their freedoms and desires through sexuality.

1.4.1.3. Rape

Rape fundamentally stems from a sense of sexual entitlement and comes as a result of lopsided gendered and sexual expectations in society (Gqola, 2015). Rape is also largely committed as a form of punishment towards partners or mistresses, and alcohol is, more often than not, one element of the circumstances (Jewkes et al., 2016). In South Africa, one out of every five documented cases of chronic sexual abuse depicts young schoolgirls below the 12-13-year-age cohort as targets (Vetten, 2014), and the rape of new-borns too transpires unconscionably often (Posel, 2005; Richter, 2003). The harmful modern myth that sexual interaction with a virgin can cure HIV and AIDS remains the key 'reason' for the rape of new-borns and older children in South Africa (Leclerc-Madlala, 2002). Reports about the brutal rape of a 3-year-old shocked the country only a few years ago (Gous, 2015): The assailant was sentenced to life imprisonment. In another painfully similar incident of infant rape, a Cape Town grandfather was arrested for the alleged rape of his seven-month-old granddaughter (Valentine, 2017). Another type of rape that has emerged into popular consciousness in the last decade is 'corrective rape'. This is a form of heterosexual violence and misogynistic crime primarily targeted against lesbian (or suspected lesbian) women that has become a seemingly unquashable practice within contemporary South African society (Anguita, 2012; Morrissey, 2013). The phrase 'corrective rape' was floated in the discourse, as Reddy, Potgieter and Mkhize remind us, "the rapists claim that they are acting in the lesbian's interest, by teaching her to behave like a woman" (2007, p.11). One highly publicised incident of this phenomenon was the brutal gang-rape, and subsequent murder, of female soccer star Eudy Simelane (who

identified as a lesbian woman). Her bedraggled body was discovered dumped in a stream alongside a park on the periphery of a town in Gauteng province. Post-mortem examination then determined she had been gang-raped, severely beaten and had sustained 25 stab wounds variously to her face, chest and legs (Kelly, 2009).

Such a condensed, but still damning, exploration of the scourge of rape culture in South Africa outlines the everyday reality of young schoolgirls. It is against this backdrop that a study of this nature becomes exceptionally valuable, especially in an epoch in which men and boys are still esteemed for conspicuous sexual activity while women and girls are condemned for it, and where rape culture is, to all intents and purposes, normalised. Schoolgirls aged between 12-13 can provide valuable research data, as their experiences may help them to newly articulate, measure and act upon their own feelings, desires, thoughts and agency. Their testimonies are especially significant to the general cause of combatting rape culture, as young girls and emerging femininities form the epicentre of both the problem and the resolution of redressing gendered inequalities in South Africa. Just as masculinities are multiple, new forms of femininities must now be acknowledged, addressed and celebrated. A revision in thinking, away from the current intellectual cul-de-sac around female subordination and passive femininity, is desperately needed. Given such a window into the lives of young schoolgirls, along with the correct strategies for guidance, our children can perhaps still be protected and educated in terms of negotiating and engaging in safer and more responsible sexual activities and practices. This thesis seeks to contribute to this agenda by closely addressing 12-13-year-old schoolgirl femininities.

1.5.Aims and objectives

As a primary school teacher, I am greatly aware of the negative impact of dominant gender norms within a primary school setting. On a daily basis, I bear witness to how gender, sexuality and violence manifest within the lives of schoolgirls, and I watch as they are gradually subordinated by the institutions around them whilst still clearly expressing their ability to express agency. Since schoolgirls are expected to be passive and compliant, they are largely taken advantage of; they are teased, sworn at and their lunches and pocket money are snatched. Boys swipe their buttocks, and ogle at their breasts and crotches. In addition, I have seen teachers work to amplify gendered disparities and reinforce dominant gender norms. Girls are inundated with ‘feminine’ chores, such as cleaning classrooms, assisting the teachers, and policing and reprimanding other girls on their dress and behaviour. Everyday statements such

as, ‘behave like a girl’, ‘don’t be wild!’ and ‘dress like a decent girl’ are rote utterances in the hallways. At Penguin Primary School, the setting for my study, sexuality as such remains silenced (let alone alternate versions of sexual identity). Boys and girls are expected to be asexual whilst simultaneously reassuring their classmates and society at large of their emergent heterosexuality. It is for this reason that girls and boys are, necessarily, secretive about their potentially divergent sexual preferences and relationships. If any of them were to come out in the open, they would be subject to ridicule, both by the teachers and by their fellows (as is the case with any girl who shows off the qualities of a tomboy). Incidences of heterosexual violence or ‘rape culture’ are, on the whole, disastrously overlooked by the teachers and the school management team. A small punitive measure is, perhaps, set on the offender, but thereafter the violence persists. They are never given the careful consideration nor corrective measures they require. Girls, in particular, encounter heterosexual acts of violence on a near-daily basis and thus the very frequency of the offences allows such behaviour to go unnoticed, filtering through the school’s daily routines and becoming normalised. In this way, rape culture is, inevitably, promoted and the practice of devaluing girls becomes part and parcel of the curriculum. And yet most girls do not accept this, as they very often do seek to rupture dominant gendered norms and find themselves able to assert their sincere identities.

Consequently, there is a palpable need today to lessen such gendered disparities, which arise from dominant gender norms being perpetuated within primary schooling. One way of achieving this would be by nurturing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) which creates an avenue through which boys and girls can become exposed to fluid versions of gender and sexuality. Thus, they can begin to learn from a very young age that there are more diverse and gender-equitable ways of being. Additionally, teachers can, in their own capacities, begin to deconstruct harmful notions of gender and sexuality which dictate that girls should assume traditional feminised roles of passivity, obedience and docility, whilst all male behaviours are condoned. Teachers and learners must also work to contradict the expectation that all boys and girls are expected to adhere to an unquestioned heterosexuality. Such collective movements towards strengthening gender equality in primary schools for both boys and girls should serve to break down the barriers which hinder girls’ resistances to dominant gender norms, suppressed agency and repressed sexuality. On the other hand, if South Africa remains entangled in socially-constructed ideologies concerning the gendered roles that men and women should play, then boys and girls alike will remain restricted in their growth and development - physically, emotionally and intellectually.

As such, further research into this phenomenon will assist in the devising of suitable interventions meant to encourage girls' mental, physical, emotional and intellectual development in South African society and, furthermore, will contribute towards promoting a greater awareness of, and more careful engagement with, the dominant and harmful gender norms which tend to devalue femininity within our national context. When creating such interventions, it is vital to draw attention to the existing gendered expectations of women and girls in South Africa. Expecting women and girls to perform within an emphasised feminine ideal counteracts the foremost objective for their growth i.e., a secure platform for them to assume alternative, assertive and gender-equitable versions of femininities in South Africa. This study therefore seeks to delve into how girls are systemically devalued within the complex nexus formed between the reproduction of dominant gendered norms and girls' own agency amidst a context where rape culture is normalised.

This window into the changing and complicated lives of forty South African schoolgirls thus challenges the homogenous positioning of young schoolgirls as being passive and trapped within a domain of suffering, risk and danger, and points towards a potential shift in focus to what young schoolgirls themselves deem as important. In brief, this research study seeks to recognise the multiple and intersecting experiences of 12-13-year-old schoolgirls in addition to their own accounts of their lives. This should create an opportunity for us to focus on the positive aspects of identifications that young schoolgirls construct and share with regards to their gender, sexuality, agency, desire, passion and pleasure. In addition, the experiences of those schoolgirls who identify as non-normative (such as homosexual girls and bisexual girls) require further examination, as such research would encourage schools to understand and accommodate diverse groups of young primary learners, along with their manifold gendered and sexual experiences, their lives and social contexts; all thus contributing to a holistic and prosperous school environment, not an inherently misogynist one.

1.6. Key research questions

This research study aims to investigate the lives and minds of schoolgirls at a public primary school in KwaZulu-Natal by asking, 'How do 12-13-year-old schoolgirls make sense of, and experience, gender, sexuality and violence in the construction of their femininities?'

This research study was carefully guided by deploying the three research questions below:

1. How do primary schoolgirls, aged between 12-13 years old, articulate the meanings of their feminine positionality within gender relations?

2. How do schoolgirls express heterosexuality in their construction and negotiation of femininity in the primary school environment?

3. How do primary schoolgirls experience, negotiate and challenge the manifestations of rape culture in their primary school?

1.7. The Research Context

This research study was conducted in Stanger or KwaDukuza, as it is interchangeably and warmly named. KwaDukuza is located in KwaZulu-Natal [KZN], one of the nine official provinces in South Africa. The name KwaDukuza has historic significance as this area was home to the late Zulu king, King Shaka. The KwaDukuza town, or central business district (CBD) was industrialized on the original location of King Shaka's kraal, and is situated on the north coast of the Indian Ocean, approximately 70 kilometres from the local metropolis of Durban.

KwaDukuza or Stanger is a part of the iLembe district - one of ten district municipalities in the KwaZulu-Natal province. According to Mthiyane (2020), this district also comprises four other local municipalities, namely: Mandini, KwaDukuza, Maphumulo and Ndwedwe. KwaDukuza is a part of the KwaDukuza municipality. Learners who attend Penguin Primary School commute from as far afield as the Mandini district. The composition of the population is multi-racial. Furthermore, there are many townships around KwaDukuza which are key feeders of learners to Penguin Primary School.

Figure 1 - The location of Stanger in relation to the other districts in iLembe.

This ethnographic case study research was conducted at a particular local primary school setting in KwaDukuza. This public school accommodates learners from grades R-7 and consists of two departments: a Foundation Phase (FP) department catering to children aged between 5-9-years-old (grades R-3) and a Senior Primary (SP) department catering to children aged between 10-13-years-old (grades 4-7). These departments are run by 2 departmental heads in each phase. Overall, the school is run by the school's principal and deputy principal. In South Africa, public schools are classified into groupings identified as 'quintiles' (Gray, 2017; Van Dyk & White, 2019). These quintiles operate on scales ranging from 1-5. Quintile 1 refers to disadvantaged schools while 5 refers to those schools that are undeniably privileged. Fortunately, Penguin Primary School falls into the quintile 4 category. This means that it has sufficient class space for learners, as well as satisfactory access to the subsequent amenities: clean, running water; an on-going supply of electricity, a staffroom to house teachers, lavatories for both teachers and learners, two playgrounds, a fully functional school walk-in library with a wide range of reading books, a natural science laboratory in addition to a school candy and snack store. Quintile 4 and 5 schools' function in harsh contrast to many quintiles 1 and 2 South African schools. Disadvantaged schools do not have libraries or even reading books, and, in more extreme cases, they lack basic resources such as electricity and clean, running water or functioning toilets (Gray, 2017). Some schools within South Africa are still overtly racialised,

and in quintile 1 and 2 learners and teachers are more or less exclusively black, while the better-off quintile 4 and 5 schools are more racially varied (Van Dyk & White, 2019).

At Penguin Primary School, whilst 12-13-year-old schoolgirls are, on the whole, somewhat sophisticated in terms of how they construct their femininities based on heterosexuality, they do still carefully reproduce an emphasised femininity when they need to, while also rejecting and rupturing it - for example, whenever instances of rape culture arose. Girls' expressions of agency in this context, through dress, dates, desires, dares and all-round self-assertion, are profoundly worth exploring, as these behaviours sum up the manner by which South African schoolgirls so carefully and adeptly construct their femininities.

1.8. Brief Outline of Chapters

Chapter two illustrates how certain corpus factors influence how schoolgirls articulate their feminised position within gender relations, and how they are restricted in expressing their sexuality in the construction and negotiation of femininity whilst at the same time living in a context where rape culture remains normalised.

Chapter three provides a review of South African and international literature focusing on young women and girls, and agency. This chapter outlines the multiple, complex and diverse ways in which agency manifests in the lives of young women and girls and how viewing agency in a positive light can lead to transformation.

Chapter four explains the theoretical framework used to support this research study. This chapter focuses on theories that build on understanding gender and power relations. The importance of utilising a post-structuralist feminist theoretical lens is discussed, followed by Butler's (1993) gender performativity theory, and Connell's (1987; 1995) and Foucault's (1980) theories on gender and power relations. These theoretical foundations outline the analysis of the data that I consider in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter five focuses on theories for better understanding femininities (Bhana, 2016; 2018; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Schippers, 2007). Young femininities form the crux of this research study, and therefore this chapter delves into more in-depth theories pertaining to femininities, heterosexuality and rape culture to examine and frame the ways in which girls are both subjected to and subject themselves to the heterosexual performance of femininities.

Chapter six explains and justifies the research design, process, and methodology utilised in order to research 12-13-year-old schoolgirls and to achieve the aims of this study. This chapter explains how the research process developed, along with confessing the positionality of the researcher, how the research was undertaken by the researcher, and why.

Chapter seven illustrates schoolgirls' accounts of respect and resistance. This foundational understanding of femininity as a double-edged sword informs the analysis throughout the chapter and thus sheds light on how schoolgirls reinforce and resist dominant gender norms in the process of constructing various expressions of femininity. Moreover, it brings to scholarly attention the complex relationships between existing structures, inert institutions and girls' socio-cultural positionings.

Chapter eight offers insights into the ways in which girls claim inclusion into practices of heterosexuality. How schoolgirls draw on particular practices within the primary school environment in order to negotiate and construct heterosexual femininity through dating, dressing and desiring will be explored.

Chapter nine illustrates how schoolgirls experience 'rape culture' within the primary school setting and how girls enact their agency in the process of relating their accounts of sexual violence. The agency enacted is not one-dimensional. Instead, schoolgirls' experiences demonstrate how they simultaneously contest, and are subordinated by, the reinforcement of 'rape culture' at school.

Chapter ten emphasises the key findings of the research study and its implications. Finally, a list of recommendations for possible future research on primary schoolgirls is enumerated. Overall, it is concluded that schoolgirls need support from teachers guided by gender-equitable ideologies. Encouraging girls to explore and engage in their agency, both sexual and otherwise, in more fluid performances of femininity can serve to counteract conventional femininity.

Chapter 2

Unravelling schoolgirl femininities within a context of patriarchy, sexual violence and risk

2.1. Introduction

A key objective of this study is to unravel how schoolgirl femininities are produced alongside girls' contestation and accommodation of dominant gender norms within a milieu of normalised sexual violence. The literature on schoolgirls and sexual violence is often preoccupied with female suffering and passive femininity - notions which can just as easily work to disregard female agency. While it is imperative to concentrate on the connections between gender inequalities and sexual violence, the gendered optic should not remain slanted solely towards lamenting a compliant and docile femininity. It is important to recognise how diverse female identities are constructed in our society, and why. Instead of focusing merely on how we have produced a narrowed narrative of sexuality (i.e. as being 'perilous' and frequently established upon preconceived notions of suffering girls), it is critical for us to know and understand the very basis of gender and sexual norms, dichotomies, patriarchal relations and how rape culture continually impacts on the lives of young schoolgirls. Shefer emphasises in this regard:

> Girls feature in the research as passive, submissive and asexual and men as aggressive, controlling, violent and hypersexual in their relations with each other. Such a representation lends itself neatly to a protective [. . .] framework of policy and programmatic response to young people's sexuality, and young women in particular, which emerges in the growing body of work on young women's sexuality at school (2014, p. 5).

Understanding the complexities involved within these initial constructions of femininities - underpinned as they are by notions of childhood innocence, danger, silencing, victimhood and heteronormativity - is then a crucial move towards empowering girls with the essential skills and knowledge required for them to explore their gender, sexuality and agency in gender-progressive ways. This chapter thus provides a context-specific analysis of (mainly South African) literature on young female identities, especially young girls of the 12-13-year age cohort who seldom feature in critical research.

I frequently draw on this body of work within my thesis so as to expose the primary factors which influence how schoolgirls articulate their feminised position within gender relations, as well as how they express sexuality in the construction and negotiation of their femininity whilst living in a society where rape culture remains normalised. Schoolgirls' 'ordinary' encounters with gender, sexuality and violence are often played out within a heterosexual discourse that overtly influences their lives in complex ways. Primary schoolgirls' experiences of rape culture in particular are always constructed against the backdrop of dominant and unequal gender and sex norms which are deeply rooted within hegemonic sociocultural principles in relation to gender and sexuality. In this literature review, I draw attention to the various entanglements between women, girls, gender, sexuality, femininity, and rape culture, and how all these categories are presently conceptualised. My thesis as a whole moves away from victimhood. Presently there also exists a dearth of research – both on a global and a local scale - that examines schoolgirls of the 12-13-year-old age cohort. This limited literature is thus one of the key reasons why the focus in this literature review slants to broadly addressing all young women and girls.

In South Africa - the most urgent context for this study - both women and girls are predominantly constructed according to the ideals of *emphasised femininity* (Connell, 1987). This form of psycho-social individual construction can be claimed as the likeliest root-cause of persistent problematic and inequitable gender-conformist practices among schoolgirls. Shefer and McLeod note that:

> Female learners are reminded to behave like girls, avoid being loud and act feminine, reflecting teachers' own values in gender dichotomies and patriarchal relations (2016, p. 76).

Dominant gender and sexual norms thus have the potential to deeply constrain schoolgirls' active agency. Schoolgirls' individual subjective positions are often further confounded by the imposition of sexualised and gendered norms which present countless hindrances to their healthy functioning.

In the breadth of contemporary South African research, five core studies have focused on in particular, young women and girls. These scholars in question have thoroughly critiqued both the dominant gender norms that perpetuate inequalities and the traditional discourses which devalue feminine sexuality by mainly focusing on the negative optics of sexuality. Through outlining their work, I aim to focus here on the gaps in research related to the field which still

remain. In the first section, to illustrate this point, I draw on: Bhana's (2017b) study entitled, "*Love, Sex and Gender*: Missing in African Child and Youth Studies", as well as Shefer and Ngabaza's (2015) study, "*And I have been told that there is nothing fun about having sex while you are still in high school*: Dominant discourses on women's sexual practices and desires in Life Orientation programmes at school". Later on, I address Kruger et al.'s (2015) paper, "*I could have done everything and why not?*: Young women's complex constructions of sexual agency in the context of sexualities education in Life Orientation in South African schools". Finally, I review a 2016 article by Shefer entitled, "*Resisting the binarism of victim and agent*: Critical reflections on 20 years of scholarship on young women and heterosexual practices in South African contexts", alongside Bhana's (2018) report, "*Girls negotiating sexuality and violence in the primary school*".

Altogether, these studies help fully contextualise my research study and serve to situate the reader within the field of research that my own work addresses. The above-mentioned studies collectively illustrate how young female sexualities and desires (particularly those of young girls) are generally acknowledged within our society, yet remain 'over-regulated' by dominant gender norms which work to control and discipline them in the spheres of both public and scholarly discourse. Liberatory notions of young feminine pleasure, desire, and agency - particularly sexual agency - are principally represented as potential perils for the social order to suppress and/or overcome. For this reason, and so many more, young people's sexualities remain an especially contested territory in contemporary South African society (Bhana, 2017b; Kruger et al., 2015; Shefer, 2016; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). Bhana (2017b), for instance, relates how, in Africa particularly, far greater focus is fixed on children according to overwhelmingly negative constructions of sexuality. This, she argues, is exactly where childhood sexuality becomes 'problematical', further adding to conceptualisations that associate young girls with passivity and vulnerability (Pincock, 2018).

To illustrate how schoolgirls' identities are constructed within South African research, I set about exploring the dominant discourses which imply that schools are: "[S]anitised spaces where signs of young sexualities are not tolerated but rendered 'a problem', thus reinforcing [the] notion that young women's sexuality is unacceptable and will result in 'punishment' (the inevitable consequences of pregnancy, illness, damage and/or loss of future)" (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015, p. 9). International research verifies too the role that the school environment plays in reproducing hegemonic ideologies in relation to children's sexuality. For example, Allen (a New Zealand scholar) maintains that "schools are heavily invested in a particular sort

of student that is 'ideally' non-sexual", and that, subsequently, there exists "a gulf between schools' perceptions of student sexuality and young people's lived realities" (2007, p. 2).

I begin Section 1 then by focusing on the five above-mentioned key studies. Each one serendipitously addresses a particular discourse, namely: innocence, danger, silencing, victimhood, and heteronormativity. These topics each wield a substantial influence on the way young schoolgirls seek to construct and negotiate their feminine positionalities, as well as how they attempt merely to survive within a prevailing culture of rape. This chapter gives details pertaining to why women and girls are constructed in the ways that they are, how they engage in their interpellations, and the consequences that transpire from their own forced actions. The following two sections and eight themes then make up this literature review chapter: Section 1 consists of five themes, namely: 'Childhood: A time of innocence', 'Femininity: Sexual danger and risk', 'Femininity: Sexuality, silence and double standards', 'Femininity and victimhood', and 'The Heteronormative school environment'. Section 2 then consists of another three themes, namely, 'Contextualising 'rape culture' in South Africa', 'The resurgence of rape culture: A global perspective', and 'Schoolgirls' experiences of sexual violence: South Africa and beyond'.

Section 1

2.2. Childhood: A time of innocence

The 'normative' construction of children and childhood is premised on a discourse of presumed innocence. At Penguin Primary School this was the character expected of the 12-13-year-old primary schoolgirls canvassed in this study. However, the norms, expectations and reality of this characteristic differ widely between different circumstances. The first study I draw upon in this regard is Bhana's (2017b) study. Her paper, entitled, "*Love, Sex and Gender*: Missing in African Child and Youth Studies", shows how childhood sexualities, whilst always extant, are still not recognised as such, and so research into them remains an embryonic field of study. For her part, she draws findings from a qualitative research project in KwaZulu-Natal investigating gender and sexuality amongst children and young people. Her main argument asserts that: "[S]exuality is part of the life course, children are not asexual. Sexuality is a product, [a] consequence of discursive practices and laden with power. Beliefs and norms about what [behaviours] are appropriate for children vary according to social context" (Bhana, 2017b, p. 247). Her main findings discount the 'childhood innocence' discourse in relation to matters

of sexuality and reveal how both boys and girls under various social circumstances invest in and negotiate performances of intimacy. She thus argues that childhood sexualities in Africa are not currently granted the considerable scholarly attention they deserve due to preconceived ideas that limit society's ability to recognise children's capacities to think, know and feel as sexual and gendered individuals. Resonating greatly with my own work, her study further positions South African children as being able to exhibit agency when constructing and negotiating gender and sexuality, whether at ages 6, 9, 16 or 17. Children, as my thesis will show, are far from innocent, or oblivious, and overall require guidance through, rather than protection from, sexual knowledge.

Over the years, Bhana has regularly worked closely with children so as to observe and analyse how they enact sexualities in a multitude of ways and negotiate their relations to gender, power and inequality. Her South African-centred research asserts that young people's sexualities are built upon, and driven by, local, cultural, material and social processes (Bhana, 2008; Bhana & Pattman, 2011). While it is of course equally crucial to investigate young children's susceptibility to violence and disease, Bhana argues for the importance of taking a closer look at learners' personal experiences so as to draw attention to the nuanced ways by which they manoeuvre through relations of domination and subordination (Bhana, 2016a). For instance, South African and global researchers have reached a certain consensus on the conclusion that young people, despite the fact that they face particularly uncertain livelihoods in our society, are not essentially passive subjects (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Pincock, 2018, 2019; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). As such, the task of constructing and negotiating masculinities and femininities under such varying circumstances is an inevitably complex process. Beyond looking at children in relation to their presumed innocence, it is more realistic to observe them as beings who are fully capable of negotiating their lives and identities in ways that reject and rupture the binary construction of a 'docile femininity' versus a 'violent masculinity'. Detailed ethnographic work shows how boys and girls continually play at gender and sexuality throughout their upbringing and self-consciously construct their own masculinities and femininities. Children do this primarily through pursuing and inventing narratives of 'boyfriends and girlfriends', and by playing games which involve love letters and bouts of kissing (Bhana, 2016a; Renold, 2007; Thorne, 1993). Young children's gradual inclusion within heterosexual cultures (Bhana, 2018; Paechter, 2017) provides empirical evidence of their pleasures and their agency, whilst simultaneously contesting the presiding idea of sexual innocence. Bhana (2013) argues too, however, that their emergent

sexualities are always already suggestive of gender inequalities that are entrenched by gendered power relations and acts of dominance and subordination.

2.3. Femininity: Sexual danger and risk

The next study I explore is by Shefer and Ngabaza (2015), entitled, "*And I have been told that there is nothing fun about having sex while you are still in high school*: Dominant discourses on women's sexual practices and desires in Life Orientation programmes at school". In this qualitative research study, utilising numerous interviews (with both individuals and focus groups), they investigate teaching staff, school management teams and learners' views pertaining to sexuality education in the national Life Orientation (LO) curriculum. Their study was conducted at 9 public schools across the Eastern and Western Cape provinces in South Africa, and their overall aim was to ascertain whether schools in South Africa were challenging or reproducing gendered norms and uneven gender power-relations at school. Another aim of their research, which was premised on feminist standards, was to potentially ascertain how a critical gender-theory lens could be practically integrated into the Life Orientation (LO) school curriculum.

In their findings, 'dangerous outcomes' in relation to sexuality education emerged as a major theme – a topic that is also clearly reflected in contemporary research as well as in the data produced in my own study. The potential dangers of being sexually active were expressed within a discourse of consequential penalties for young women in particular. Although there is an undoubted need for a better form of sexuality education to communicate the negative consequences of unsafe sexual practices for both girls and boys, these messages were found to be primarily promoted within a broad discourse of danger and negative consequences in relation to being sexually active. Herein the 'risks' associated with young women who engage in sexual relations are often rooted within the prevailing discourse of heterosexuality, with the onus placed on cautioning women about how unplanned pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases will negatively influence their health and future life prospects. Shefer and Ngabaza (2015) note too that young women and girls are increasingly the victims of coercive sex, which can lead to unplanned pregnancies and HIV or AIDS. At the same time, the sexualities of young women and girls are often stigmatised and heavily regulated within their communities. It is clear too that there exists a gap within the research with regards to studies that emphasise women's individual narratives and focus on their personal agency and positive approaches to their sexuality. Filling it would be a vital step towards acknowledging the female sexual desires

which are so often missing in heteronormative practices and gendered ideologies (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). The study's findings thus reiterate the destructive nature of any over-reliance on disciplinary discourses premised on fears of 'danger' and 'damage' in response to young women's sexualities, as they ultimately deny their agency in demonstrating their sexuality and their capacity for sexual desire**.** The scholars go on to argue: "Indeed there is little literature in which women's positive sexuality is represented; notions of young women's pleasure and desire or a discourse articulating this has been relatively silenced both in public and scholarly discourse" (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015, p. 2).

They conclude by emphasising that the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education within the LO curriculum at schools can potentially serve to empower young minds to critically challenge uneven gender and power relations. This can then work to generally reduce problematic incidents in relation to coercive sexual practices and sexual violence. However, they are careful to note that simply including sexuality education at school will not automatically ensure an ideal and constructive approach that promotes positive sexual agency among young women and girls (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). Indeed, lessons on sexuality education (if taught badly) might even work to reinforce the same inequalities, stereotypes and stigmas that they strive to disrupt. Consequently, despite there being a clear need to work towards developing young girls' agency in ways that ensure safe and gender-equitable sexual practices, young girls continue to receive messages that 'reinstate' an unproductive archetype of femininity founded on traits of vulnerability, submissiveness and inherent victimhood. Schools can thus be considered as 'active sites' that persistently reproduce normative gendered ideologies and re-impose a submissive and vulnerable femininity on young women that denies their inherent capacity for sexual desire and agency. Ultimately, the message this gives to young women is that active sexuality in their school years is not something that is either potentially pleasurable or fun but instead represents a sure path to doom and despair.

2.4. Femininity: Sexuality, silence and double standards

The third study I draw on is by Kruger et al. (2015, p. 30), entitled, *"I could have done everything and why not?:* Young women's complex constructions of sexual agency in the context of sexualities education in Life Orientation in South African schools*".* The scholars here employ focus group and semi-structured interview discussions to engage with 12 coloured female learners, aged between 16 and 18, at a secondary school in the Western Cape. On the whole, the main aim of the study is to highlight young womens' voices as they give meaning

to their own lived experiences - despite these experiences being overbearingly shaped by wider societal influences.

In Theme 1 of the study, 'The Explicit Discourse: Danger and responsibility', the study's respondents consistently alluded to the discourse that constructs sex as a dangerous activity. Herein, a language of passivity and victimhood is used to locate feminine experiences within a framework of 'things being done to women' or 'things happening to women'. For example, women are said to fall pregnant or suffer "a lot of damage" as consequences of sexual indiscretion. Kruger et al. (2015, p. 35) thus argue that: "[W]hile sex is clearly constructed as dangerous and young women as inevitably vulnerable and at risk, the above quotes also suggest that the young women in this study understood from adults in the school context that they themselves were responsible for protecting themselves against the dangers of sex". This then works to reinforce the 'common-sense' ideology that it is the responsibility of young women to ensure that their sexual choices will totally safeguard their well-being and ensure their moral integrity. Consequently, the study's respondents were constructed simultaneously within a discourse of both passive victimhood and active agency. Thus, their particular degree of knowing, thinking, doing and feeling prevented them from turning into merely ineffectual subjects. Their power was acknowledged and professed by them – such that one of the research participants asserted: "… but I don't want to have sex now" (Kruger et al., 2015, p. 34).

In Theme 2, "The Implicit Messages: Silencing of female desire and privileging of male power", certain implicit assumptions are observed as reducing society's ability to recognise young women as sexually desiring individuals: "[A]bstinence is the only possible decision, and young women do indeed have power in the context of a sexual, or potentially sexual, encounter with a young man" (Kruger et al., 2015, p. 36). In addition, whilst abstinence is considered to be an ideal feminine virtue, men should ultimately be reassured in their power in all such interactions. Heteronormativity was overtly reproduced within the sexuality curriculum offered by the school's LO syllabus, and this, together with girls' lived experiences, complicated ideas around girls' sexual agency. Although there was a noted expectation that young girls should assume responsibility for their sexual activities, it was also implicitly communicated to them that these sexual activities should adhere to wider gendered norms and not with their individual desires or feelings. Herein, messages concerning their agency were wholly perplexing and left them in a paradoxical state whereby they were simultaneously assigned agency and denied agency. The implication of these findings was that if the girls made conscious or unconscious decisions when engaging in sexual activities that did not comply with heteronormative gender

norms then it was highly unlikely that they would admit that their performances were actually reflective of their individual sexual desires or feelings. This then resulted in a further silencing of young women's voices, as the regulatory framework under which they were placed made it difficult for them to talk about sex, such that they could not even have conversations about bad sexual encounters or good sexual encounters, nor about wanting or not wanting sex.

In their conclusion, Kruger et al. advise that "sexuality education programmes need to facilitate more focus on finding out from young women themselves what they are struggling with [as well as] providing a constructive and supportive space for them to speak about sexuality and sex. If young women are to have more agency with respect to their sexuality, they will have to come to believe that what they think and feel is important" (2015, p. 42). Additionally, the development of female agency in gender-equitable ways must form a part of the comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) curriculum and, furthermore, young women and girls need to be given a greater platform and more support so as to freely express their feelings and opinions.

2.5. Femininity and victimhood

In a desktop review entitled, "*Resisting the binarism of victim and agent*: Critical reflections on 20 years of scholarship on young women and heterosexual practices in South African contexts", Shefer notes that:

> "[W]omen emerge in my research as primarily passive, submissive and asexual and men as aggressive, controlling, violent and hypersexual in their relations with each other. Such a representation lends itself neatly to a protective framework of policy and a programmatic response to young people's sexuality, and young women in particular, which emerges in the growing body of work on young women's sexuality at school. This continued emphasis on female passivity and powerlessness may unwittingly serve to silence them on the occasions that they do resist male power and do challenge men, and thus further constrain women's capacity to articulate positive sexual desires and even lived experience(s)" (2016, p. 6).

An ominous consequence stemming from the normative gendered construction of women (as either unavoidable victims or as defiant agents) is the reinforcement of male power and compulsory male dominance over women in heterosexual relationships. While hypersexual masculinity is a well-documented phenomenon in the literature on heterosexuality, the academy is sometimes guilty of 'expecting' and blithely reproducing this stereotype among

men and boys. Despite the increasing societal acknowledgement of the great diversity of masculinities, negative and homogenous constructions of men, boys and masculinity persist within social spaces and within academia. An obvious example of this is the stereotypical construction of Black and impoverished young men as being 'problematic' and 'dangerous' (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Ratele, 2014).

The instinctual adoption of a gender-binary approach when investigating matters in relation to heterosexuality can also have a ripple effect which results in binary approaches to victimhood. Here, men are simultaneously constructed as inevitable perpetrators and unimaginable victims. This conceptualisation is highly problematic as it disregards sexual violence as being a problem for men too. For example, Ratele (2014) notes that in South Africa, poor, young and black men form a substantial part of the large group of individuals who are most at risk of male violence.

Shefer goes on to add that a failure to disrupt normative gendered binaries will work towards reinforcing the homogenous construction of women and girls as passive, submissive and unavoidably vulnerable (2016):

> Research that is contextually located and centred on dialogic constructions of gender and sexualities, that acknowledges constraints and opportunities within the performances of masculinity and femininity, that resists a binaristic picture of women as either victim or agent, and which articulates a more nuanced picture of young womens' contested and complicated agency, is an important imperative. Such scholarship not only destabilises determinist, unitary and acontextual accounts, but may also serve to facilitate different imaginings and different possibilities for equitable and pleasurable negotiations of heterosex. (Shefer, 2016, p. 10).

My thesis therefore acknowledges that learners, even in primary school, are heavily invested in and motivated by sexual pleasures and desires. This understanding, however, should not distract us from giving careful consideration to the gendered, social and cultural circumstances through which sexualities and femininities are forged (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). In accordance with the small, but growing, body of scholarship around children and sexualities in South Africa, my study argues that children are powerfully invested in sexuality, have pleasures and desires, and that their experiences of childhood are perennially intertwined with issues of gender and affective relations of normative power (Bhana, 2016a, 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). In South Africa over the past decade, sexuality research in schools has grown and matured substantially. As previously noted, a sizable body of research conducted by Bhana

(2016a, 2017b, 2018) demonstrates how, regardless of adults' indigent desires to construct young learners as asexual beings, radical discourses about young sexuality still flourish within schools and society at large.

So, having explained the dominant gender discourses which persist in constructing and restricting schoolgirls, I will now go on to explain the school as a heteronormative context, wherein heterosexuality presents itself as a dominant gender discourse that penetrates the lives of learners intrinsically, even in primary school.

2.6. The heteronormative school environment

Heteronormative discourses have trademarked female sexuality as being passive, vulnerable and submissive, and male sexuality as being dominant, aggressive and connected to bottomless appetites of sexual desire (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1987; Schippers, 2007). Bhana's qualitative-based study, "*Girls negotiating sexuality and violence in the primary school*" (2018, p. 80) makes use of in-depth individual and focus-group interview discussions to examine how learners experience gender and sexuality in the primary school environment. Of greatest concern here, in line with my current thesis, is how gendered power inequalities manifest and become self-evident within learners' experiences of sexual agency. Bhana's study attempts to encapsulate the 'digressing production' of gender and sexuality. Her study aligns with existing research that positions schools as fundamental spaces for the construction of gender and sexuality, within which inequalities, violence and sexual harassment are actively performed (Bhana, 2016; Paechter, 2017; Renold, 2005). Bhana's study thus has important implications for my own study, as it specifically focuses on girls between the ages of 12-13-years-old in their last year of primary education. These girls stem from a predominantly black, low-economic zone township setting. My thesis uses the very same age-cohort and my schoolgirls come from a similar setting. Her study explores schoolgirls' investments into, and confused relationships within, a heterosexual playground culture, as well as a "Dress-up Friday" (Bhana, 2018, p. 88) activity that emphasises Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix, through which uneven gender power relations are established (Paechter, 2017; Renold, 2005).

Her first theme, "'It's mostly the boys': Girls negotiating femininity in the playground" (Bhana, 2018, p. 84), describes schoolgirls' playground cultures as being reflective and reproductive of heteronormativity, wherein girls participate in normative sexualities that reinforce uneven gender power relations (Paechter, 2017). Such gendered relations hypothesise that schoolgirls should be submissive and passive, whereas boys should be rough, tough and powerful (Bhana,

2018). A wide array of scholars (Huuki & Renold, 2015; Mayeza, 2016; Paechter, 2017) have investigated and declared the school playground to be a site within which gender power relations are actively produced and within which femininities and masculinities are produced, negotiated and resisted. In her study, Bhana (2018) notes that all the schoolgirls in consideration constructed femininities within a certain degree of ambiguity. On this note, her research evidence indicates that these schoolgirls considered the playground as an exhilarating place of fun, where they could play hopscotch and share their lunches. However, along with this exhilaration, they inexorably reproduced the normative gendered discourses which reproduced a passive femininity in relation to the schoolboys' dominance (Bhana, 2018). In this way, the gender binary was consistently maintained and boys were unthinkingly constructed as rough individuals who fight, kick and engage in wrestling whilst schoolgirls sit courteously, talk or play netball. Bhana (2018) thus calls for scholars to move beyond simplistic understandings of the gender binary in order to acknowledge and include an understanding of the harmful environment of male domination and how schoolgirls navigate their own identities in order to avoid the 'violence' of boys. She then finds violence on the playground to be a multifaceted phenomenon: equally physical, verbal and sexualised. In an environment greatly shaped by boys, schoolgirls forge their own safe spaces; in this way, a softer, gentler femininity is produced and contrasts with the rough and tough masculinity depicted previously.

Schoolgirls participate actively in heterosexual cultures in school, and evidence of this is seen in the games that they play, which involve chasing, "running, hide and seek and the spin the bottle [game]" (which leads to kissing) (Bhana, 2018, p. 87). Heterosexuality is thus being learned while they play these childhood games, and, for schoolgirls, this learning forms a crucial component of a femininity wherein divisions between boys and girls are broken down as they encounter each other as sexual beings. Further research on schoolgirl femininities demonstrates how playground cultures are heterosexualised and how schoolgirls, in response, utilise play to assert heterosexual desirability - in this way, casting schoolgirls as less submissive and dormant in comparison to boys (Paechter, 2007; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993; Bhana, 2016a). As they engage in heterosexual play cultures, schoolgirls reposition their femininity from its gentler and more passive form to one that produces pleasure; however, they simultaneously (and paradoxically) express anxiety regarding the normative constructions of gender and how such expectations implicitly structure relations of power. In a similar vein, Huuki and Renold (2015), and Paechter (2012), clarify how 'being a girl' necessitates an investment in heterosexuality wherein girls are required to project, comply with and act upon

heterosexual desires. Owing to this, girls are inevitably sexually objectified (Paechter, 2017). A critical deduction can be made from this: heterosexuality can be considered as privileging femininity, but is equally considered to be a damaging force when allied to gendered inequalities (Bhana, 2018; Renold et al., 2015). Sexual objectification (as well as harassment) is a daily experience amid such social interactions. Bhana (2018), in particular, reveals how boys are regularly depicted as the perpetrators. Schoolgirls spoke to her about their routinized objectification via cat-calls and whistles, as well as the sexualised disposition of these interactions which involved the subordination of girls. Inappropriate and unsolicited touching and grabbing of girls were also described as everyday experiences which served to uphold gender hierarchies.

Bhana's second theme: "Dress-up Friday: Cool girls, heterosexuality and the fight for boys" (Bhana, 2018, p. 87) portrays the unintended consequences of how, on a Friday, learners are sanctioned to dress in casual clothes. It is perhaps no revelation that schoolgirls invest in fashioning their heterosexuality via their casual dress. Despite the continual silences surrounding sexual cultures, relationships among primary school learners remain firmly rooted within heterosexuality. Herein femininity and masculinity are performed in complex ways that extend far beyond the simplistic construction of a 'passive girl' and 'violent boy'. Fridays, for these schoolgirls, allow them to express a hypersexualised version of femininity through stylish hairdos, cosmetics and dressing up. Herein femininities are regulated via a good-girl/cool-girl binary, which firmly operates inside a matrix of compulsory heterosexuality. Existing studies also note that 'good-girl' femininities are endorsed by heteronormative feminine traits of sexual compliance, respectability and a suitable feminine demeanour (Kehily, 2002; Renold & Ringrose, 2013). 'Good-girl' femininities are thus firmly established upon patriarchal virtues of good conduct, appropriate dress and desexualisation. As such, they stem from a superficial creed based on physical looks and the signifying of appropriate conduct around sex and sexuality. It encourages young women to separate themselves from the 'cool girls' - from a femininity that endorses sexual promiscuity and is marked by a sexually explicit dress code – and to instead preserve feminine chastity and rectitude.

The primary school sexual economy is powerfully driven by performances that involve "dating, kissing, sexual rumours, boyfriend and girlfriend cultures and love letters" (Bhana, 2016a, p. 183; Thorne, 1993). Primary schoolgirls' strong investments in heterosexual dating and competitions for boys as part of their sexual culture are key markers of heterosexual femininity. Heterosexual competition manifests openly between girls and is fuelled by acts of jealousy,

spreading rumours, and verbal abuse. Although good/nice girl femininity works towards supporting and accommodating male heterosexual power by upholding representations of female respectability and passivity, cool girls are, in truth, equally compliant towards the reproduction of heterosexuality - albeit via their non-normative conduct. Both versions of femininity fundamentally work towards reinforcing the idea of compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1990). A powerful investment in heterosexuality and relationships thus fuels competition among schoolgirls, which frequently results in various forms of violence. Some schoolgirls do resist gendered norms and sometimes even venture beyond the victim and agent binary by ascribing to a non-normative femininity that revolves around aggression and female-on-female violence catalysed by the acts of cheating boyfriends. In this situation, femininity and heterosexuality is not demonstrated via girls passively accepting male power, but instead through their dynamic involvement in violent and gendered cultures themselves. Reports of violence aimed at girls for lashing out at cheating boyfriends show how male privilege is consistently preserved by 'correcting' violations in relation to gender norms in ways that can be witnessed by others. A normative gendered order expects boys to be perpetrators of violence. Although girls do sometimes use violence as a form of resistance, it is essentially the same variety of violence used as a powerful tool by both boys and girls to give the same ideological meaning to their daily experiences. As boys attempt to rectify acts of violence inflicted upon them, they implicitly work towards re-establishing the gendered norms that were potentially disrupted by non-normative feminine performances. As a result, boys reclaim their male power within a social realm that centers on gender inequalities and threatens non-conforming girls who contest the legitimacy of male power with acts of violence and rape.

In her concluding comments, Bhana (2018) adds that addressing gender, sexuality and the sophisticated constructions of femininities in the primary school environment is a vital pursuit. Such nuanced everyday experiences often go unnoticed due to the primary school setting not being recognised as a space within which children regularly invest in sexuality (Renold, 2005). Raising the sheer amount and calibre of research into primary school environments, and increasing our awareness about how gender and sexuality manifest and how power is deployed at school, are critical subjects of research for South African scholars (Bhana, 2018).

As can be deduced from the South African literature review above, a set of critical feminist scholars have worked over the last few years to emphasise and explicate the dominant messages and norms expected of young people, especially women and girls. These discourses pertaining to childhood innocence, sexual double standards, silences, victimhood and heteronormativity

are the root causes of rape culture. In my own thesis, girls not only reproduce these dominant messages but also rupture and resist these norms and messages. The ideology of childhood innocence, danger, silence, victimhood and compulsory heteronormativity is revealed to be profoundly flawed. Moreover, it is shown to form the basis of many of the social ills that transpire in South Africa and beyond. The next section thus moves on to focus on contextualising 'rape culture' in South Africa, providing a global perspective on the phenomenon, and recounting and recording schoolgirls' experiences of sexual violence on a global scale.

Section 2

2.7. Contextualising 'rape culture' in South Africa

Socio-cultural norms work to reinforce and sustain sexual violence in specific contexts (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). For example, in South Africa, the context of this study, the country's political landscape is laden with extremely high levels of heterosexual male violence; men who submit to harmful and violent ideologies of hegemonic masculinity are often linked to high levels of violence in the country at large (Gibbs et al., 2014). Subsequently, girls' experiences of sexual violence are highly gendered and are increasingly perpetrated by boys (Mayeza et al., 2021), school officials (Bhana, 2012), or others capable of providing financial resources or favours (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013). This is because the political landscape in South Africa is founded upon patriarchal tendencies, as well as endemic plagues of poverty, hegemonic masculinity and subordinate femininity. As a result, women and girls are often the victims of a prevailing 'rape culture'. Hegemonic masculinity is what legitimises male dominance and power in South African society (Morrell et al., 2012). 'Rape culture' is then undeniably linked to hegemonic masculinity and a predominant masculine ideal (Connell, 1987). This atmosphere then provides and promulgates ideals that are far more disadvantageous to women and girls. Nonetheless, boys and girls are consistently taught to aspire to them and so their conduct, experiences and identities are consequently shaped by gendered inequalities and violence. In South Africa, men and boys are taught to be dominant and women and girls are taught to be subordinate; thus, unfavourable and gender-inequitable relationships and social structures play out on the broadest possible scale.

There is an urgent need to uncover and explicate the early formation of femininities and how such broad inequities are fortified by an educational discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. Such prescient findings can be used to better educate and equip girls with the necessary knowledge and skills to negotiate their sexuality in more gender equitable ways that serve to benefit them and ensure their overall well-being. A raised consciousness of how escalating levels of heterosexual violence can be attributed to the manifestation of certain versions of masculinities and femininities are then absolutely imperative. The consequences of a prevailing hypersexualised masculinity and a docile femininity result in women and girls' heightened susceptibility to sexual violence, particularly in the form of age-disparate and transactional relationships (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morell, 2012; Pincock, 2018, 2019; Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013) teenage pregnancy (Gibbs et al., 2015), HIV and AIDS transmission, rape (Anguita, 2012; Interpol, 2012; Morrissey, 2013), and violence towards non-normative sexualities (Msibi, 2012).

2.8. The resurgence of rape culture: A global perspective

In South Africa, a significant component of the existing research on young girls, gender, sexuality and violence remains preoccupied with female suffering and the concept of docile femininity. To address this gap, contemporary research in the field has begun to unravel the root causes of flawed and harmful gender ideologies (Bhana, 2017a, b, 2018; Kruger et al., 2015; Shefer, 2016; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). For example, when focusing on gender inequalities and sexual violence, the gendered lens is often skewed towards reinforcing the ideas surrounding passive and meek femininity (Connell, 1987; Schippers, 2007). While this steady focus on childhood innocence, danger, silence, victimhood and heterosexuality has produced confined understandings of sexuality (as being 'risky' and established upon the ostensible suffering of girls), the actual reality of their experiences and vulnerabilities needs to be unpacked, understood, addressed and ultimately protected. Therefore, this chapter will now focus on the victimisation narrative first before unpacking the existing literature on female agency.

Globally, critical feminist scholars have declared a resurgence of the concept of 'rape culture'. 'Rape culture' has been called out wholesale in our time due to the increased exposure of normalised sexual violence involving politicians, athletes and celebrities, as well as within the contested public spaces of university campuses and schools (Curry, 2015 - India; Le Roux, 2016 - South Africa; Mayeza et al., 2021 - South Africa; Monchgesang, 2015 - Australia). This

continuous spectrum of sexual violence, and the ways in which sexist performances are normalised and socially accepted within a society, is what defines, creates, sustains and worsens 'rape culture'. Consequently, 'rape culture' is what endorses and bolsters male violence and aggression towards women and girls — an ambience of oppression that plays out in daily life in various ways (Prieto et al., 2016; Ridgway, 2014). It does not only pertain to women and girls; individuals across the gender spectrum are subjected to 'rape culture'. Moreover, a large percentage of disabled people are victims of rape (Madden, 2014). Rape culture can thus be viewed as a multi-pronged problem that intersects across all ages, genders, races, abilities, ethnicities, and sexualities. Regardless of age, context, size, or ethnicity, a prevailing culture exists by which males (men and boys) are ritually taught that they need to uphold traits of dominance, sexual aggression and power (Kivel, 2012; Ratele, 2014) and that if they do not conform to hegemonic masculinity, they will be subjected to taunts and violence. Such pressures create a contaminatory environment which nurtures the notion that rape is a behavioural characteristic of being a man (Connell & Messerschidmt, 2005). Such harmful gendered norms and ideologies then play out in various ways to regularly subordinate women and girls: through victim-blaming, slut-shaming, silencing, and spreading rape myths.

The construct of 'victim-blaming', and the purposes it serves, inherently disadvantages women and girls. The perpetrator of sexual assault is excused and positioned in power over their victims (the ones who have been targeted or harmed). According to Fast and Richardson (2019), 'victim blaming' during incidences of sexual violence is a common occurrence. Davies (1997) draws attention to how the likelihood of women and girls becoming victims depends upon certain factors - such as their perceived decency, physical appeal, former sexual activity, their resistance, their degree of intoxication or the perceived state of their clothing at the moment of their attack. These factors significantly affect the possibility of victim-blaming. Some theorists argue that the perpetrators' and observers' characteristics and attitudes towards rape are added factors that can be considered as being instrumental in the victim-blaming process (Kaufman et al., 2019). On this note, other factors such as attitudes about feminism (Davies, 1997), beliefs in a just-world (Culda et al., 2018), learner or non-learner status, the possibility of identifying with either the victim or the perpetrator, and - not least - the gender of the observer (Grubb & Turner, 2012) have all been documented as potential causes of victim-blaming. Kaufman et al. (2019) emphasise that when women and girls are victim-blamed, their sense of suffering is augmented, and their subordination is prolonged and exacerbated. The process inherently adds to the embarrassment and dishonour that they already feel. 'Being a

victim' is still widely stigmatised in our society, and having been harmed by another is frequently considered to be a stain on an individual's character — as if one has a 'victim personality', or is weak or impure (Kaufman et al., 2019). Within victim-blaming, Fast and Richardson (2019) note that there is sometimes an implication that the aggrieved party did something to bring their suffering on themselves, such as not having boundaries, not being properly assertive, lacking self-esteem, and/or foregoing a knowledge of self-defence.

In addition to victim-blaming women and girls, slut-shaming works in much the same manner - subordinating and maligning women and girls for alleged sexual behaviour. To elucidate this practice, Armstrong et al. (2014) argue that the Urban Dictionary South Africa (2020) - an internet site that records young people's colloquial speech – references the following words to cover the gamut: "slut, whore, bitch, skank, ho, cunt, prostitute, tramp, hooker, easy, or slag" (p.100). These words are all commonly employed to slut-shame women and girls. To slut-shame, one need not only act verbally; even non-verbal behaviours can have the same, or similar, negative impact (Armstrong et al., 2014). On another level too, the participation of women and girls themselves in slut-shaming is usually a clear indication of internalised subjugation (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). This form of sexual labelling is principally used to distance oneself from a stigmatised, low-status sexual category that is ultimately deemed to be somehow degraded. Ringrose and Renold (2010) reveal that the main avenue through which women and girls are socially permitted to articulate meanness is by indirectly and directly regulating the sexuality of other women and girls. Taking this approach further, Pascoe (2007) notes that "the slut discourse" effectively operates as a tool via which individuals are able to regulate themselves and others. He goes on to claim that slut-shaming works, "as a powerful disciplinary mechanism" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 54). Therefore, slut-shaming has developed into a normalised practice that provides an avenue for women and girls to situate themselves and others within a sexual hierarchy and to foster self-confining discourses about sexuality, physical appearances and performances within the private vicinity of their peer groupings so as to construct and reinforce idealised femininity (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). The emphasis of slut-shaming usually falls on how women and girls tempt condemnation for performing femininity in ways that do not adhere to gendered norms and standards (West & Zimmerman, 1987). For example, Crawford and Popp (2003) note that slut-shaming originally emerged as a modern phenomenon as an explicit consequence of the conventional context of sexual double standards. Men, women, boys and girls are simply expected to be guided by different rules pertaining to sexual behaviour. While women and girls are briskly defamed for any deviant

sexual behaviour outside of heterosexual marriage, such conduct is pretty much expected of males (Crawford & Popp, 2003).

In addition to victim-blaming and slut-shaming, the silences enforced on the part of learners can be linked to prevailing cultures of fear and dominant gender norms and stereotypes. Hlavka (2014) notes how rates of rape-reportage at educational institutions are catastrophically low - thus reinforcing 'rape culture'. They claim that silences with regards to sexual violence, and children's exclusion from sexuality research, signify the continued power of the innocent child archetype and uphold the prominent Western discourse of the submissive child and the authoritarian adult. In the global South, Bhana (2016a) (again) has written extensively about how sexuality matters to young children and how their voices are received regarding how they interpret sexual violence is crucial. However, the foundational silences in our society regarding gender, sexuality and violence are underpinned by dominant gender norms and ideologies. Overall, these forces work to create, maintain and worsen sexual risk environments for young people.

Rape myths, moreover, continue to steer dialogues about sexual assault, and these too are often established on victim-blaming ideologies. Rape myths may include the idea that 'no really means yes', or that women and girls who dress or act in sexually explicit ways deserve to be sexually harassed or assaulted, or that blame can be shifted from the perpetrator if alcohol was involved, or even that the male perpetrator 'simply could not resist' his primal sexual urges. The endorsement of rape myths can easily lead to the development of pro-rape attitudes and a fading of empathy towards survivors of sexual violence, which can, in turn, create negative environments that discourage survivors from disclosing their experiences to peers and authorities. One study investigating the role communication plays in propagating 'rape culture' provides various examples of rape myths (Burnett et al., 2009). Firstly, women and girls are assumed to be 'strong enough to resist rape'; victims of rape are labelled as 'promiscuous'; and many women 'falsely report incidents of rape' (Burnett et al., 2009). Like victim-blaming and slut-shaming, rape myths discriminate against, subordinate and increase the risk of women and girls being sexually abused. And in the South African context, a particularly notorious rape myth that still abounds is the belief that raping a virgin or a baby is a potential cure for HIV and AIDS (Leclerc-Madlala, 2002).

The evidence for victim-blaming, slut-shaming, silencing and subjecting women and girls to rape myths suggests that the term 'rape culture', though widely condemned by society at large

on a superficial level, has not prevented or uprooted its pervasive normalisation within intimate societal practices (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). On this note, Gqola (2015) has criticised South African society's hypocritical reactions towards rape, labelling it as a kind of two-way process: on one end of the spectrum, outrage and disgust is demonstrated if a child is raped or killed, as such an act obviously represents a performance of obstinate and irrational violence where solely the perpetrator should be held responsible, but all the while on the other end of the spectrum, there are incidents of rape within which a certain degree of doubt is consistently upheld - particularly in relation to women (Hayes & Abbot, 2016). The wrongdoer is then always spared a modicum of the blame, as male sexual violence is normalised and anticipated, and a squalid ideology dictating that the female victim should have known better than to put herself in such a situation is fortified and upheld (Hayes & Abbot, 2016). The pervasiveness of 'rape culture' in South African society is not only signified by the uniquely high statistical occurrence of rape, but furthermore of how 'rape culture' itself is everywhere and shaped by our society. It is against this backdrop that my study offers its insights into how 'rape culture' manifests in a primary school setting and how primary schoolgirls enact agency despite being subordinated in various ways to a system that reinforces 'rape culture'. A more nuanced and general understanding of this process may hopefully facilitate a movement towards developing effective solutions that may appropriately challenge the existence of 'rape culture' in South Africa.

2.9. Schoolgirls' experiences of sexual violence: South Africa and beyond

Globally, sexual violence is, today, a serious and ongoing problem - in particular for young girls. Dominant gender norms and ideologies generally position girls as being subordinate (Paechter & Clark, 2016; Parkes, 2015) while approximately one third of all children globally have encountered some variation of sexual violence (Pinheiro, 2006; UNESCO, 2019; WHO, 2018). In South Africa, sexual violence against young girls is particularly rife. According to the South African Police Services Annual Crime Report (2019/2020), 24,387 accounts of sexual violence against young girls were recorded in a single calendar year. Rape constituted 18,586 cases, followed by sexual assault with 4,451 cases, and attempted rape with 562 cases, and contact sexual offences being 788 cases (SAPSACR, 2019/2020), though of course such numbers should be understood as only constituting the tip of the iceberg.

Bhana has documented how South African learners' experience sexual violence at school - in rural KwaZulu-Natal, the city of Durban and beyond. In a study derived from a large interview-

based project entitled, ‘‘*16 turning 17*: Youth, gender and sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS’’ (2012, p. 353), she explores the diverse ways in which young people in Durban, KZN, attach meanings to gender and sexuality in the dire context of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Her findings reveal that young girls constantly experience sexual violence, in and out of school. Girls spoke of their concerns and anxieties surrounding sexual violence and coercion. Their experiences were profoundly related to gender subordination and cultural/local understandings that upheld patriarchal male power and violence. Girls explained how their own boyfriends, male teachers, and men in their own neighbourhoods were perpetrators, and how their homes had become, for them, contaminated spaces. They spoke of how fearful they were, and how the grip of sexual violence and rape locked them into subordinate roles, once again refuting the vast freedoms and agency that they should by all rights have access to within a democratic South Africa (Bhana, 2012).

In her other work, conducted with primary schoolgirls aged 12-13, Bhana (2018) examines how heterosexuality shapes and influences how schoolgirls navigate and negotiate their feminine identities, both in relationships with their peers and in their interactions with boys during school breaks. A South African co-ed public township school was chosen as the study's research site and her findings revealed the school playground to be an exciting and dynamic social space; albeit one fortified by disproportionate gender power-relations that manifest via performances of gendered and sexualised violence, sexual harassment, and misogyny. This research is thus particularly valuable to my own purpose, as it depicts how heterosexuality plays out in the lives of young schoolgirls, along with how heterosexuality locks girls into a subordinate status, despite girls' obvious active agency. However, given its contained focus, regrettably no mention is made as to the study of homosexuality and lesbian relationships on the playground.

In another study investigating the prevalence of violence amongst a group of South African secondary-school learners, Mayeza et al. (2021) utilised in-depth focus group and individual interview discussions to investigate schoolgirls' accounts of gendered violence in a South African township secondary school. They find that sexual violence is wholly normalised in the scholastic environment and that girls especially are at risk of being sexually violated by boys within the secondary-school hierarchy (Mayeza et al., 2021). This violence is highly sexualised and manifests (as you might expect) in complex ways. The girls of the study were exposed to multiple forms of sexual violence and coercion by boys in varied school spaces. Moreover, the study's analysis indicates how female-on-female violence transpires in the context of

heterosexual competition. This kind of violence only works to reinforce girls' subordination within a wider hetero-patriarchal society (Mayeza et al., 2021).

Another study by Lynch et al. (2018) investigating primary and secondary school learners in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, utilised surveys, focus groups and individual interview discussions to collate data for an intervention programme aimed at addressing the plague of sexual violence in schools. Through this process they found that three themes reappeared constantly throughout their data: 1) the culture of silence; 2) violence in relationships; and 3) the prevalence of unwritten dating rules within the school context. The first theme revealed how primary schoolgirls remained silent whilst experiencing physical and verbal abuse (such as being kicked, having their hair pulled, and touched inappropriately) - such accounts of abuse encompassed incidents in various school spaces, ranging from school toilets to classrooms. The second theme described heterosexual violence within dating relationships, finding that violence amongst dating couples occurred more frequently between learners in primary school than those in high schools. Accounts of physical, verbal and sexual violence, together with disgraceful and embarrassing coercively-imposed sexual actions underscored primary schoolgirls' experiences of dating violence. Their third theme then drew on the presence of steady sociocultural norms in heterosexual relationships used to perpetuate "unwritten dating rules". For example, a schoolgirl's refusal of sex was normalised as 'scripted feminine behaviour' whereas boys were normalised as sexual pursuers. In line with this thinking, schoolgirls construed boys' sexualised and verbalised inferences towards them as signs of innocent desire towards them. These advances from boys served to confirm the girls' desirability as sexual subjects and influenced their decisions to accept romantic relationship proposals from boys. Although the study thus provided important statistics concerning the pervasiveness of violence in the lives of primary schoolgirls - as well as insight into how they navigated heterosexual relationships so early in their maturity - there remains a clear need for an even more in-depth gendered analysis that pays added attention to the sociocultural beliefs and values that underpin gendered ideologies, all with the intention of offering a more sophisticated understanding of how girls experience sexual violence (instead of a rigid focus on a 'girls-as-subordinate' discourse within a victim/perpetrator binary) (Lynch et al., 2018). Further resonating with my thesis, Lynch et al. (2018) identify the school as a focal setting within which sexual violence can be pre-emptively (or at least emptively) addressed and combated. Based on this conclusion, they strongly suggest that schools need to implement suitable and improved avenues through which sexual violence can be reported at school. They

also advocate for the need to improve learners' awareness, knowledge and skills with regards to important issues involving gender inequalities – all of which can be achieved through the redevelopment of the Life-skills and Life Orientation curriculum. This has the potential to assist learners and provide them with the opportunity to recognise, address and eradicate harmful and normative gendered norms that tend to fuel sexual violence at school.

Focusing on sexual violence in the sub-Saharan context, Leach et al. (2014) provide an overview of contemporary research in various contexts across the world. This premise, taken together with previous studies, motivated them to distinguish between explicit and implicit configurations of violence. They explain that explicit sexual violence includes all unwanted and impulsive forms of physical contact - such as being kissed, touched, pinched, groped, harassed, cat-called, taunted, and verbally abused - and that this also includes the sexist or derogatory comments made in class by teachers (which are aimed at embarrassing or threatening learners) (Leach et al., 2014). Words such as 'slut', 'whore', and 'bitch' here served as ammunition for ostracising and silencing non-conforming girls. Implicit or symbolic sexual violence, they state, thus encompasses performances that are less noticeable and more ordinary; such as those which are sanctioned, tolerated and fortified by daily performances and configurations that make up the school day. Herein specific laws are put in place to direct and regulate learner behaviour whilst discriminating against those who defy them. In an earlier study, Dunne et al. (2006) emphasised this as an ever-present set of presupposed, habitual school practices - also referred to as the 'hidden curriculum'. This hidden curriculum, they noted, is frequently governed by normative heterosexuality, wherein masculinity is linked with violence and power, while femininity implies traits of submissiveness, compliance and girls making themselves attractive to boys (Dunne et al., 2006). On this note, specific performances may be considered trivial and dismissed on the account of natural sex-related traits (with one example being the common gendered ideology that 'boys will be boys').

Jewnarain (2019) uses an ethnographic study to explore girls' experiences of gender and sexual violence in primary school. Her study, like mine, was conducted at a primary school in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, with her main research aim being to recognise and understand the core elements that shape primary schoolgirls' experiences of gender and sexual violence and how teachers' attitudes impacted on their experiences. Another key objective was to carefully unravel how the girls in her study constructed their sexual identities. Her research thus strongly emphasised the need to understand the broader social contexts for the occurrences of gender and sexual violence. Gender and sexual violence, as well as harassment, are complex

phenomena and, using schoolgirls' own voices, her study handily provided an in-depth and fully contextual understanding of how girls casually experience these forms of violence.

Sexual violence is often rooted in the gender power-relations within which boys and men draw on male power to subordinate girls. Herein boys use sexualised verbal abuse, taunts and teasing so as to lay claim to their 'male power' and demonstrate their dominance within a patriarchal gendered system. Jewnarain (2019) provides an in-depth insight into how these degrading sexualised performances - which included the physical 'sexualised touching' of girls' private parts - are a complex and multifaceted social process. As a practice, it involves the entanglement of heterosexual teasing, and desirability as well as humiliating acts that focus on eroding girls' sexuality via inferences of their 'incomplete' sexual development. At times these complex processes result in girls being made complicit in their own subordination, alongside their subordination by dominant heterosexual masculine performances. The study also draws attention to how heterosexual femininity is often overtly influenced by wider structural, cultural and societal norms that subordinate girls via the tacit endorsement of widespread performances of sexual harassment, exploitation and violent conduct. Herein schoolgirls' accounts of abuse and coercion are situated within socio-cultural dynamics rooted within gender disparities inextricably linked to hegemonic masculine ideals and subordinated femininities. This form of institutionalised misogyny, maintained by the performance and pursuit of hegemonic ideals, is profoundly detrimental to girls. Being subjected to such humiliations can destroy their self-esteem and diminish by degrees their sexuality and dignity (Jewnarain, 2019). Jewnarain concludes her argument by emphasising that there is an urgent need to move away from constructing schoolgirls as passive victims, as this construction is presently far too simplistic and fails to recognise their sexualities. On a similar level, claiming that boys sexually harass girls merely due to their ages and present phase of development is also far too basic because it invalidates girls' experiences of undesired touches and caresses. Consequently, the school does not only operate as a training-site for boys to perform culturally-glorified versions of masculinity but correspondingly emerges as a secret academy for girls' subordination.

Plain, obvious, extensive evidence of schoolgirls' sexual assertiveness can serve to actively challenge and disrupt the discourse that locks them in a fantasy realm of sexual innocence and passivity. As girls resist and challenge the hierarchical supremacy occupied by boys, they actively rebel against displays of male supremacy and domination located within hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, girls can be observed to possess sophisticated understandings of sexual harassment and violence. Just as with the participants in my study, Jewnarain (2019)

found that schoolgirls are able to make sense of intricate gendered and sexual entanglements with, as well as amongst, boys. By drawing attention to the issues raised by the study's girls themselves as being 'problematical', 'unsolicited' and 'repressive', Jewnarain (2019) adds to our understanding of the complexities involved within various facets of sexual violence. In doing so, these findings foreground how girls' experiences of sexual harassment and violence are strongly associated with heterosexual masculinity and the wider socio-cultural milieu which upholds the subordination of girls. Consequently, the violence that schoolgirls experience continues to be stubbornly shaped by a wider sociocultural system of gender that is entrenched by a patriarchal ideal, which, whilst being malleable, is still a powerfully resilient force (Jewnarain, 2019).

Lees and Devries (2017) conducted a Zanzibarian qualitative interview-based study investigating gender, sexuality and violence amongst 15-24-years-olds. They found that religious and cultural teachings in Zanzibar strongly focus on mere discourses of moral behaviour. The respondents in their study identified men in positions of authority as the number one perpetrators of sexual violence. Their findings thus suggest a need for a more precise understanding of how positions of power are produced and upheld according to cultural norms and standards that serve to shore up uneven power relations between ordinary people. Additionally, the findings indicate that sexual violence urgently needs to be recognised as a structural problem that requires immediate political intervention. The scholars also note the fundamental role that religious education plays in influencing ideologies surrounding childhood and sexuality. The respondents' individual accounts of sexual and physical violence indicate too that there is a dire need to redress the problem of sexual and physical violence at madrasa (Islamic) schools. On this note, the respondents alluded to the strong influence these schools wielded in moulding their ideologies and beliefs surrounding appropriate and moral behaviour. Religious schools thus have the potential to provide a suitable platform through which knowledges of children's sexuality in relation to their rights and security can be transmitted. The study also found that the perpetrators of the reported acts of sexual violence faced next to no accountability. The authors then suggest that intervention strategies need to more carefully and intricately link the prevention of sexual violence with their present responses to sexual violence. They also advocate the implementation of an intervention strategy that overtly adopts an ethical approach to preventing sexual violence by systematically increasing levels of support from members of the community and other stakeholders (Lees & Devries, 2017). In the study, both boys and girls consistently reported that they were at risk of

sexual violence within their homes, neighbourhoods, schools and particularly at madrasa (religious) schools. The researchers thus argue that curbing sexual violence at madrasa schools could ultimately serve to both strengthen the beneficial aspects of religious teachings and ensure children's overall safety (Lees & Devries, 2017).

Hlavka's (2014) US-based study on young girls investigates how girls produce, maintain and normalise violence amongst themselves. The schoolgirls here habitually failed to identify what the law, academia, and their own teachers officially classify as sexual harassment or abuse. The data used in the study comprised audio/video-taped interviews with 100 girls who had reported sexual abuse between 1995 and 2004. The girls were all between the ages of 3 and 17 and the interviews were conducted by trained forensic interviewers. Hlavka's research aimed to explicitly, "re-cast youth as agentic, having intentions, desires, and standpoints rather than as passive objects" (2014, p. 338). The interviews revealed that heteronormative scripts were used to give wholesale meaning to daily practices of harassment, violence, coercion, and consent. This provides a more sophisticated understanding of how sexual violence is normalised by so many individuals in our society. Additionally, the findings provide sophisticated accounts of how violence is intertwined with the progress of sex education and gendered relationships from an early stage in an individual's life.

Hlavka specifically emphasises how sexual violence has become normalised in the lives of girls. The number of safe spaces for girls is found to be minimal as the girls in her study report acts of sexual violence occurring in a wide variety of spaces - including parties, classrooms, playgrounds and even on school transportation such as buses, vans and cars. The girls in the study largely portray males (both boys and men) as being naturally sexually aggressive - a common heteronormative trait assigned to men. This latter concept emphasises how heteronormative ideals are almost always premised upon male dominance and female subordination. Hlvaka states that: "[G]irls' characterisations of everyday violence paralleled both their assessments that 'boys will be boys' and their understanding of harassment as a normal adolescent rite of passage" (2014, p. 344-345). The girls in Hlavka's study disclosed that they did not wish to make their experiences into a "big deal". As a result, they hardly went on to report any of their various experiences of sexual violence. Many of the girls also questioned whether others would take their experiences seriously if 'rape' had not been committed, thus alluding to the complacent ideology that other forms of sexual violence are not serious enough to warrant intervention from society (Hlavka, 2014). The girls then went on to draw a superficial boundary within acts of sexual violence, distinguishing between "real

rapes" and daily, normalised, violent practices that were labelled as "little rapes" (Hlavka, 2014, p. 346). The obvious interconnection here between daily practices and violence was reproduced via the acknowledgement of blame. Girls criticised each other for failing to navigate around males' naturally aggressive behaviour. Additionally, once an act of sexual violence had been committed, further concessions were sometimes made in the interests of the perpetrator. For example, a 14-year-old female respondent reported being raped by a fellow 17-year-old male in a local park whilst walking home after school. The perpetrator promptly went on to spread rumours that got her labelled as 'sexually active', 'promiscuous' and a 'slut' by her fellow pupils. Sexual reputation was thus found to be highly valued among the girls, and the ever-present danger and fear of being labelled a "ho" or a "slut" featured powerfully in their stories. The consequence of being sexually and socially 'degraded' served as the clear barrier to rape being consistently reported, as this was inextricably connected to exaggerated false accusations that influenced the ways in which girls' peers decided to include, exclude, label and/or ostracise them. However, it was within this complex course of action that girls were also potentially able to earn some cultural capital from their peers for being desirable and pursued; but within this course of action their agency was still more often neglected. Hlavka therefore concludes by stating: "[S]exual education must be gender equity education, resistant to troubled, heteronormative binaries and cultural constraints that omit discourses of desire, gender, and sexuality" (2014, p. 359). She advocates for a movement to identify and recognise young people's agency and then provide them with suitable spaces within which they can co-operate together with adults to evaluate their own emotions and experiences of sexual debut, encounters, and activities – all of which can potentially shed light on other aspects of their experience, such as harassment, power, compulsion, and consensus in more helpful and gender equitable ways (Hlavka, 2014).

In the Caribbean context, Cobbett and Warrington's (2013) study utilises a qualitative research approach in four government secondary-schools in order to investigate boys' and girls' experiences of sexuality. Their findings reveal that the girls and boys in their study (aged between 11–12-years-old) had both undergone an array of anxieties and confusions on matters of sexuality. At the same time, they also confessed that the emergence of (hetero)sexual attraction was one of the most exhilarating parts of school life. In all four schools considered, the sexual harassment of girls was revealed to be a pervasive problem exacerbated by the normalisation of sexual violence. The study also clearly refutes ideologies that construct girls within a passive victim discourse. In contrast, the girls surveyed responded to boys' behaviours

in complex and contradictory ways that were usually founded upon their own individual investments within a certain grading of desirability and within hetero-feminine ideals, as well as the urge to gain the pleasures they desired from their own relationships. Boys and girls thus equally serve to benefit from regular opportunities to engage in conversations that highlight their needs, views and wishes concerning sexuality and relationships. The scholars' overall findings then draw attention to how sexuality - specifically heterosexuality - is a highly significant component of childhood that shapes the schooling experiences of both boys and girls (Cobbett & Warrington, 2013).

One theme of this study that I found to be of particular relevance to my own work is Theme 1: "Heteronormativity and sexuality: being a 'normal' girl or boy at school". Cobbett and Warrington (2013) note how the daily negotiations pertaining to gender relations remain multifaceted and extremely contrary. This experience entails regulating masculine and feminine performances against the backdrop of a 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990). They specifically explore how fitting in at school is heavily dependent on gendered and sexual norms (in addition to learners' expressions of sexuality and desire). They find that demonstrating heterosexual desire is a fundamental prerequisite for fitting in at school for both main genders. Moreover, they observed that learners also gained happiness from their sexual pursuits at school, and that boys, whilst still executing tough masculinities, also encountered a series of unheeded and unsympathised sexual anxieties and exposures. On a similar note, although girls' weaknesses and anxieties were found to be more noticeable and common, some girls did describe emotional states of augmented power stemming from their raised positions within their school's sexual cultures. However, as in the South African context, the schoolgirls still experienced incessant sexual harassment, and, as a result, the power they gained from being 'desirable' was a perilous value that was never acquired without consequence.

Theme 2 in their study, entitled 'Sexual harassment: Girls' experiences', delves into girls' narratives of sexual harassment, and discusses the many complexities and ambiguities their observations raised concerning sexual harassment. Although it was quickly evident that girls derived pleasure from certain relationships with boys, and that they regularly enjoyed and courted boys' admiration, the most common way that sexuality surfaced in their interviews was through discussions on sexual harassment - a problem identified as being pervasive in all four schools in question. Both the girls and the boys in their study also asserted that it was easier to be a boy at school, as girls had to contend with sexual harassment. A girl is quoted as saying: "[B]oys like to feel them up and push off their clothes." It is noteworthy here that almost all

the comments girls made in this study about sexual harassment concerned boys fondling and ogling at girls. This indicates that, at least in the Caribbean context, sexual harassment has a somewhat different quality to the South African context discussed earlier (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019), wherein violence was more variously physical, verbal and sexual. Nevertheless, the sparse accounts of verbal sexual harassment in this context may not be the result of its complete absence, but rather as the consequence of how sexual harassment is conceptualised within the study's specific context. Additionally, the evidence of sexualised and derogatory comments made by boys about girls during the boys' interviews demonstrate rather obviously that verbal sexual harassment also exists within the researched schools. Cobbett and Warrington (2013) lastly go on to highlight some very prescient findings: firstly, they make sure to note components of the 'tough femininity' that is frequently linked with Caribbean girls - particularly demonstrated in one schoolgirl's remark that she would "break [boys'] fingers one by one". Despite this, the findings reveal that it remains difficult for girls to deflect or prevent unsolicited attention from boys; as a result, the girls were (understandably) inclined to fantasise about the ways in which they could utilise extreme violence to defend themselves from sexual violence. Then, secondly, the authors provide a rationale explaining why the girls felt they needed to make attempts to defend themselves: to wit, the lack of support from teachers as to intervening in matters concerning sexual harassment and violence.

2.10. Conclusion

In South Africa and beyond, the majority of studies related to this topic have focused on older women or secondary-school girls' and boys' experiences of sexual violence (Bhana, 2012; Bhana & Pattman, 2012; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Mayeza et al., 2020); whilst very few studies have delved into the lives of primary school learners (see exceptions: Bhana, 2016a, 2018; Jewnarain, 2019; Mayeza, 2016). However, some South African studies have recently begun to throw a sharp focus onto primary schoolgirls' narratives (Bhana et al., 2019). Despite schoolgirls' experiences being profoundly connected to harmful and dominant gender and sexual norms (Bhana, 2012) that implicitly uphold masculine power and violence, women and girls can and do resist these norms.

Globally, studies have shown how coercive touching, sexualized vulgar language and male domination remain serious causes of concern in both schools and society at large (Cobbett & Warrington, 2013; Hlavka, 2014; Lees & Devries, 2017). In her South African-based studies on young schoolgirls, Bhana (2012, 2016a, 2018) has shown how the school environment is an

invigorating and dynamic social space still heavily fortified by disproportionate gender power-relations that manifest through performances of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, misogyny and sexual violence.

In addition, these aforementioned studies also highlight how the lack of reporting by schoolgirls, and the lack of institutional support as such, remain matters of deep, tragic concern to us all. However, this is not to infer that stark gender ideologies and harmful dominant gender norms cannot be efficiently or effectively deconstructed and changed (Bhana et al., 2021). Schoolgirls themselves have been found to resist the rape culture they find themselves seemingly trapped in (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Jewnarain, 2019). As Gilligan (1990) notes: "[They fight for their rights] by coming [up] against the wall of patriarchy" (see chapter 3).

Finally, the studies explored in this literature review draw attention to the crucial need to confront the deep-rooted gendered norms, prejudices and inequalities that circumscribe school-based gendered and sexualised violence (Parkes, 2015). It is important that these gendered ideologies are confronted at the ground-level within schools and communities; that is to say, along with young people, with their teachers and parents or guardians, and furthermore on the higher level of the school district and the provincial and national departments of education, all in order to influence and inform wider school policy for the future. This effort will of course require steadfast commitment from all stakeholders and will only prove effective if we address, at multiple levels, the enormity of the job of challenging the manifold configurations of violence confronting learners in their daily lives (Unterhalter, 2013). All stakeholders involved in the lives of young learners bear crucial roles in the tackling of sexual violence. We need to improve our understanding of their perspectives, critique the paradigm that limits and incapacitates their ability to take action, and offer support through educating en masse and providing the resources needed to effectively tackle the problem of sexual violence at school (Unterhalter, 2013).

Having focused on how young girls experience, and are subordinated and attempt to survive, within a culture of rape, the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 will go on to unveil how girls are not simply docile victims of rape culture, but possess and employ their agency in diverse ways, thereby showcasing how not only one monocultural version of femininity or girlhood exists.

Chapter 3

Schoolgirl femininities and agency

3.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, I explored South African research which covered how normative discourses of gender and sexuality impact the lives of schoolgirls and how such constructions restrict them. I also explained how sexual violence manifests across the globe and becomes normalised in school settings. I showed how providing a one-dimensional emphasis on female passivity and powerlessness can often contribute to a silencing of the instances when women and girls do resist and challenge male power, thus undermining and constraining their ability to enact positive sexual desires, passion, pleasure, and agency through their lived experiences. A revised perspective is clearly needed of how young women and girls - like the schoolgirls of this study - perform gender and sexuality differently, affirming their sexual desires and needs, and seeking out possibilities for affirming themselves in ways that are positive, unbiased and pleasant.

Notwithstanding the ongoing evidence of rape culture in South Africa and the patterns of inequality that lead to sexual risk, a preoccupation with danger and normative gendered practices has led to a noticeable lack of research and debate on female agency. This thesis, with a particular focus on primary schoolgirls aged 12-13, focusses on schoolgirls' expressions of agency in the production of young femininities, and moreover portrays an underlying expression of power and resistance that contrasts with dominant narratives that nullify or misrepresent young female desire. The schoolgirl participants in this study resisted the normative, gendered conceptualisations of 'respectable' girlhood, as they asserted themselves and engaged in sexual talks, practices and acts that demonstrated their active agency. In moving beyond the discourse of danger and risk that is too often stapled to young African femininities, this thesis strives to surpass the oversimplified framework that positions African girls as docile and mere victims of rape culture. This uniformity in positioning girls as victims, Switzer reminds us, "empties girls of agency" (2013, p. 247).

The literature used in this literature review chapter demonstrates how women and girls contest, dislocate and fracture the dominant gender and sexual discourses regarding sexual docility and

victimhood. My aim is to illustrate how young women and girls engage with, accommodate, resist, and, at times, collude with the dictates of dominant gender and sexual norms, albeit as active agents. It is vital to note that some parts of this literature necessarily set out research on young women together with that on schoolgirls, as the topic of agency amongst primary schoolgirls is presently an embryonic field of research. Women and girls' expressions of agency show how femininities are not based simply on acquiescence to dominant gender and sexual norms, but rather on the individual thoughts, feelings, desires, pleasures, passions, and resources available in particular settings, and on the relational dynamics through which women and girls construct agentic femininities. The literature on young women and girls and their agency not only opens up possibilities to examine their enactment of agency, both sexual and otherwise (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana, 2018; Pincock, 2019) but additionally unveils far more nuanced versions of femininity (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Anderson, 2013 a, b; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007) that contest the tropes of idealised heterosexual femininity within particular social contexts.

While agency is evident in schoolgirls' particular actions, Bay-Cheng (2019) reminds us that agency is a quality typically attached to those schoolgirls identified as transparently and unapologetically self-advancing - those who identify as courageous, independent and assertive. She argues that this line of thinking about agency is flawed, as it excludes from view any recognition of the agencies of emerging and fluid femininities. Hlavka (2014) also advocates the re-casting of primary schoolgirls as active agents with viewpoints of their own. She states that girls' own experiences, intentions, desires and standpoints should be recognised, rather than their being perceived as passive objects, and she maintains that, by considering young schoolgirls as decisive agents, one can perhaps generate spaces in which girls can feel free to collaborate with adults to evaluate girls' experiences of sexual activities - be it the abuse, consensus, power, and coercion - predominant in their lives. In light of my own findings, and to situate my study within the field of femininities and agency, I now provide a second literature review within this thesis to specifically illustrate the enactment of agency by young young women and girls and the subsequent construction of femininities as fluid.

3.2. Agency through heterosexuality – A global phenomenon

Over the years there has been some global research on young schoolgirls which documents how schoolgirls express agency through heterosexuality within primary school settings (Bhana, 2016a; 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Blaise, 2005; Cobbett & Warrington, 2013; Martin, 2011; Myers & Raymond, 2010; Paechter, 2017; Renold, 2006; Rich, 1980; Thorne, 1993).

In a South African study investigating gender and childhood sexuality, Bhana (2016a) notes how learners conduct their everyday lives through the optics of heterosexuality. Her findings show how talks regarding marriage, kissing and sexual activities are not unusual or undistinguished instances within the lives of primary school learners (Bhana, 2016a). In line with this thesis, dating within the bounds of the primary school is widespread. The school sexual economy entails heterosexual jockeying, girlfriends-boyfriends, kissing, writing love-notes and other everyday practices that include engaging in heterosexual games (Bhana, 2016). As young people insert themselves within heterosexual cultures, the presumption of sexual innocence amongst young people is contested (Bhana, 2016a; 2017b), providing evidence of their pleasures and their agency (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019) set against a backdrop of gendered inequalities and the interrelation of domination in addition to subordination (Bhana, 2016a; Mayeza, 2016). Young people's complex and multi-faceted constructions of themselves as heterosexual subjects allow us to consider sexuality, just like other facets of human social development, as an important fragment of young learners' daily schooling cultures (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). Mayeza (2016) adds that the primary school is a specific social environment where much of the hetero-sexualisation of learners materialises.

The pervasiveness of the above-mentioned activities has been extensively documented and easily correlates with other research in the Global North. For example, Thorne (1993) and Blaise (2010) note how children as young as seven engage in dating, playing heterosexual games, kissing and accordingly benefit from heterosexuality. My thesis similarly points to the prevalence of these activities amongst children at Penguin Primary School and challenges our conventions around childhood innocence by raising enquiries regarding the manner in which gendered and sexual relations are patterned amongst children. Through the enactment of heterosexual practices and activities, young learners mobilise and enact their agency.

Similar to my own study investigating primary schoolgirls' constructions of gender and sexuality, Renold's (2005) one-year ethnographic study explores how sixty young learners construct and act out their gender and sexuality in their final year in primary school. Her

research context consists of two different primary schools positioned East of a small semi-rural city in England, and her main findings reveal that being a normal boy or girl means an investment into, and active persuasion of, hegemonic heterosexual identities along with relationship cultures. Here, the pervasive heterosexual matrix systematically controls heterosexual relationships, from the games played, to friendships and relationships. She highlights the diverse ways through which young learners are able to enact discourses of heterosexuality and sexual virtue in their parts, as girlfriend-boyfriend. She concludes by revealing how learners utilise their agency to discuss and disclose delicate experiences, such as sexual harassment, homophobia, bullying, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, games they engage in, dressing and physical appearance (Renold, 2005).

An American study conducted by Myers and Raymond (2010) explores how schoolgirls co-construct heteronormativity. Their findings demonstrate that heteronormativity is an ingrained aspect of life, even for primary school learners. They observe how girls are fascinated with boyfriends and perform their heterosexuality for other boys and girls. Their findings also reveal how girls often answer personal questions through a heteronormative lens and speak of heterosexual crushes, sex, and dating. The girls of the study proclaim themselves to be 'boy-crazy' and speak about 'hotties', crushes, and dating. They learn early from each other that to be an appropriate girl means performing heteronormativity for other boys and girls (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1987; Paechter, 2007; 2017; Renold, 2006). In so doing, the gender binary is reinforced, as girls measure, and are measured against, their relationships with boys.

In the UK, an ethnographic study conducted by Martin (2011) shows several examples of how primary school learners explicitly position themselves within heterosexual masculinities and femininities by using trendy clothing, cosmetics, and fancy hairdos. Boys' self-portraits, likewise celebrate themselves in stereotypically active masculinities, predominantly through playing football with their friends. Martin (2011) also notes how learners heavily invest in the heterosexual matrix. For example, through the games they play, heterosexual norms are both reflected and reinforced. Consequently, learners show how they are active agents in fitting into heteronormative social relationships. Their fitting in occurs in various ways; through the performance of certain play activities and between the claiming of and portrayal of gender power relations rampant in the school setting. Their study further yields numerous examples of how learners explicitly position themselves in heteronormative gender and sexuality roles. The girls draw themselves in the latest fashions, adorning makeup, jewellery and flaunting fancy hairstyles. UK girls' attraction to makeup and jewellery is documented by the scholars

Martin (2011) and Blaise (2005), and in both instances the schoolgirl participants were observed using makeup and jewellery as signifiers of adulthood, along with their resistance to such positions. Blaise's (2005) study on young children also reports on how "[girls] pretended to be beautiful princesses attending extravagant parties and balls where they would meet and dance with a handsome prince" (p. 77). Through examining young girls' fantasies, it becomes evident that they explicitly subscribe to compulsory heterosexuality.

In the Caribbean context, Cobbett and Warrington's (2013) study with young boys and girls establishes that negotiating daily gendered relations is a multifaceted and conflicting experience, involving demanding presentations of the gendered structure within the 'heterosexual matrix'. From this report it is clear that for primary school learners, being attracted to, and exhibiting an interest in the opposite sex is a crucial component of conforming at school.

Paechter (2017) similarly argues that there is substantial indication that learners are active, sexual beings. They work diligently to assert their presence in localised heterosexual practices. She suggests three significant motives for this. Firstly, she notes how through discourses of normative gender and sexuality, children gain an authorised language within which to articulate their sexual feelings. Secondly, this self-infusion into the heterosexual matrix reflects a means for young people to affirm their rights to social involvement. Thirdly, when children take up heterosexual constructions, they gain, secure and understand the authority of identifying themselves as part of the social world. The heterosexual matrix is deeply rooted within adult cultures, apparent to children at home, through mass media, and from their daily experiences, both within the home and school environment. From an early age, children witness how adults obtain and derive power in addition to pleasure from their participation in hegemonic sexualised performances, and they too desire to experience these realities for themselves. For example, in addition to Paechter (2007, 2017), the scholars Blaise (2005) and Martin (2010) have also documented how children participate in heterosexual fantasy-play, and as a result are able, even if only briefly, to practice the pleasures of immersion in adult-centred power relations. This permits them to acknowledge themselves as hypothetically, if not essentially, influential performers within the world, and to consequently attain some connection to the adult social contract. These powerful performances reflect prevailing desires. Paechter concludes by affirming the importance of, "finding ways to involve even very young children in decisions about things that matter to them; recognising and valuing their participation in economic

activity; and, of course, resisting the heterosexual matrix itself so that it becomes less thoroughly implicated in the adult-focused society" (2017, p. 288-9).

Irrespective of the continuing patterns of socio-cultural norms and gendered inequalities that position girls as subordinate to boys, heterosexual relationships — whether or not learners experience them physically, or dream or romanticise them — remain a crucial part of learners' sexual cultures (Bhana, 2018; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Paechter, 2007; 2017; Pincock, 2019; Renold, 2013). Even very young boys and girls, whilst not having the full sexual span or responses of young people or adults, do nonetheless have, and regularly express, sexualised feelings and participate in sexual debut, whether through playing games or other means of their own enquiry (Paechter, 2017).

In the section above, I looked at the prevalence of heterosexual relations from a global perspective. In the subsequent sub-sections I provide a detailed account of the various ways in which agency is expressed through heterosexuality. I begin by unpacking how heterosexual desire, pleasure, passion and love are expressed by young women and girls and how these practices illustrate their active agency.

3.2.1. Expressing desire, pleasure, passion and love

Desire, pleasure, passion and love are the positive expressions of sexuality which indicate women and girl's agency. Global research with young people has shown that connections between female sexual desire, pleasure, passion and love are often considered to be inimical to each other, and are often unacknowledged and missing from contemporary accounts (Allen, 2013a; Bhana, 2015; Hlavka, 2014). As noted above in Chapter 2, the combined forces of gender ideas, cultural norms, as well as male sexual entitlement merge to exaggerate a one-dimensional understanding of women and girls that is premised on the dominant expectations of female passivity and male sexual predation in terms of sexual agency. But beyond the continuing patterns of inequality and hierarchical gender and sexual norms that do persist to situate and render women and girls as passive, heterosexual relationships still remain an essential part of young women and girls' sexual cultures (Bhana, 2016a). I highlight several studies here to illustrate how young women and girls express desire, pleasure, passion and love, and how these form the base of their sexual agency within heterosexual relationships.

A South African study by Reddy and Dunne (2007) emphasises the construction of young womens' sexualised identities. The scholars isolate three vital themes that shed light on young women's understandings and experiences. Their first theme - 'love and trust' - deals with the

manner in which relationships are formed. They find this to be a central part of young womens' lives, wherein they negotiate their sexualised selves in an atmosphere of uncertainty and diverse understandings, with individual, social and physical dimensions. They claim that the emphasis young women place on 'being loved' means condom-use becomes a subsidiary concern. The second theme - 'virginity and marriage' – looks at the differences in the participants' present sexual relations and activities, and forthcoming implications. The last theme - 'troubling sexualities' - debates constructions of conventional femininity within the leading context of compulsory heterosexuality, and specifically highlights the opposing discourses between them. Their main findings disclose how conventional femininity is an unsafe sexual identity that requires confrontation to achieve gender equity in personal relations, as well as, significantly, to decrease young women and girls' susceptibility to contracting HIV and AIDS. Reddy and Dunne (2007) conclude by stating that women are, indeed, eroticised beings who derive happiness from heterosexual relations and have hopes and desires for them, and that these exist in conjunction to and are entangled with their experiences of rape culture.

In another South African study conducted by Bhana and Anderson (2013a), young girls describe their sexual experiences and talk about boyfriends who, whilst being supportive and loving, reproduce their subordination by cheating and then seeking forgiveness on the basis of an ideal of love. Though predominant constructions of femininity contribute to making it problematic for young women and girls to safeguard their sexual welfare, "working with both girls and boys is an important strategy of intervention, and involves shifting dominant patterns of masculinity and femininity to broaden pathways towards love, trust, loyalty and understanding" (Bhana & Anderson, 2013a, p. 30-31). As explained in the previous section, children also enact their masculinities and femininities through their narratives of boyfriends and girlfriends, and through heterosexual games which include writing love letters and kissing. Young children's insertion within heterosexual cultures provides evidence of their desires, pleasures, passions and love, ultimately expressing their active agency.

Bhana's (2016c) qualitative study of young South African girls and boys draws on four same-sex focus-group discussion interviews that took place at two formerly Indian-only schools situated in locations previously allocated for Indians under the apartheid regime. Most of the learners were of Indian race and came from middle-class socio-economic settings in KZN. The young girls in her study disclosed narratives to her that illustrate a concept of agency that takes into account passion, love, pleasure and desire. This evidence, Bhana (2016ac) states, reveals a high level of emotional connections and the manifestations of power and inequality. She finds

that young girls resist traditional gender norms by connecting with sexuality and pleasure, and so present themselves as being desirous and pleasure-seeking. She notes: "[P]leasure is not simply about sex but involves a range of sexual activities, practices that produced emotional attachments and desire" (Bhana, 2016c, p. 374). Furthermore, Bhana (2016c, p. 371) adds: "[Y]oung women talked about the pleasurable aspects of relationship dynamics, as desiring subjects idealising and describing the positive ways in which relationships were fuelled and how their desires were nurtured in and through these relationships. These included kissing, dating, or in cases of serious relationships, going to house parties to make out." Moving forward, Bhana (2016c) posits that conceptualising agency that takes into account acts of passion, love, pleasure and desires should reveal more around the emotional connections and influences that abound through manifestations of femininities, agency, power and inequality.

In the Ugandan context, Muhangazi (2015) draws on detailed individual and focus group discussion interviews with young women who were involved in heterosexual relationships to examine the intensity with which they articulated their sexual agency. Findings demonstrate that these young women are capable of articulating their sexual desires freely and can, and do, negotiate different options for pleasurable sexual experiences. She suggests the need for recognising differences within heterosexual experiences and the likelihood of positive heterosexual relationships which resist dominant notions of masculinity and femininity. She further adds that there is evidence that young women in heterosexual relations do have chances to assert themselves and to express their ideas of pleasurable sex (Muhangazi, 2015). She notes that positive and pleasant heterosexual experiences in relationships empower women to be active subjects instead of inactive objects of the male gaze, such as that of male sexual yearning and desire. Her female participants' accounts have demonstrated sufficient evidence of sexual agency and further prove that, in contemporary Uganda, the fractured structure of subordination characterises patriarchal heterosexual relationships. However, the existence of different options of expressing sexual desires and pleasures consequently specifies the prerequisite to acknowledge variances in meanings and experiences of sexualised interactions in heterosexual relationships, while recognising the inspired ability of women and girls to destabilise the structural situations they are presumed to be subordinate to (Muhangazi, 2015).

Desire, pleasure, passion and love are missing in research regarding young primary schoolgirls (see exceptions Bhana, 2016a, c; 2018; Paechter, 2017; Renold, 2013). There is a need for research on the ways in which young primary school learners, especially schoolgirls, experience sexuality that takes heed of both danger and desire. In addition to expressing acts

of pleasure, desire, passion and love, sexual talk and practices are also documented as expressions of women and girl's agency through heterosexuality, as will be outlined in relation to the next sub-section.

3.2.2. Sexual talk and practices

Despite the prevailing taboo around discussing young sexualities and sexual knowingness, women and girls do engage in, and learn from, sexual talk and practices. Allen (2015) states that: "[I]t is apparent that what girls and boys learned officially, through for example, the sexuality education curriculum was only part of the sexual meanings they gleaned from schooling experience" (p. 122). She further notes that through talk, most learning transpires 'unofficially' in areas not particularly acknowledged as 'educational' - for example, the physical education change rooms, peer and group interactions during the interval breaks, and graffiti on the school and toilet walls, and classroom desks (Allen, 2015).

Other studies have also highlighted the grand extent of sexual talk and knowingness; for example, in their South African research, Carboni and Bhana (2019) highlight how sexual pleasure features prominently in young girls' lives. Their work moves away from discourses of sexual danger and sexual suffering to address the understandings of privileged girls stemming from an elite local schooling context. The girl participants in their study openly express acquaintance with, and investment in, SEM (sexually-explicit material), expressive of agency in tactical ways and revealing resistance to dominant ideologies that demand their virtue and decency. They thus state that a focus on positive sexuality could prove beneficial to young girls' development. Comparable to the aims of this thesis, they too critique the one-sided view of femininity based on the sexual suffering of poor girls and object to such constructions of femininity. They argue instead that femininities are extensive, fluid, paradoxical and are entangled with, not detached from, sexual pleasures. Their study shows, rather definitively, how secondary schoolgirls embody SEM in a manner that expands the definition of femininity beyond a timid sexuality, while demonstrating its entanglement with gendered inequalities. Even though this disrupts normative assumptions around femininity, Carboni and Bhana argue that an ambiguous relationship with SEM is apparent, as their challenging of the dominant type of femininity is mediated by concerns about innocence and respect (2019).

While conducting research on sexuality amongst a sample of 28 young people aged 16-17 in a Black township in Durban, Ramlugan (2012, p. 31) notes how one of the girls remarked, "Don't call me weird, but I normally watch porn and stuff." Ramlugan then states that, instead of

overlooking the views of young women and girls as indecent and irresponsible, this research shows how African girls articulate their sexual agency along with their desires by making sense of pornography in a context where sexuality education is insufficient or missing. Many of the girls in their interviews talk about pornography as an educational resource; they want to absorb knowledge from SEM and glean a rudimentary form of experience (while others talk, too, about its pleasurable capacities) (Ramlugan et al., 2012).

This thesis builds on this body of literature by illustrating how girls' sexual talk, practices and knowingness are very much the cocktail at primary school settings, too. Having covered how young girls involve themselves in sexual talk and practices, I now move on to outline literature that documents how external bodily expressions (through clothing) are used as a means to express women and girl's heterosexual identity.

3.2.3. Bodies and dressing up

In debates on sexualisation, much focus is attached to girls, and particularly to girls' bodies and clothing as a locus of concern (Kehily, 2012). The troubled subject of girls' clothing is illustrative of the tensions inherent in most commentary on the premature sexualisation of girls and the dissonance between public concerns and girls' own experiences. Kehily has argued that the sexualisation of women and girls remains as an adult structure based on liberationist ideals and consumer cultures, which do not capture how sexually-informed girls are, or their class-inflected experiences (2012). Even in primary school, bodies are especially salient. Learners' notions of gender are correlated to external bodily expressions, for example clothing, hairstyles and fashion (Paechter, 2006). Paechter argues that "children can thus be seen to use their bodies to construct, express and demonstrate gendered identities. Bodies matter: this is something that we cannot escape" (2006, p. 131).

Using qualitative methods to investigate young people in the UK and Australia, Ringrose and Rawlings (2015) discover that, through expressive appearance, girls develop a heterosexual stance towards boys in order to mark themselves as heterosexually-desirable girls. This conception of the heterosexual matrix serves to slot girls into binaries of sexual purity or surplus so as to uphold prescriptive, dominant, heterosexual attraction to boys. Furthermore, as girls attempt to mediate through multifaceted and high-stake spots of sexual accessibility, attractiveness and social admiration, their connectivity with material agents such as hairstyles and makeup is once more utilised as a key means of attempting to impress or attract the male gaze (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015). In their study, Ringrose and Rawlings (2015) find that there

is a need to "unpack how the material agents intra-act in the situation; whether a skirt is shorter, longer, worn with tights, or without tights, and also what the skirt actually covers, each materialise subjects into appropriate girl – or not" (p. 19). Short skirts are thus problematically linked to an absence of respect for oneself. Furthermore, they have to be careful, as skirt-length, hairstyles and make-up also work collectively to unleash the dynamic force of "slut-shaming" (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015, p. 56).

In one South African tertiary institution, Shefer et al. (2017) carried out a study involving male and female students. They found here two conflicting notions of dressing up. Firstly, that dress is as much about the communication of meaning as it is about convenience, physical need, individual choice and freedom. Clothes are worn as an accessory to present an individualised performance of the self - to produce individuality and uniqueness - and thus, branded and expensive clothes and accessories support a degree of self-confidence and comfort, reiterating the prevailing ways in which socio-economic classes shape social belonging and value. Secondly, Shefer et al. (2017) note how the participants' accounts reveal the pressure to follow specific dominant ideas of gender. Clothes are marked as significant accessories to the presentation of idealised heteronormative gendered norms. What men, women, girls and boys wear, together with other features of their self-appearance, helps emphasise and confirm their gendered and normative expectations around gender, together with their heteronormative practices. The prominence of dressing up as women and girls includes the tie of femininity with body-hugging clothes - specifically clothes which expose certain body parts. The incentive for women and girls to obey that which is erected as feminine is not merely for them to gain social capital through the male gaze, but to attain recognition by female peers too. Dressing in feminine ways is seen as an agency ticket; not only towards reception into dominant heteronormative tropes, but then again correspondingly to positive attention and regard. Accordingly, it then serves to ensure that individuals are not negated as individuals (Shefer et al., 2017).

When it comes to bodies and dressing up, in the global North most studies have focussed on high school girls (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015). Girls in primary school and of the 12-13-year-old age cohort have been overlooked. This thesis adds to this body of literature on young primary school girls and the manner in which they utilise their bodies and dress to construct heterosexual, desirable femininities. The above section has looked at how clothing and bodies play a critical role in how young women and girls gain and maintain agency using their bodies.

In the section that follows, I list and explore the literature on material love, and how women and girls engage in age-disparate transactional heterosexual relationships.

3.2.4. Material love, age-disparate and transactional relationships

Material love, age-disparate and transactional relationships are receiving growing scholarly and attention globally. However, increasingly authors have argued that it is problematical to accept a simplistic picture of transactional sex whereby women are unavoidably seen as helpless victims (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Pincock, 2019; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). Rather, it is argued that such transactions are complex, have always existed in relationships between males and women and girls throughout various societal histories, and are not inevitably or constantly illustrative of female powerlessness and male exploitation of power. Bay-Cheng (2019) pinpoints that this is what female agency appears to have become given the dearth of sufficient resources, in addition to their facing systemic difficulties. She thus advocates for girls to be seen as models of agency, not victims, and as main contestants for intercessions aimed at increasing their sexual agency. Girls have the capacity, she proclaims, to shoulder entangled societal inequities, as well as new adversities, at the same time as they are freed from other societal problems by being provided with material resources. For some women and girls, agency is not pointed at or steered by sexual desires or passion in the least, but rather by their own "thick desires for material security, intellectual stimulation, emotional and physical intimacy, and hopes for the future" (Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 300).

For instance, Shefer et al.'s (2012) study on young womens' experiences of transactional sex at universities in South Africa finds that young women in higher education institutions occasionally have sexualised relationships with elderly men ('sugar daddies') or with younger men ('blessers') so that they can acquire funds to pay for study materials or fees, or just to obtain social mobility. Similarly, schoolgirls strategise and improvise to secure their immediate needs. Material relationships are initiated for the sake of satisfying their immediate wants and needs, like school fees, groceries, branded clothing and small stipends, where access to these resources is not met by families who stem from the lower end of the socio-economic stratum (Shefer et al., 2012). Women and girls clearly do not want to be eliminated from the modern expressions manifested in conspicuous consumption.

In another qualitative-based study in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa, Ranganathan et al. (2018) conducted secondary analyses on approximately seven-hundred sexually active

young women and girls to investigate their incentives for attaining diverse consumer commodities. Their qualitative study utilises five focus group interview discussions as well as nineteen detailed individual interviews to discover young women and girl's incentives for attaining diverse commodities. Their results illustrate that young women and girls who indulge in transactional sex possess far greater chances of acquiring items such as theatre-movie tickets, than everyday sustenance items. Their findings also reveal that young women and girls' insights as to commodities measured as 'needs' are strongly influenced by social pressures and a desire for improved life status. Additionally, their findings reveal that transactions with sugar daddies offer a means to obtain consumable items linked to a contemporary way of life, like items for personal improvement and entertainment. Their study concludes by restating that young women and girls are more than eager to take on social and sexual risks with the intention of attaining a degree of financial freedom (Ranganathan et al., 2018).

Bay-Cheng's (2019) study focuses on three girls, while discarding narrow discourses of agency. The girls are observed as working hard to secure their instantaneous needs and shadowing their upcoming goals for their education by employing their sexualities. They endeavour to only allow their involvements to affect them "in that instant so as to safe-guard their eventual livelihoods, but nonetheless struggle and suffer to secure their futures. This still shows and echoes the omnipresence of sexual agency amongst young girls and is demonstrative of girls' self-chosen roles as 'clear agents' rising above their circumstances" (Bay-Cheng, 2019, p. 469). The girls' reasons for dating and situating money at the core of relationships are conveyed as casual and factual, suggestive of no experiences which could be deemed to be gross violations, but instead are considered as aspects of a matter-of-fact, ordinary performances of daily agency. Through gaining money, women and girls protect their needs and limited resources, utilising the only capital at their disposal. Correspondingly, this could be classified as a sign of resourcefulness and wiles (Bay-Cheng, 2019). The context does not reduce young women and girls' susceptibility, but does somewhat counter the inclination to perceive them reductively, such as solely perceiving their distress by overlooking their agentic actions. Payne highlights how girls "live and make life meaningful outside of, and beyond, the categories of 'at risk' or vulnerability in which they are so often confined" (2012, p. 408). Moving beyond their being seen as acts of mere resistance or survivalist conformism, and thus engaging sexuality as a rightful realm of youthful experience, moments of sexual agency manifest in women and girls' daily efforts to progress - whether to the subsequent day or to compose one's circumstances slightly better either currently or on a long-term basis.

Bhana and Pattman's (2011) South African study shows how young people are often key strategists and agents in the forging of epitomes of love, through which gender insubordination is formed and repeated. Their study demonstrates the nuanced and sophisticated manner in which agency is established and gridlocked, emphasising that, in fact, agency is in essence an effect of social circumstance. They specifically examine how young people in impoverished contexts express ideals of love and desire. Their prerogatives to love are shown as calculated acts taken to mediate poverty conditions and socio-economic marginality. Girls' claims to love are closely linked to their objectives to reach middle-class materialism levels at least. Love becomes inseparable from the idealisation of the males anticipated to provide for them. Endorsing provider masculinity is then a calculated approach to acquire money, fashionable clothing and prestige. The overall findings reveal that young people's prerogatives to love are continuously outlined by specific sets of social situations, circumstances and relations, which are unavoidably material manifestations of gendered economic hierarchies (Bhana & Pattman, 2011).

Strebel et al.'s. (2013) South African study focuses on how a taxi queen and taxi driver relationship is received and understood by young people. The data collection method utilised is focus-group interview discussions. This took place encompassing young people aged 15-16-years-old. The key themes in their findings are fundamentally expressive of girls' agency. Their first and most important theme, 'Constructions of taxi queens and taxi drivers', delves into the prevalent phenomenon of how young girls commute with taxi drivers and get entangled in a relationship prefaced on material exchanges in the form of gifts such as cell phones, money, cigarettes, alcohol, and even substances such as drugs. The girls shared their feelings on how 'cool' it would be to become a taxi queen - achieving social status and capital from being spotted with taxi drivers and obtaining commodities. While poverty is alleged to be a robust incentive amongst taxi queens, they are also often perceived as being engrossed by the social status and acknowledgement of their relationships, or the opportunity of expressing emotional needs owing to family difficulties. Furthermore, an apparent contradiction is made evident in portrayals of taxi queen girls as deviant, promiscuous, and irresponsible, although the relationship is also understood to be an expression of normal relationships, by which girls receive gifts from boyfriends (Strebel et al., 2013).

Selikow and Mbulaheni (2013) investigate the love-money-power-gender maze by conducting ten detailed interviews with young girls from an urban tertiary institution in South Africa who are involved, to whatever extent, in sugar daddy relationships. The authors note that "the

metaphor of putting food on the table is a proxy for providing young girls with 'wants' to satisfy their desire for conspicuous consumption" (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013, p. 86). They go on to acknowledge that such relationships are not lacking in love. Young women are able to find ways to carve out moments of agency within power dynamics that inexorably favour sugar daddies. Nevertheless, their findings highlight that young girls also exert degrees of agency in all stages of their sugar daddy relationships. Notwithstanding these relationships being uniformly instigated for the sake of visible commodities, at some point in the relationship, sugar daddies often change roles - from providers to just friends, to confidants and finally, to lovers. Additional findings reveal that often, if the sugar daddy fails to endow their girls with resources, they might terminate the idealistic relationship whilst maintaining friendship. This analysis discloses that the maze of notions pertaining to agency, power, love and money should not be perceived through a negative slant, as such preconceptions blind us to the contradictions that girls productively negotiate amidst their pursuits of money and love (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013). The girls' own narratives reveal how students exert degrees of agency at every stage of their sugar daddy relationships and that, notwithstanding the contributory relationship goals, real love exists through a variety of manifestations within these relations.

Majola (2015) uses qualitative data to explore the practices that Kenyan schoolgirls engage in so as to stake claims on the modern consumerist femininity. His study inspects the significance of consumption to the vaunted character of modern femininity and his evidence shows the contradictions of the materiality of idealistic love on one hand, and normative expectations of male provisions on the other. Consumerist wants and financial realities amongst Kenyan schoolgirls are found to be equally overbearingly powerful and problematic. Majola concludes by arguing for a new reflection and advocacy for 'post-girlhood' power.

Other South African studies associate features of modernity with growing agency for young women and girls in sexual mediations, along with residual restrictions on that agency. For instance, Jewkes and Morrell's (2012) qualitative-based study made use of individual interviews and ethnographical observations of sixteen young women and girls who stem from the rustic Eastern Cape to discover the manner in which they construct their feminine individualities and exercise their agency. Jewkes and Morrell (2012) have highlighted some of the extent to which young women are capable of exercising their agency within their relationships - for example, by selecting and attracting partners. Furthermore, they note how young women seek to embody their agency as a vital part of forming their self-image as

autonomous, modern women and girls (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). However, they conclude by stating that "efforts to empower young women through education have failed to acknowledge the sexual and emotional agendas of women, particularly the extent to which women accept a surrender of power in order to meet cultural expectations of 'good' women" (p. 173). They find that young women and girls exercise a greater degree of authority in their negotiations to enter into sexual relationships, however when in these relationships, their mediating powers decrease. Nonetheless, the authors go on to trace how modernised young women and girls are broadly expected to be sexually-active, materialist consumer subjects who are bombarded by an explosion of mass media images screening flashy lifestyles, wealth and easy sexual encounters in serials, commercials and publications (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). They may, therefore, prefer to participate in transactional sex to endorse and realise a discourse of autonomy that symbolises sexual activities, and for the sake of powerfully symbolic materialistic commodities, as well as stylish clothing and jewellery (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012).

Heterosexuality, as established thus far, is the predominant expression of female agency; however, this does not mean that women and girls do not subscribe to other forms of gender identities and sexualities whilst still expressing their agency. In the next section I seek to articulate and uncover various forms of agency amongst gender- and sexually-diverse women and girls.

3.3. Agency amongst gender and sexually diverse women and girls

3.3.1. Tomboys

Most definitions of 'tomboy' as Paechter reminds us, in general focus on "gender transgressions and the ways in which girls oppose or reject normative femininity, often as a bid for more social power" (2005, p. 9). Similarly, Reay reminds us that "implicit in the concept of tomboy is a devaluing of traditional notions of femininity and a railing against the perceived limitations of being female" (2001, p. 162). The girls who identify as tomboys in Francis's Global North research are thus portrayed by other girls in the class as being betrayers to girlhood (1998). Connell for her part notes that "it is perfectly logical to talk about masculine women or masculinity in women's lives, as well as men's" (1995, p. 163). Paechter and Clark argue that "although definitions of a tomboy are nebulous, these girls can generally be defined as a girl who spends a large proportion of their time 'participating in activities that are usually associated with masculinity, and who rejects some of the conventional trappings of femininity"

(2007, p. 318). As a result, tomboys exist and assert their spaces at the borders, 'where femininity congregates with masculinity' (Reay, 2001). Paechter (2010, p. 10) states that "tomboy identities can be related directly to masculinity, and operate as a claiming and assertion of masculinity by a girl, or an understanding by other children that a girl performs her femininity in ways that are congruent with how many of her male peers perform their masculinities". This deployment of the tomboy identity thus devalues and ditches femininity, along with girlhood. Such girls respond to the established gendered order which inherently links being masculine with possessing additional power and status.

In the UK, Paechter (2010, p. 6) notes how tomboy girls "self-identify as tomboys and often construct girly-girls very much as other to themselves: the girly-girl image was used as a container in which to place aspects of femininity that they wanted explicitly to reject". She goes on to claim that tomboys are the girls who 'do the things boys usually do'. Tomboys are girls who behave 'exuberantly' and 'forcefully' (Swain, 2014). A one-year investigation into tomboy identities, conducted by Paechter (2010) within two London primary schools, revealed how girls constantly co-construct tomboy as well as girly-girl identities as opposing positions. Tomboys are acknowledged as using blatantly forceful vocal affectations in ways comparable to the naughty boys of their peer-set. This is set in stark contrast with the relatively restrained ways of asserting domination drawn on normally by 'girly-girls'. Tomboys are, of course, able to defend themselves verbally too. Another identification is made by noting a girl's preference in wearing clothes that boys normally wear. Paechter (2010) also reveals that one more trait of being a tomboy is getting into fights. Tomboys strongly reject all things considered to be feminine, and some are blatant in their avowed negative responses to any feminine symbols. Paechter (2010) notes that trouser-wearing is deemed to be the most significant indication of tomboy-hood, and this observation is ostensibly the fact of the matter at Penguin Primary School too (the school that forms the setting for my own research). It is also noted that "girls identifying as tomboys also rejected other stereotypical symbols of femininity, such as cleanliness and having tidy hair" (Paechter, 2010, p. 10).

In essence then,

> Tomboy identities can thus be constructed around a rejection of the feminine, as well as an embracing of the masculine. It is also important to note that much of what is rejected by these tomboy girls is the same as is stereotypically rejected by masculine boys. Particularly with regard to their dislike of feminine clothing, some tomboys are,

> in rejecting what girls do, simultaneously embracing what boys do: that is, they are embracing the expulsion of the feminine (Paechter, 2010, p. 10-11).

These findings draw deserved attention to the various nuanced ways through which tomboy girls enact agency via dress, conduct and the activities they engage in.

Reay's (2001) study investigating gender issues among 26 children revealed how one female participant, named Jodie, sought to combine elements of resistance with recognition. Jodie undoubtedly recognised and responded to dominant gendered hierarchies, which locate being male with having increased power and status. Jodie thus seemed to act at the borders where both femininity and masculinity meet (Reay, 2001). While it is vital to recognise and acknowledge the transgressive virtues of identifying and rejecting conventional ideas of femininity within Jodie's conduct, the empowering aspects of being classified as a tomboy inevitably mask profoundly unreceptive features entrenched in the mere assumption of such a heavily gendered position. Implied in the conception of the 'tomboy' lies the undervaluing of conventional ideals of femininity and a barrier against the perceived limitations of being female.

In addition to adopting gender-diverse or tomboy identities, the young women and girls described in this literature also often subscribe to, and engage in, same-sex relationships, as the next section will unpack.

3.3.2. Lesbian relationships and homosexualities

In several patriarchal societies on our continent, heterosexuality is privileged as the only authentic type of sexual interaction; other sexualities are comparatively marginalised as being allegedly 'un-African', uncharacteristic, abnormal, sinful and worthy of repression (Muhangazi, 2015). Yet, in the interstices, many rebellious women and girls do find the courage to come out (even if just to each other), thus expressing their active agency. Bhana (2017b, p. 250) writes in this regard: "[T]he missing discourse of love, sex and gender is especially silent in relation to childhood constructions of homosexualities and younger children." Breaking with, and moving away from, the traditional emphasis of research in South Africa, it is recommended here that young women and girls' sexuality should be recognised and understood away from the categories of power and powerlessness so as to embrace same-sex desires, agency and regulations. Same-sex desires are indeed also pleasurable investments for girls, yet they are too often restrained, surveilled and made publicly unrewarding (Bhana & Anderson, 2013b).

Recognising and acknowledging the different ways that young South African women and girls make meaning of their alternate sexualities is significant, predominantly in the context of their amplified vulnerability to rape culture. Utilising a focus-group and interview-based study with young women aged 15-17 in South Africa, Bhana and Anderson sought to challenge depictions of female sexuality as perpetually submissive, suffering and in agony (2013b). Rather, they recognise how young womens' constructions of sexuality reveal both agency, and complicity, to male power. Agency is evident in their expressions of sexual desires, passion, love and pleasures, as well as their aptitude to engage in same-sex relations. Agency is an ambiguous category here, nevertheless, and is too often constrained by the need to safeguard sexual status, preserve compliance to violent gendered relations, and the use of alcohol and drugs, which all together serve to advance male sexual opportunities and power. Challenging the structures of a homogeneous and inert African femininity, their research demonstrates the ways in which femininities are being formed through dynamic investments into sexualised cultures of desire, pleasure, passion and love. In addition, sexuality is also expressed beyond heterosexual desires and includes the joy and pleasure of the discovery and exploration of lesbian sexualities (Bhana & Anderson, 2013b). Lesbian sexuality is here given serious attention and the young women interviewed offer individual narratives to validate the manner in which their same-sex sexualities are expressed, resisted and rejected. Lesbian relationships have thankfully become more accessible in the light of South Africa's progressive sexuality laws, thus providing women with greater sexual options, though these still face various discursive and material constraints.

In the Global North too, the expression of same-sex sexual desire is often considered to be reflective of an instantiation of female agency, although agency is sometimes restricted by the preservation of counter-feminist epitomes of sexuality. Myers and Raymond's American study of young schoolgirls aged between 5 and 11 reiterates the pattern of young girls answering through a heteronormative lens as they speak about crushes, sex and dating. Girls as young as 6 proclaim themselves "boy crazy" (2010, p. 174). In addition, these girls go above and beyond to express their agency. Some self-identify as lesbians. An incident of relevance to my study occurs when one girl is teased by her peers for potentially being/becoming a lesbian. This incident triggers a certain outrage primarily because the girl is comparatively older - much closer to adolescence and the experience of full sexual awakening. If she were younger, the term 'lesbian' may have been more quickly dismissed from the conversation. The adults' reactions to this incident are complex and contradictory. A strong message is subsequently sent

to all the boys and girls that teasing someone about their sexuality will not be tolerated. They thus attempt to decrease the likelihood that others will use 'lesbian' in this same way. In the Global South, however, there seems to be a dearth of research on this phenomenon in both primary and secondary schools. While some studies have touched on how sinful and abnormal lesbian or same-sex relationships are perceived to be (Muhangazi, 2015; McArthur 2015; Wells & Polders, 2006), others have focused on high school girls and how they have found agency in same-sex relationships.

3.3.3. Lesbian sexuality in South African schools

A very small body of research in South Africa has synthesized the corpus of research and literature on how gender and sexually diverse learners experience schooling. For example, in a desktop review of gender, sexual diversity and schooling Francis (2017, p. 5) has found that, "LGBT youth in schools experience significant homophobia in school environments". In a Northern Cape secondary school, McArthur (2015) has also concluded that there is a clear sense of hostility when it comes to sex and sexual diversity amongst learners. Other studies conducted in the Gauteng province of South Africa, have also reported on victimization and homophobia experienced at school (Wells & Polders, 2006). Their findings highlight that victimization on the basis of gender and sexual orientation was widespread and included verbal and physical abuse. Similarly, a study by the Human Rights Watch (2011) provides empirical evidence that schools perpetuated and reinforced social prejudices and discrimination toward gender and sexually diverse learners. For example, even when school management teams and teachers enforce heteronormative dress codes for the learners, this contributes to an oppressive school environment (Wells & Polders, 2006). Kowen and Davis (2006), too, highlight the rampant heterosexism lesbians experience in schools. They report that "in the South African context, coming out means confronting a range of punitive social controls, including, among others, abandonment, rape, physical violence, censorship and accusations of witchcraft" (Kowen & Davis, 2006, p.82–83). Francis has noted that whilst the primary source of victimization was fellow learners, teachers and school management teams were also found to be perpetrators. For instance, Msibi (2012) writes about teachers being central in spreading the idea that homosexuality was contagious, and therefore heterosexual learners were seen as being in danger of being "infected" by gender and sexually diverse learners. One of the participants in his study noted: "I was at school, and Mrs. Nhleko called me to the staffroom. She started shouting at me and was telling me to stop acting like a boy. She said I need to stop this lesbian thing because I will start making other learners like me" (Msibi, 2012, p. 524). Denying the

existence of sexuality diversity in schools, Bhana (2012b, p. 312) also notes, that forcing learners to behave like a proper boy or girl also means that teachers did not have to deal with non-heterosexuality. In the South African context, not many learners chose to authentically express their homosexuality and this was true for schoolgirls especially stemming from a primary school context, therefore there has been limited research on lesbian sexualities in schools. Studies which have delved into homosexuality have found that learners negative experiences of schooling ranged from punitive actions expressed through derogatory language to vicious reactionary hate, often expressed through violence and often perpetrated by the teacher (Bhana, 2012b; Francis, 2017; McArthur, 2015; Msibi, 2012).

3.4. Agency in being assertive through violent means

South African research in schools pertaining to the sources of female violence is, ironically, limited due to the preoccupation of research on male violence. Despite this, the existing research clearly demarcates how schools are not mere sites for the construction of toxic and violent masculinities but violent femininities too (See Bhana, 2008; Bhana & Pillay, 2011). Yet because girls are mostly portrayed as the victims of rape culture, the dominant understanding of femininity seldom links girls to violence (Human Rights Watch, 2001). However, Bhana (2008) contests the girls-as- 'victims' discourse and situates girls instead as active agents in their employment of violence to ward off violence. However, some scholars note that such girls are often referred to as 'gender deviants' and 'uncivilised' for showing assertiveness through violent means (Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

In her South African-based study, Bhana (2008) examines the different ways in which girls aged between 7 and 8-years-old contest, navigate and mobilise violence within primary school settings. She challenges the binary positioning of girls on one extreme end of the spectrum of gender and sexual violence. This stance is said to be critical to constructions of gender, as it dismantles ideas of girls as submissive victims of sexual violence and advocates for a recognition of how gender intersects with multiple aspects, such as race-groups, socio-economic classes and sexuality, so as to outline sexual violence. By altering the gaze from acts of male violence to acts of female violence, Bhana challenges this positioning of primary schoolgirls as submissive victims and instead illustrates how they contravene and surpass dominant gendered norms, such as passivity, docility and sweetness, through their dynamic involvement in complex practices of verbal and physical violence. "Girls are not simply passive recipients of male violence. They engage with violence, use it, and resist it" (Bhana, 2008, p.

412). She concludes by stating that a stubborn interpretation of South African schoolgirls as victims of violence merely blocks our familiarity with their schooling practices, and also supports a critically disadvantageous dichotomy. Slotting femininity into a binary structure conceals the possibility of variations in femininity (Bhana, 2008).

In a more recent study, Bhana and Mayeza focus on South African primary schoolgirls' experiences of male violence and bullying. They find that schoolgirls both reinforce and contest violence in unforeseen ways. By rejecting outdated constructions of schoolgirls as being 'passive', they examine how schoolgirls draw on different forms of femininity to manage and address violence at school. These femininities are non-normative in as much as they advance violence to stop violence and are imbued with culturally-relevant meanings concerning care, forgiveness and humanity based on the African principle of ubuntu (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). Beyond this, though, they reveal how schoolgirls accommodate, resist and contest violence by drawing on cultural norms that valorise care and forgiveness. In so doing, they earmark the fluidity and diversity of identity, as well as the ways in which violence and bullying are negotiated as schoolgirls take on different forms of femininity. Their findings illuminate the contradictory processes via which femininities both endorse and reject violence. The authors explain that schoolgirls respond to bullying in different ways; while some ignore it, others feel it is up to them to create their own safety and thus seek to protect themselves by interpreting, negotiating and responding to the bullying situations in which they find themselves. Rupturing the dominant narrative of schoolgirl femininities as being sensible, selfless, dutiful, and compliant (Porter, 2015), some schoolgirls opt to act out - to punch, for instance. Bhana and Mayeza argue that schoolgirls invest in the use of violence to fight violence: it is through violence that girls find one way to act in response to their subordination. They show their agency too in how they construct their femininity, but some schoolgirls know what they cannot accept and thus are able to resist violence and claim their rights through further agentic responses. Acting against boys, however, also inevitably endorses violence as a valid expression of power. The reproduction of violence is thus achieved through schoolgirls' complicity in it under the guise of empowering femininities. Schoolgirls' use of violence still conflicts with dominant discursive constructions of sensible and selfless femininities (Porter, 2015) and is, as a result, deemed non-normative. Some girls do adopt the principle of ubuntu, whereby they express care and co-operation instead of utilising violence to fight off violence. The girls in the study obviously destabilise homogenised stereotypes of African girls as being steeped in a version of femininity that lacks agency (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). As such, it

should be affirmed that agency is not a feminine capacity necessarily impelled towards non-violence (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019).

Waldron's (2011) study of schoolgirls in the US emphasises that it is not appropriate to reduce girls' use of violence to a practice that only so-called 'ghetto girls' (bad girls) do. Indeed, girls' use of violence is often pathologised as something aberrant that fails to meet acceptable feminine norms which operate in opposition to male norms (according to which violence is conceptualised as a male prerogative) (Miller, 2016). However, as Waldron (2011) argues, it is important to understand the position from which girls' violence is enacted. In her study she finds that lesbian girls use violence in self-defence, and in reaction to homophobic abuse.

In another South African study, Bhana and Pillay (2011) illustrate the social complexity inherent to the constructions of different types of femininity, which employ physical and verbal contestations and are intricately entangled with sexuality, race and culture. Their research on a group of fourteen girls advocates that young women and girls have greater agency nowadays than in almost any former era. They distance their findings from stereotypical non-normative femininities and report on the pervasiveness of a type of femininity through which violence is deployed within the classroom, on the playing fields, and beyond school hours and bounds. They try to articulate how such violence is inherently physical, verbal, and emotional, and show the mechanisms through which they transpire. Furthermore, they find that violence and conflict are daily aspects of school-life for the girls, both in and out of the classroom. Breaching notions of passive femininity, physical violence is shown to be very much the repertoire of female conduct. Collectively, the girls gang up and assert their power through physical means. Groups of girls are observed colluding with one another and collaborating in teasing, name-calling and physical violence. Physical violence is correspondingly linked to teasing and name-calling and has a profound emotional effect.

Heterosexuality is shown to be essential to young people's socio-cultures and relationships, and school sites are cast as active sites for the production of gendered and sexualised identities (Kehily 2002). Kehily in the UK notes that heterosexual relationships form a part of a sexual economy where physical attraction, desirability and social status are played out through school rituals including both heterosexual dating and dumping (2002). Demonstrating how heterosexuality is so profoundly entrenched in socio-relations, the girls in this research actively participate in defending their sexual turf through gossip, rumours and violence. In an intensely sexualised same-sex school site, girls form competitive and violent femininities in the contest

for boys. Their sexual investments in boyfriends are obvious and powerful. Securing a boyfriend is seen as an important indicator of heterosexual success. In the competition for boys, girls often resort to physical fights to deal with competitors. The very idea of sexual competition produces friction and incites violent outbursts. Needless to say, this finding resonates in the South African context too (see Bhana, 2016a, c; 2018).

Other studies show that violence is not the sole domain of boys only; girls engender violence too (Morojele, 2011; Renold, 2005; Ringrose & Harris, 2013). Bhana, nevertheless, shows that while girls' employment of violence works to contest or subvert dominant constructions of gender, it is also a notably advantageous practice for their constructions of fluid femininities (Bhana, 2008; 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019).

Arguing against dominant representations of vulnerable African schoolgirls, this theme demonstrates how violence is mediated as a tactical strategy used to make claims for power in a context of bullying, material as well as social destitution, homophobic harassment and the constant struggle for heterosexual capital through securing boyfriends. Girls thus challenge disempowering passive feminine constructions by supplanting them with tropes of assertiveness and agency. Research with young primary schoolgirls has demonstrated how girls contest, navigate and mobilise violence in primary schools from as young as 7-8-years of age. In the US, Waldron (2011) has written about how lesbian girls use violence in self-defence. Bhana and Mayeza focus on South African primary schoolgirls' experiences of male violence and bullying. They have noted how schoolgirls both reinforce and contest violence in unforeseen ways by rejecting outdated notions of passive femininity. While Kehily (2002) in the UK has documented how girls' sexual investments in boyfriends and securing a boyfriend are important indicators of heterosexual success. In the competition for boys, girls often resorted to physical fights. Sexual competition produced friction and impelled violent outbursts (see also Bhana, 2016a, c; 2018).

The next theme goes on to look at this agency a little deeper as expressed through the practice of alcohol consumption.

3.5. Agency in alcohol consumption

While it is perhaps not as common for young people to consume alcohol at school, it is still an observable reality. Gevers et al.'s (2013) South African study of learners aged between 12-15 years found that young people do usually get around to exploring a variety of sexualised

behaviours, which they thus conclude to be, to a certain degree, developmentally normative. Moreover, they find that the consumption of alcohol notably contributed to the encouragement of sexually risky behaviours. The enactment of heterosexual desire is then also associated with the consumption of '1818' - a brand of vodka (unlawful considering the participants' ages). Other international scholars have also noted the role of alcohol in investments into sexuality - it is, in fact, a normative aspect of development (see Livingstone et al., 2013). The consumption of alcohol and the performance of sexuality uniformly produce "unsanctioned sexual behaviour" (Livingston et al., 2013, p. 20) but are thus correspondingly reflective of learners' active agency.

The consumption of alcohol is not a new finding, as many secondary schools have documented such activities (Gevers et al., 2013, South Africa & Livingstone et al., 2013, USA). The consumption of alcohol in primary school has been overlooked, yet participants in this research study have noted how they consume alcohol at school. Having touched on agency in relation to alcohol consumption, I now move on to discussing how agency is enacted through social media.

3.6. Agency through social media

The technologically savvy girls are those who are able to utilise new mediations in their lives – namely, mobile technologies and social media in particular - to express agency and assert their identities (Renold & Ringrose, 2016; Rentschler, 2015). Girls are thereby said to utilise "technological means as a form of expression" (Lievrouw, 2009, p. 317). Dobson and Ringrose (2016) argue that female agency in particular should be conceptualised beyond the assumption that sexualised selfies for girls equate to victimhood, a lack of agency, and to a lack of morals or self-esteem. Young women and girls' digital representations are henceforth viewed as self-produced, so that girls are 'free agents' of their own representations (Dobson, 2015). As Harvey and Ringrose note: "[L]ikes and comments on social media platforms are in essence sites of struggle over meaning – to be recognised as appropriately gendered, classed and racialised requires access to knowledge (both locally specific and more globalised cultural norms), and for this to be authorised through interactions with others" (2015, p. 360). Research of this nature, helps us to better conceive of the underlying flow of socio-cultural capital girls attain through sexuality and social media practises and interactions.

In Spain, García-Gómez (2017) undertook research which enlisted sixty-eight female teenagers so as to analyse their evaluations of views and incentives behind the act of voluntary sexting. This was meant to shed more light on the manner in which they portrayed and conveyed their gendered identities and sexualities even while "performing feminine desirability" (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 307). Through this study, it is evident that the online exchange of sexually-stimulating pictures and texts, usually considered as sexting, appears to have developed into a vital part of many young peoples' social lives. Notwithstanding prominent mass media and policy attention, questions remain regarding the manner in which young women and girls navigate sexual relationships and construct their gendered identities by endorsing or challenging sexual agency through social and behavioural norms. The paper's results recommend that sexual agency via sexting "show[s] the tension between the presence of a feminine discourse of empowerment and the conformity to cultural ideals of beauty and the reproduction of dominant culture and hegemony" (García-Gómez, 2017, p. 405).

In her book titled, 'Sexting Panic', Hasinoff (2015) makes a point for teenage girls' active agency. She emphasises that "sexting may still offer girls unique forms of resistance and agency" (Hasinoff, 2015, p. 125). Young women and girls mostly seem to be able to make their own calculated choices about why they sext and how they enhance their own sexual self-awareness. As they themselves report, they sext with the intention of expressing themselves sexually and defending the significance of acknowledging and being satisfied with their bodies, depicting sexting as a means to enact their sex-life completely in contrast to adults. Therefore, young women and girls are strikingly upfront and openly describe sexting as a part of their sexualised practices, making it easier to interrogate girls' agentic choices and critique the hypothetical ideology of the passivity of girls (Hasinoff, 2015). However, the use of mobile phones by young people has garnered a moral panic regarding 'sexting', which, as Hasinoff notes, entails the "sending of sexually explicit images or text through mobile phones" (2014, p. 449). Mass-media responses to sexting have highlighted the dangers it can have for young people, particularly the features of the permanent digital footprint and potential negative social repercussions incurred. The framing of the debates of mobile phones and sexting stereotypically manifests as a binary between those who view their usage as immoral for young people or else those who uphold the view that mobile phones offer many positive and productive features. It is indeed not startling then that, given these viewpoints, institutional responses and rules concerning mobile phone use by learners have erred on the side of caution. From the studies cited, it is perhaps not surprising that what young people learned formally

through the content of sexuality education was merely a small proportion of the sexual meanings they gleaned from their schooling experiences. Their talks indicated that much learning took place informally, in spaces not precisely chosen as 'educational' - for instance, the physical education rooms, peer interactions at interval breaks, different school functions like the Debs-ball, as well as on graffiti found on toilet walls and classroom furniture (Allen, 2015).

Harvey and Ringrose's (2015) qualitative research project on childhood 'sexting', involved focus-group and individual interview discussions, as well as digital observational data derived from Facebook. Research was conducted with thirty-five learners between the ages of 13–15. Their research took place between two multicultural, inclusive schools in central London. It specifically set out to investigate the contemporary panic around teen sexting – considering why it focused mainly on women and girls' bodies (such as their buttocks and breasts). Harvey et al. (2015) discovered that bodily ideals play out in specific ways concerning the presentation of online teen heterosexual female identities in the medium of image reproduction. The style, angles and proportions of the pictures of women and girls' bodies depicted and disseminated on social media interactions were shown to be a source of avid attention which served to secure a form of social capital for girls, which was expressive of their agency.

Ringrose et al. (2013), for their part, seek to intercede into complex debates on gender, age suitability and sexting practices, drawing upon findings from a UK-based qualitative- research on the younger generation and their sexting practises. Their study examines how young people experience the sending and receiving of sexually-explicit material through mobile technology. Their findings reveal new constructions of gendered morality and values, various sexual conventions and many new norms of gendered desirability in the visual economy of the teen socio-networks such as, at that time, Blackberry Messenger (or bbm as it was fondly known). These dimensions of the visual economy illustrate how explicit pictures of girls circulate as a type of digital currency and value for boys who seek to accrue 'ratings' by having and exchanging certain pictures. The girls, in contrast, mainly debate the capturing and sharing of selfies as a site of potential risk, blame and guilt around their sexual reputations – potentially being referred to as a slut, a slag, or a sket, for example. Ringrose et al. (2013) conclude by stating that, through sexting, young people are able to disrupt dominant gendered norms within their day-to-day, technologically-mediated relationships.

Evans and Riley (2014) theorise that these above online activities are used by young people as technologies of sex, which informally come to constitute sexually attractive and desirable femininities. In the heterosexual atmosphere, such expressions of femininity are constructed in complement with hegemonic masculinity, so that desirability is defined by what heterosexual men find sexually appealing (Evans & Riley, 2014). Women and girls continuously negotiate and re-negotiate these disciplinary postfeminist technologies of sexiness through a series of self-development regimes that mandate repeated performances and self-evaluation (Evans & Riley, 2014). Gill and Orgad (2015) call this a "confidence culture" that advocates "heightened modes of self-work and self-regulation" (p. 337) in order to accomplish a desirable sexy, modernised femininity.

I conclude this literature review by illustrating a way forward: namely, acknowledging young girls' agency, and thus understanding it through a holistic lens, as a phenomenon that is all-encompassing, positive and transformative.

3.7. The way forward: Understanding girls' active agency as all-encompassing, positive and transformative

Femininity, like masculinity, is an active state; it is not just what we are but what we do, what impression we give off, how we carry ourselves out, how we reflect ourselves in diverse times and places (Paechter, 2007). Being a female is a question of being and becoming (Connell, 2002; 1987), and girls, like boys, are active participants in the continual negotiation and production of their gendered identities. Femininities are constructed in relation to other local femininities, and, in particular, against peer constructions of masculinity; for, above all, they exist to maintain differences in masculinity. Paechter similarly maintains that this is not a balanced relationship and that femininity is therefore most generally defined as a lack, or absence of masculinity.

Different groups of femininities are suffused with varying power relations, so that some girls are more able to influence the dominant view of femininity than others. While most girls construct and enact their femininities in ways that closely accommodate the dominant conceptions of femininity within their particular locations, in certain locations many girls do not. As we shall see in this section, not all girls possess either the resources or the desire to construct the same ideal type of femininity in any one setting. Of course, this may just be because they are unable to do so based on personal circumstances.

Fahs and McClelland (2016) point to a view of sexual agency as being a crucial concept, not only in sexuality research, but also within policies and practices - whether in classrooms, heath institutions or within homes. Calls are thus made to help girls express and gain more agency so as to improve society's perceptiveness and responsiveness to how girls are, already, agentic. If we take the existence of girls' agency as a matter of fact - rather than a preoccupying object of assessment and intervention - we might become more alert to its varieties and subtleties, including the "unheroic struggle and creativity, and/or non-resistant actions" that typify it (Harris & Dobson, 2015, p. 153). We could perhaps recognise that 'staying the course' of a certain femininity is as much an expression of agency as resisting hegemonic discourse, even if their motives and outcomes diverge. We might also see how agency is less a function of individual aptitude than of life circumstance. The difference between a girl who refrains from an unwanted or unsafe sexual interaction and a girl who consents to one essentially lies not in their psychological reserves, but in their external resources (Bay-Cheng, 2019). Indeed, not speaking up for one's own wants or against others' oppressions might be a strategic, savvy means toward a greater long-term goal, or a fully worked-out plan to secure immediate safety. Coming to terms with the many forms of agency not only enables one to celebrate women and girls' bold acts, but to mark them as signs of social progress and as confirmations or rejections of dominant gender norms. Bay-Cheng (2019) highlights that we must also reckon with the fact that the social and material conditions of many young women's lives have tremendous sway over their destinies, and are therefore capable of thickening or thinning girls' active agency - channelling it into acts of compromise, resistance, compliance, or sacrifice.

In South Africa, Jewkes and Morrell's (2012) study clearly illustrates the multiplicity of femininities. They find there to be a diversity of femininities and much evidence of their fundamentally dynamic nature. Whilst some young women accept their lot, and to different degrees embrace it, others adopt a 'modern girl' femininity, constructed in opposition to the dominant conservative cultural model. Others in response show evidence of an emerging feminist consciousness, albeit still blended with a more traditional femininity. Differences between femininities translate into differences in hopes for, and experiences of, relations with male partners, yet none of the femininities are presented as posing a substantial challenge to the prevailing gender order. This analysis notwithstanding, a great deal of literature on sexuality frames women's practices for material rewards merely instrumentally, and so often reduces young African women's agendas to the pursuit of material reward. Jewkes and Morrell (2012) strive to show the meanings underlying these practices; for instance, how when women

seek older partners, they do not see themselves as relinquishing power for consumerist reward but as pursuing a strategy that they hope will give them more power (of another type), as well as more respect and pleasure in the relationship than they would get with a younger boyfriend. Sexualities are thus produced, but their production is often premised upon conditions not of their own choosing, suggesting ways in which agency is, and can be, constrained by wider structural inequalities (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012).

Within this literature, and the accounts of scholars working in the field in Tanzania, there is not only a general impression given of girls as passive and vulnerable, but also the idea that the gender inequality they experience manifests in girls having low self-esteem. Based on her experiences with Tanzanian schoolgirls, Pincock (2018) broadly disputes this ideology and concludes by stating that, in her experience, the girls see themselves as valuable and important people. The girls themselves, when asked about their role models and sources of guidance, nearly all describe themselves as the leader within their own lives – agents who will not follow anyone other than God. They often refer to themselves as beautiful and intelligent, and talk of the overarching need to love and respect oneself. These narratives challenge the idea that such girls lack the confidence to assert their own value, and require a Western-sanctioned form of 'empowerment' in order to see themselves as worthy of positive sexual encounters (Pincock, 2018).

Another study in Tanzania carried out by Pincock (2019) used ethnographic research methods conducted with teenage participants derived from a project located in a rural area in the north of the country which provided free education on a 'live-in' basis, aimed at ensuring that girls were able to focus on learning rather than being occupied with housework or family livelihoods. Its overall objective was to empower girls through education (premised on the assumption of a causal relationship between education and expanded agency). Pincock adds that this context makes for an interesting site in which to explore norms around girlhood and sexuality from the perspectives of adolescent girls seeking to change their life trajectories through schooling (2019). Data is generated through a methodological toolkit that includes drawing projects, focus-group discussions, individual narrative interviews and, later, a participatory research project. The girls' ages range from 13 to 25 years old. For the study itself, Pincock focused on three girls and their present circumstances, offering great insights into how sexuality and girlhood assemblages play out in their lives on a day-to-day basis. Research evidence too suggests how girls forge a path amongst frequently contradictory expectations and complex dynamics that do not confine them to their relationships with their

families and communities. Their relationships reinforce the narratives of agency, self-respect and self-control which constitute 'doing girlhood' appropriately. Girls must walk a careful line to ensure they retain control over their reputation, such that they should be mindful of engaging in relationships, in sex, and even in how they carry themselves out. This broader socio-economic landscape of girls' lives forms an important part of the structural assemblages of girlhood and sexuality, but also inevitably produces dissonances and contradictions. At the same time, norms of appropriate girlhood place expectations on girls to be co-operative, peaceable and community-minded. Thus, girls who transgress the accepted forms of girlhood are damned to the hell of social alienation (Pincock, 2019). In Pincock's study, one girl turns out to be pregnant, while another has a secret boyfriend and pierced ears and always shows off painted nails. Her outfits are much more recognisably Western than the clothes of most of her peers. Her attitude to males is flirtatious, provocative and assertive, both in private and in public. The third participant in Pincock's (2019) study though, asserts positive aspects about her religious identity. She reveals that she feels protected from doing things which could lead to problems, describing behaviours such as dancing or wearing nail polish as a slippery slope into drug abuse and destitution. With both their structural contexts and interpersonal relationships shaping girls' agency, it is important to explore in more depth the ways some girls exercise agency by deflecting or negotiating these pressures.

Using a conceptual analysis, Bay-Cheng's (2019) Chinese study concentrates on young girls' forms of sexual agency. Specifically, it focuses on the lives of three young girls, the choices they make and why. Whilst carefully considering the limitations and distortions of what is typically recognised as agency, and whom are recognised as agents, her research highlights the many faces and manifestations of agency - including among girls imagined to have none - and delves into how agency is, at times, overvalued by its potency, insinuating that individual will is enough by itself to fend off the sexual vulnerability imposed by social injustice. She concludes by stating that we need to create a societal lens that would permit us to see girls' sexual agency as a matter of fact, evident even among those who are compelled by social and material conditions to exercise it through sexual compliance, compromise, and concession. Accepting sexual agency as being basically ubiquitous among young women can help re-orient attention and action away from changing girls and towards changing the pervasive, systemic threats to their well-being, sexual and otherwise (2019). One girl in the study notably avoids family conflict and violence while nurturing hopes of moving out of her parents' house. Another skirts the stigma associated with being a victim "glued to the past" and draws on her

relationship with her boyfriend to weather the uncertain transition to college. They convert the attainment of a boyfriend into a source of personal pride and social capital, as well as a post-care life plan. For them, sexual agency is not aimed at or driven by sexual desires at all, but rather by their "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 300) for material security, intellectual stimulation, emotional and physical intimacy and hope for the future. Indeed, it is not clear what better tools or paths to reach these goals are available to them as minor-aged girls, two of whom are racial minorities, all of whom are from working-class/working-poor backgrounds with disrupted and unstable social networks. Obstructed from directly and independently pursuing their goals by age-based restrictions, economic injustices, decrepit social welfare systems, and entrenched sexism, they set out to use age-disparate and transactional relationships as means to wanted ends. Their actions thus break from the conventional norms of being a girl.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has shown, in some detail, how heterosexuality dominates the scholarly literature on young women and girls and agency. However, this is not to say that young women and girls do not express agency outside of gender, sex and sexual diversity. Girls are found to reproduce and resist, make calculated decisions, disrupt, destabilise and reject dominant gender norms, gender essentialism and gender inequality. This chapter has illustrated where we are at present in relation to young people and sexual agency by focusing not only on assertiveness, but on desires, pleasures, passion and love. Broadly speaking, these studies suggest that a more positive and holistic focus on female agency needs to be acknowledged and conceptualised. Such a process of conceptualisation should yield more advantageous and equal results for young girls in particular. The five major themes and six sub-themes in this chapter have articulated the ways in which agency is enacted by both young women and girls and thus points towards the addition of aspects of sexuality such as pleasure and passion in sexuality education and for the absent discourse of positive sexuality and gender, sex and sexual diversity to be acknowledged, researched, critically explored and understood.

Chapter 4

Gender and Power

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 provides the theoretical scope of my research study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a 'theoretical framework' functions as a conceptual guide to the research phenomena under study. An eclectic theoretical approach was adopted to help me better understand and analyse the complexities of gender, sexuality and constructed femininities. The chapter is separated into two clear parts. I begin by stating the rationale for employing a post-structuralist feminist theoretical lens, and then give a broad outline and critique of essentialist views on gender. Thereafter, gender as a descriptive category is depicted as an active social construction in accordance with Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) gender performativity theory. Raewynn Connell (1995, 2002, 2012) and Michael Foucault (1978, 1980, 1991, 1998) are also drawn upon as influences for their texts on gender and power relations.

4.2. Adopting a post-structuralist feminist theoretical lens

Post-structuralist theory has, over the last few decades, become an increasingly vital field of thought to researchers dealing with studies on gender and sexuality. Its concepts have had an extensive influence on the social sciences, and especially in understanding and theorising masculinities, femininities and sexualities. Thus, this section begins by defining post-structuralist feminism, as well as presenting several reasons why I made use of it as a conceptual approach, and moreover how this context has influenced the research study.

One of the most distinctive facets of the poststructuralist approach is its focus on a new notion of power. Post-structuralist feminism provides a valuable lens with which to examine our common understandings of gender, sexuality and femininity because it provides us with a deeper insight into the complex relations that exist between knowledge, power and gender. It recognises that power is concentrated "in systems of shared meaning that reinforce mainstream ideas and silence alternatives" (Fletcher, 1999, p. 17). Societal beliefs about gender are thus inherently rooted in organisational cultures (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). Post-structuralist feminism seeks to destabilise traditional power structures and critique commonly-held assumptions (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). This study puts an emphasis on a group of schoolgirls of the 12-13 age cohort and examines the nature of both their reproductions of, and resistances

to, dominant gender norms. It unravels the complexities involved in the ways in which they make sense of, and experience gender, sexuality and violence in the construction of their femininities and thus employs a post-structuralist feminist lens to accurately conceptualise their reckonings with power, discourse, language and human interaction.

Post-structuralist feminist theory specifically focuses on the role of social processes in making individuals into gendered subjects (Davies & Gannon, 2010). It is used to determine how power relations are formed and upheld via understandings of what things are considered to be normal, other, rational, irrational, natural or unnatural. By examining the ways in which social categories inscribe themselves within an individual's subconscious, post-structuralist theory unravels the ways in which power shapes individual desires to behave according to certain ideals (Foucault, 1978).

By troubling the status quo, post-structuralist feminism incites possibilities for another form of personal agency - one in which autonomy is not only ascribed to the stereotypically successful, powerful, and 'heroic' citizens within a society (Davies & Gannon, 2010). This new self-determination accomplishes power and leverage through social regulation, and thus can be deconstructed, collectively enforced and reinforced. However, this new agency is still dependent upon the discourses at play, and on the individual's position within such discourses (Davies, 2008). As human beings, we not only constitute ourselves through multiple, contradictory discourses, but the ways in which we self-reflexively read these positionings can either open up or close down the possibilities of our agency (Davies & Gannon, 2010). Through a liberated form of writing and dialogue, the individual can create their own strategies to resist, subvert, or discompose the discourses of their society through the very means by which they are usually reasserted (Davies and Gannon, 2010). Agency via a post-structuralist lens does not promote the idea of lone, undaunted individuals bravely standing outside or against social injustices; instead it is a conscious recognition of how power is configured (Foucault, 1978). Thus, as individuals, we use this lens to recognise how we are immersed in and indebted to discourses of power and, moreover, how we possess the ability to re-create new ways of living that are not bound by gender conformist practices (Davies & Gannon, 2010). As human beings, we are subjects bound on a persistent process of relations and self-differentiation, in addition to self-recognition, and may always transcend the gendered and regulatory discourses and practices upon which our identities are established (Davies & Gannon, 2009).

Post-structuralist feminist theory thus supersedes the practice of merely documenting differences between binary categories, such as male or female, and rather focuses on 'de-massifying' our accepted notions of gender and sexuality so as to spread the understanding that power is discursively constructed and spatially and materially located (Foucault, 1978). Davies and Gannon (2010) remind us that our conversational practices have the ability to grasp the existing regulating order intact and to force open the avenues of power to help imagine new practical forms of equality. In my own research, I demonstrate how young schoolgirls not only (re)produce dominant gender norms and practices, but also can and do succeed in disrupting them. This chapter then looks at both the nature of schoolgirls' reproductions of, and resistances to, dominant conceptions of gender. I want to know how 12-13-year-old schoolgirls make sense of, and experience, gender, sexuality and violence in the construction of their femininities.

Henceforth, I provide an explanation of why such essentialist, pre-assumed views on gender and sexuality are commonly rejected.

4.2.1. Rejecting Essentialist views on Gender

Essentialist views on gender are commonly rejected by researchers working in the fields of gender and sexuality. Instead, as Judith Butler notes, it is crucial to recognise that "gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalised, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are [also] deconstructed and denaturalised" (2004, p. 42).

The very term 'gender' and the critical theorising of gender have been examined by scholars and academics since the early 1980's (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Revising the history of how gender has been collectively defined and perceived is crucial to appreciating the aims of our own research, as it provides a key lens for understanding and analysing young femininities and sexualities. Alas, early academic understandings of the term gender only employed the language of biological science; that is to say, classification in categories of sex (Connell, 2012). Burr reminds us that: "[S]ince the social world, including ourselves as people, are the product of social processes, it follows that there cannot be any given, determined nature to the world or people" (2006, p. 4). There are simply no discoverable 'cores' or things within individuals that fully compose their authentic reality. Individual human beings have no definable and discoverable gendered natures, such as those specified by the

scientific determinations of biology. However, 'gender' is entrenched so systematically in our institutions, our actions, our ways of life and our everyday desires that it has come to appear to us to be a totally natural form of division. The world we live in overflows with artificial trappings and myths that reassert this gender binary, such that it is presumed that these historical notions are fixed and true aspects of humanity. This widespread delusion is known as essentialism. A host of feminist writers - Davies (2003), Francis (1998), MacNaughton (2000) and Paechter (2006) - have productively engaged with and rejected the sex-role theory that reinforces stringently static, binary-modelled fixed gender norms and values. Their collective critique amounts to the insight that such hegemonic ideals promote false discourses of binary inequality. Thus, 'sex-role theory' is labelled as being fundamentally flawed and inadequate for our, or any, era. In reality there is no one rigid pattern or one defining gender-role for biological males or females. Instead, there are manifold patterns or ways of being. The sex-role theory supports homogeneity when multiplicity is the lived experience of free individuals.

In this regard, Connell (2002) highlights how patterns of gendered behaviour are not merely learnt but are tangibly experienced by men, boys, women and girls. Indeed, they are unceasingly active agents - whether conscious or subconscious ones - in creating these patterns. These are "worked-out patterns of conduct in a gender order marked by power, violence and alienated sexualities" (Connell, 2002, p. 78). The gender process is not so clear-cut as gender essentialist understandings admit; rather, it is intricate and multifaceted, but most of all contradictory, as the 12-13-year-old schoolgirls in this research study demonstrate through their accommodations, contestations and rejections of dominant gender norms. Essentialist theories also fail to encompass any of the variances in femininity concerning race, class differences, perceived ethnicity, age or sexual diversity which emerge constantly in contemporary society (Connell, 2002). Likewise, young schoolgirls are empirically not as soft and receptive to dominant gender norms as essentialists imply. Indeed, they very seldom soak up the ideology of their society without attempting to negotiate the alternative roles they may follow as they refine their femininities and sexualities. Following Connell, Martin (2011) notes that another pitfall of the sex-role theory is its failure to provide a rational narrative for why girls often acquiesce to some societal expectations of gender and sexuality while intelligently and blatantly rejecting other aspects of it. Moreover, Renold (2005, 2006, 2007) declares through her myriad studies of childhood sexuality that the key inadequacy of the sex-role theory is its failure to acknowledge children as being dynamic agents of self-identity.

Influenced by all these trailblazers, this research study delves into young schoolgirls gendered and sexualised experiences within a context of rape culture. Both gender and sexuality are not biological givens; essentialising them merely renders all femininities as being static, homogenous and unable to enact personal agency (Bay-Cheng, 2019). Gender is, rather, an active social construction.

4.2.2. Gender as an active social construction

Gender, as experienced, is a nuanced and intricate category that encompasses how we carry ourselves through our lives, what decisions we make and how we perceive ourselves. As such, gender is undeniably fluid and ever-changing, and thus cannot be confined to the either/or limitations of basic biological sex (Burr, 1995; Butler, 1990; Connell, 2012). Conventional essentialist ideologies of male and female identities which endorse specific sex-dependent personality traits have already been outmoded and are now, more than ever before, under the yoke of a constructivist consensus. As a result, the off-campus scrutiny of gender has recently drawn substantial popular and scholarly attention (Bhana, 2016; 2018; Connell, 2012; Mayeza, 2016, Paechter, 2017). Critical research now increasingly focuses on the 'gendering process'; that is to say, how gender is continually defined, redefined and negotiated through daily practices. Considering gender as a social construct moves beyond the conventional singular and homogenous views of masculinity and femininity in order to concentrate on masculinities and femininities as multiple (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; MacNaughton, 2000).

Boys and girls become conventional 'boys' or 'girls' through a variety of common or incidental gender socialisation processes (Connell & Pearce, 2014; Davies, 2003; Francis, 2000; Thorne, 1993). The theorists cited above all propose that girls' behaviours are not merely the result or outcome of a forced socialisation process, but instead stem from their own actions as dynamic participants in their own self-gendering. Certainly, gendered socialisation through a girl's formative years implies an intricate process that encompasses regular discussions between girls and boys themselves, girls and girls, and between girls as well as the many other important figures within their own social networks, such as their parents, community members, teachers and peers (MacNaughton, 2000). Beyond the overwhelming influence of dominant gender norms within their societies, girls always remain dynamic agents who can both support and defy those dominant practices depending on their own individual experiences and choices (Bhana, 2018; Martin, 2011).

So, since gender is a social construct, it follows that it should be perceived as a continual, unavoidable practice. It is, in fact, a creative form of self-determination that is incorporated into the everyday routines and ways of life of all individuals. Lorber reminds us how "social constructionism is of the view that gender is created and recreated out of human interactions, out of social life, [such that] it is the texture and order of that social life" (1994, p. 5). In this vein, gendered social relations can be considered as relations of power that follow in line with the ideology of gender domination (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005), whereby each gender is continuously seeking to accomplish added power with the aim of dominating the other, opposed one. In this way, dominant gender norms persist through time via reasserted forms of domination. These represent the present consensus of society concerning the definition of gender roles, embodying generally fixed, totalised social values (Connell, 1987). Boys and girls are then socialised into these values by being taught they should adhere to respective gender roles. Different socialising agents - such as parents, peer groups, schools, communities and the media – collaborate to perform and reinforce this order, moreover applying positive and negative sanctions to their children for their role performance. For instance, girls are expected to behave in an orderly manner, dress in a respectable way and be sexually innocent. If they are ever perceived to transgress these norms, society ostracises them. For fear of this outcome, they start to internalise such gendered values, roles and norms. They behave according to prescribed behaviours and, consequently, they in turn help to socialise the following generations into the same dominant standards. Thus, as Connell reminds us: "[T]he reproduction of norms across generations occurs, in a more or less automatic and conflict-free way" (1987, p. 26). However, as researchers we must not fail to see the complexity within the process.

The identities that men and boys and women and girls construct are also dependent on their surrounding cultural ideologies and usually function as imitations of communally constructed ideals of masculine or feminine virtue in a specific culture or context (West & Zimmerman, 2009). In addition to societal influences, the twin forces of vulnerability and poverty may additionally present a structural context for the conformist construction, performance, and experience of gender (Chowdhury, 2017). It is crucial then to factor in the gendered social and cultural pressure on schoolgirls' understandings and construction of gender and sexuality; especially for the purpose of this qualitative study. Burr points out that "gender is fluid and ever-changing, like personality and illness, human sexuality is not a stable phenomenon" (2003, p. 43). 'Sexuality' describes, in this case, individuals' sexual identities, including their

socio-cultural and historic differences, and though sexuality cannot be completely detached from the human body, as it is primarily a social construct that augments biological reality (Turner, 1984).

Therefore, based on this discussion, a social constructionist position was assumed for the purposes of this study, as this approach bears the most relevance to my quest to understand schoolgirls' construction of femininities and sexualities within contemporary society. Social constructionism considers gender and sexuality to be social constructs which are embedded within social interactions, transactions and discourses; therefore, these will be the objects of this research. The sum of all these elements is the concept we call gender performativity.

4.2.3. Performing Gender

Gender, as set forth, should not merely be looked upon as a rigid identity, but rather as a locus of agency which sponsors various actions and behaviours. Butler (1990, p. 136) writes: "[G]ender is performative […] acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never can reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause". The body itself always performs a gender that is not inherently rigid, but which is rather socially constructed and variable between situations, contexts and periods (Butler, 1990). As a result, multiple masculinities and femininities play out across our own lifespans, let alone our society. Other scholars' takes on 'doing' or 'performing' gender mostly concur with Butler's thesis (West & Zimmerman, 1987) whilst elaborating on the deconstructive potential of her work (Butler, 1990, 2004). For example, West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of 'doing gender' aligns with Butler's (1990, 2004) standpoint on 'gender performativity' in terms of viewing gender as an activity carried out by the individual actor. However, the sheer identification of gender with performances or acts instead of with bodies is not devoid of its own complications (Francis, 2008, 2010; Paechter, 2006). Francis (2008) notes that this theory does not explicitly disrupt or refute the conventional aspects of gender that are already seen as performative, such as ritual gestures of concern, passion, diligence and submissiveness for femininity, and force, self-confidence and bravado for masculinity (Francis, 2008). Yet, it must be noted - as Connell (2012) does - how femininities and masculinities can still not be wholly understood in pure isolation from each other. Other scholars also concur that gender is social and thus relational. As such, masculinities and femininities are shaped and arranged in regard to one another. (Bartholomaeus & Senkevics 2015). Furthermore, Butler (1990, p. 136) clarifies: "[T]he

gendered body is performative, it has no ontological status apart from the various acts, gestures, movements, enactments which constitute its reality. Such acts, gestures and enactments are performative in the sense that the essences that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means".

However, one critique of her position is that, despite gender being described as a species of free performance, the binary manner in which Butler (1990) frames her radical notion should not be all-encompassing. In the above definition, Butler's (1990) portrayal of gender as a performance - as an agglomeration of actions and expressions – still somewhat rests on the fiction that there is a fixed and homogeneous essence of masculinity or femininity worth asserting or creating. It also presumes and reproduces the notion that boys and girls always efficiently imitate the narrative of a homogenous masculine, if not feminine, distinctiveness through their performances. For the purposes of this study, Butler's theory of performativity is still extensively drawn upon, as girls do obviously perform a variety of feminine identities. However, the ways they do so are far from homogenous, and their performances are always multiple, contradictory and complex, as my analysis shows.

The works and concepts of Michel Foucault and Raewynn Connell are also employed at length in this study and will, moreover, be considered in-depth over the next few sub-sections so as to present a fuller theoretical stance towards the subjects of girls, gender and power.

4.2.4. Gender and Power

Connell's (1987, 2005) work emphasises how gender lingers on as a key constituent category of structural inequality, where the undervalued gender has little power, esteem and profitable remuneration in comparison to the esteemed ones. Even in countries that ostensibly reject gendered prejudice, countless executive roles are still predominantly gendered; women and girls remain the mainstays of domestic life and, even with the opening of the workplace, child-rearing has merely slipped to become a woman's second or third job. Men and women are still commonly segregated in their assigned tasks and each are still made to perform work that society considers suitable to their gender. Where they do perform the same work, women are also typically compensated less in comparison to men, while men still hold sway over the sites and roles of power and management (Lorber, 1994). All this while the popular discourse acknowledges more than ever how "[g]ender inequality – the devaluation of women and the social domination of men – has social functions and a social history. It is not the result of sex,

procreation, physiology, anatomy, hormones, or genetic predispositions" (Lorber, 1994, p. 247).

Gendered inequalities are, as we say, shaped and maintained by particular societal processes built into totalised social structures which filter down to affect individual identities intentionally and persistently. In other words, our social order perpetuates gendered inequalities. This thesis challenges the notion that women and girls, as a group, are innately subordinate to men and boys. Even as gendered relations continue to be relations of power and, as such, relations of domination, Connell earnestly reminds us that this status-quo holds the potential for wholesale transformation (Connell, 2005). This argument is the nub of Connell's own gender power-relations theory.

4.2.4.1. Raewynn Connell – Gender Power-Relations

Raewynn Connell is a prominent scholar who has developed and published many valuable texts on inequality, gender and disparities of power which have proven extremely influential across the social sciences over the last few decades. After initially examining the key components of the landscape of early gender theory, Connell (1987) developed a unique perspective by isolating the role of power relations within the discourse of sex. In the late 1980's, Connell declared that a revision of the concept of gender was urgent, as it now required "a theory of practice" (1987, p. 62). The word 'practice', for Connell, means "what people do by way of constituting the social relations they live in and [how] such a theory would be valuable [so as] to get a grip on the interweaving of personal life and social structure" (1987, p. 61-62). Here, masculinity, as well as femininity, are embodied not in terms of biological essences, but via a more fluid depiction, through "processes of configuring practice through time, which transform their starting-points in gender structures" (Connell, 1995, p. 72). Performances of masculinities and femininities are impacted by 3 diversely gendered structures:

- Firstly, 'power relations', which entail the lower status of women and girls in addition to the regulated supremacy of males.
- Secondly, 'production relations', which refer to the gendered allocation of labor as well as its relative remuneration.
- And thirdly, 'cathexis', which is to say the gendered temperament of sexual desires and emotional commitments.

  (Connell, 1987)

Building on this multi-tiered concept in a much later study, Connell (2012) notes various means of 'doing' gender in addition to the diverse types of masculinities and femininities which are impacted on by diversity in race, age, class and sexuality, amongst countless other variables. Many other theories have of course previously challenged assumptions pertaining to the unitary nature of gendered identities, as well as the power biases towards men, women, boys and girls as well as between adults and children. These studies proffer an alternative paradigm whereby gendered power relations manoeuvre and manifest in multifaceted and contingent ways (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; MacNaughton, 2000; Martin, 2011; Risman, 2004). Although Connell (1987, 1995) has primarily written on gender in relation to males (men and masculinities), because the concept is treated in such a relational way, her theoretical framework is also essential to understanding women and girls (femininities).

Through Connell's lens, 'femininities' are practices through which girls comply with, or defy, their subordination as a gender (1987). For instance, women and girls may achieve a sense of social esteem by stroking the male ego, by acting delicately, by obliging boys in their whims, as well as by becoming mothers. Put together, such complementary masculine and feminine practices re-produce and justify a structure of gendered hierarchy which at least implicitly serves to subordinate women and girls. Moreover, Connell (1987) asserts that there are various dimensions of societal life where it is expected that boys will perform powerful masculinities and girls will follow subordinated femininities. One of these is the domain of sexuality, along with intimate relations. In line with the aim of embracing multiplicity, Jewkes and Morrell (2012) state that these stereotypical masculinities and femininities are produced and reproduced alongside a milieu of gendered histories, cultures, value systems, principles and financial circumstances. All of these attendant elements are vital to any general framing of female mannerisms and positions which still allows women their own self-transformational agency. The dispute as to the efficacy of these contextual influences further resonates with other femininity theorists who draw on the works of Foucault (Gavey, 2005; Renold, 2005). Current research has illuminated some of the tangible ways that gendered inequalities are embedded in multifaceted structures of gender relations (Bhana, 2016; 2018; Mayeza, 2016; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). These can be identified at all levels of human experience, from individual sensations and inter-personal communications to large-scale financial networks, traditional cultures and the workings of the state itself (Connell, 2002).

Connell (2002), for her part, asserts some key tenets regarding gender and power, which are particularly useful to a study like mine on young schoolgirls. Firstly, 'gendered relations' refers

to both a networked arrangement of human connections as well as the set of distinctions amongst individuals or groups of individuals such that a change experienced by one grouping in the arrangement has an inevitable ripple effect. This phenomenon clearly affected my schoolgirl participants as they came to influence and be influenced by one another. Secondly, gendered relations are not shallow belief-systems, but rather are ideologies that are profoundly entrenched in organisational routines, in religious and legal concepts and in the well-established rituals and traditions of individuals' lives and realms, such as the home, the classroom and the workplace. A third tenet then posits that gendered relations are multi-dimensional, interconnected relations of power, as well as financial arrangements, emotional relations, systems of communication and well-worn connotations. Schoolgirls, for their part, can be observed constructing diverse, fluid feminine identities, and constantly shifting how they exert power, get used by power, engage in heterosexual relationships, experience privilege, experience disadvantage, and manoeuvre though social and structural factors. A special focus on gender as such is then vital to any study of how girls construct their identities and perform gender and sexuality. Gender construction should not be viewed as an isolated entity but rather with an understanding of power. In order to achieve this, Michael Foucault's contribution to the contemporary theory of power must be considered.

4.2.4.2. Michel Foucault – Power

Foucault states:

> "[P]ower is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate through its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only the inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (1980, p. 98).

In line with this definitive understanding, the schoolgirl participants in my study are positioned as vehicles of power who are actively immersed in the research process as they dynamically act on positions of power. Foucault's theories on the concept of power depict a world in which power is a universal process; thus, schoolgirls too can be shown to continually engage in dynamic acts of power. Foucault classifies two forms of power:

1. Domination – The power which is invested in regulating or influencing people.
2. Resistance – The owners of power who are contesting and attempting prevent domination.

Foucault is particularly excellent here in conveying the insight that power should not simply be perceived as a harmful element. In fact: "[P]ower can be highly productive […] by producing ways of being and knowing in the world" (1978, p. 174). As such, all schoolgirls can exercise power and are continuously open to power. Foucauldian theories on power have helped shift the prevailing consensus of his (and our) time that power always needs to be perceived in a negative or harmful light – as a force which aids the optimisation of dominance and violence. For Foucault, power is the world's subliminal economy - a human currency diffused and personified through discourses, knowledge and regimes of faux-scientific accuracy (Foucault, 1991). Schoolgirls bear personal testimony to this, and so Foucault's work compels us to no longer consider them as muted, defenceless victims, but as free agents who also have the capacities to engender violence and spark resistance.

Foucault asserts that: "[P]ower is everywhere and comes from everywhere, so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure" (1998, p. 63). Power is instead seen as a daily, societal and personified episode in the process of lived experience (Foucault, 1998). Power is a part of our everyday, internalised practices of life, and it is therefore an unavoidable performance of gender itself. Since all schoolgirls are continually exposed to power relations, they also apply, lose or exert power, and any scholarly notion of femininity must keep the concept of power at its core (Bhana, 2018). For the purpose of this research study, much thought has therefore been given to the power relations inherent in my schoolgirls' daily interactions and experiential structures, so as to better understand their nuanced relations with gender, sexuality and violence and receptively note both their pleasures and their pains.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter has adopted an eclectic theoretical approach in order to provide a better understanding and aid in the analysis of the complexities of gender, sexuality and constructed femininities. This chapter included two sections. The rationale for employing a post-structuralist feminist theoretical lens was explained, followed by a broad outline and critique of essentialist views on gender. Gender was also depicted as an active social construction (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004). The importance of gender and power relations was also drawn upon using the works of Raewynn Connell (1987, 1995, 2002, 2005, 2012) and Michael Foucault (1978, 1980, 1991, 1998). The next chapter focuses on the notion of femininity as such. Theoretical frameworks and concepts relating to femininity will now be unpacked, as these pertain just as heavily to this study.

Chapter 5

Understanding Femininities: Heterosexuality and Rape Cultures

5.1. Introduction

Young schoolgirl femininities are at the centre of this research study, and so this chapter delves into more in-depth theories regarding understanding femininities. First, the history of dominant and subordinate versions of femininity in South Africa (or 'emphasised femininity') is explored. Then the defining narratives of femininity and heterosexuality are contrasted with the current state of transitioning femininities in South Africa. All the while, a concern for the role of feminine agency is pushed to the forefront. Lastly, the term 'rape culture' is investigated in conjunction with the daunting spectre of sexual violence so as to highlight the extent to which gender-based violence has become normalised, and almost expected, within our society and our schools. This chapter thus aims to theorise rape culture in relation to boys, girls, and the predominance of compulsory heterosexuality within the primary school environment. It then concludes with an overview of all the theories adopted to achieve the aims of the study.

5.2. Understanding Femininities

Schippers (2007) defines femininity as comprising three components:

- A particular social location which individuals can navigate through their self-performance.
- A set of performances pertaining to behaviours and characteristics connected with what it means to be 'feminine'.
- The cultural and social consequences that follow from the efficient acceptance of these social performances.

Schippers (2007) asserts that femininity refers to a position that any individual may perform which achieves the combined personification of features and mannerisms allied with the constructed notion of the feminine. Character traits such as control, power, violent behaviour and technical knowledge are commonly perceived as being non-existent in femininity (Connell, 1987; Schippers, 2007). Connell also notes that boys can readily adopt multiple forms of masculinities at different life-stages and across varying situations. In the same manner, theorists have put forth the need for a multiplicity of femininities to be recognised as well (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Connell, 1987, 1995; Schippers, 2007). Similarly, Jewkes and

Morrell (2012, p. 11) note how: "[F]emininities, understood as expressions of identity among women which combine, inconsistently and sometimes contradictorily, aspirations and practice, showed considerable diversity [in their research]". Femininities are multiple, and Connell (1987) classifies three 'types' of femininity, namely: emphasised, non-compliant and a multifaceted, premeditated femininity that combines compliance, resistance and co-operation with gender expectations. Connell (1995) maintains that herein the term 'type' must be used with caution and not be reified or treated in any way as static. In conducting research on femininities, Mac and Ghaill argue that researchers should demonstrate the multiplicity and differences in femininities among their research subjects whilst continually acknowledging that such types of femininities are "not fixed unitary categories" (1994, p. 54, 2000, 2012). Femininities are indeed practices, and whilst my study demonstrates this fluidity in femininity, these 'types of femininities' are presented as an explanatory framework for the cornucopia of how female identities are configured.

A host of researchers have reaffirmed the existence of multiple femininities (Bhana, 2008, 2016a, 2018; Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Connell, 1987, 1995, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007). 'Emphasised femininity', though still pervasive, is thankfully not so dominant in our era as to disallow other types of emerging femininities to come to the surface of our society. To quote Connell: "One form of femininity is defined around compliance with subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. […] Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation" (1987, p. 184-185). From the above, it can be rationally asserted that femininities abound with a smorgasbord of variances, complexities and contradictions; only a small number of which will be described in the subsections to follow.

5.3. Multiple femininities

> "Femininity has been described by Holland as an 'elusive' concept, seen variously as a normative order (i.e., a set of psychological traits such as being nurturing), a performance or a process of interaction" (2004, p. 8).

Plural femininities have been well set forth in Connell's (1987) early texts and Schippers' work (2007) subsequently.

5.3.1. Emphasised femininity

Through cultural prevalence, traditional femininity remains the norm in our society. Connell coined the term to describe this particular construction: 'emphasized femininity' (1987). Significantly, she declares that it can be easily categorised by its acquiescence to subordination and its explicit accommodation of male interests and desires. Women and girls who adopt emphasised femininity conform to a gender order that subordinates women and silently allows their subjection. Just as with conventional masculinity, there are societal rewards to emphasised femininity, as well as sanctions that follow on from the espousal of alternative types of femininities. These are often imposed through localised moral discourses, in addition to the persistent hazard of heterosexualised violence (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). In this same study, Jewkes & Morrell found that the majority of South African women and girls are, on the whole, distinctly conservative. The inequality of gender relations in household arrangements may be generally acknowledged, but this recognition trails from the belief that women and girls ought to be explicitly submissive, respectful and polite in their dealings with males. This acceptance of domination defines an emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987), as such women and girls offer no contest. They not only allow patriarchy, but support patriarchy. This species of conservatism also compels many South African woman to support certain exceedingly domineering traditional practices. However, Jewkes and Morrell (2012) also note that such persistent ideologies have mostly been formed beyond the influence of more contemporary contentions of sexual autonomy and sexual agency.

5.3.2. Femininity and heterosexuality

Warner (2002, p. 194) explains this section in a brief passage:

> "[A] whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatised sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just in sex—is what we call heteronormativity."

Heteronormativity takes hold in boys' and girls' minds as early as their primary school years. The societal expectations of institutions, their environmental ways of being and the knowledge systems which surround them all, work ceaselessly to centre heterosexuality as the prevailing and preferable sexuality. Heteronormative discourses are still deeply entrenched within the social, structural and cultural systems of contemporary society. And by 'heteronormative', we mean beliefs that lead one to assume that all identities, ideas and relationships ought to be

anchored by a staunch heterosexuality, which, in tandem, works to silence and marginalise alternative gender expectations and sexualities (Renold, 2005).

Renold here also reminds us that: "[F]ocusing on the sexualisation of children's gender identities, is [a means of] identifying heterosexuality as a pervasive and normalising force mediating and regulating children's school-based relations and relationships in ways that constrain and disempower how they live out their gendered identities as 'girls' and 'boys'" (2005, p. 168). As a result, heterosexuality is "a key site by which masculinities and femininities are constituted, negotiated and resisted" (Allen, 2013, p. 351). In her South African research, Bhana (2016, 2018) argues that girls are not devoid of agency when they construct their gendered sexualities, and there remains a dearth of research investigating the interrelation between girls' gendered sexualities and girls' own experiences of being and becoming girls. This void can be attributed to previous research focused only on the need to protect girls' sexual innocence (Renold, 2005). But such a scholarly qualm seems an inadequate excuse when "heterosexuality is not only visible and present in schools but crucial to the organisation of schools" (Renold, 2007, p. 280). Understanding how schoolgirls empower themselves through engaging in heterosexuality is thus of vital concern to our field, as this study will illustrate. Kehily (2002) also maintains that children's sexuality has been an academic bugbear for decades, yet it is still a highly unexplored research field.

Childhood, however, is far from a period of sexual innocence (Bhana, 2016a, 2018; Renold, 2005, 2006, 2007). "Gendered sexualities always persist in relations with other social experiences and inequalities around gender, class and race" (Bhana & Anderson, 2013b, p. 549). Similarly, Pattman and Bhana's (2009) South African investigation of schoolgirls' lives revealed how girls often explore their sexuality as part and parcel of the construction process for their identity as such. The authors emphasised too how: "[S]exuality was indeed a medium through which girls asserted themselves and through which they were subordinated" (p. 37). Sexuality is thus fundamental to the construction of young girls' identities. But, of course, these findings are not confined to girls, and moreover show that sexuality is perhaps the most important element in the construction of all emergent gendered identities.

The schoolgirl participants in this study demonstrated how constructions of femininity can still trace deep roots in obligatory heterosexuality. Being a 'normal girl' usually involves conforming to an acceptable type of femininity, which entails the projection, as well as the staging, of heterosexual investments – that is to say, investments in boys (Bhana, 2018).

Moreover, Butler's (1990) conceptualisation of heterosexuality is particularly valuable to this research, as it - along with several other practical studies in primary schools across 'the West' (Paechter, 2007, 2017; Renold, 2013) - puts forward the notion that gender as such is made understandable to us via binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity. It also proposes that presently gendered relations of power have been cemented through the naturalisation of heterosexuality and the cultural ubiquity of expressions of longing for the opposite sex. Such expressions though are still primarily masculine-centred constructions, while girls are more often interpellated as models of emphasised femininity, born to accommodate the desires of boys (Paechter, 2017). Girls' own processes of constructing and exploring heterosexuality are often filled with radical pleasures and desires, whilst still being imbued with frightening tensions and uncertainties; particularly as young girls are expected to project a child-like innocence in tandem with a 'healthy' curiosity for heterosexual diversion (Bhana, 2018). The act of sexuality is therefore mired in a nexus of ideological demands that expect sexual submissiveness and girls' sexual purity above all else, whilst always safeguarding heterosexual norms and indulging the whims of young boys (Bhana, 2018).

5.3.3. Transitioning Femininities

Femininities are currently in transition and are no longer simply compliant. Instead, they are more often able to adopt combinations of compliance, resistance and accommodation or co-operation in highly strategic ways. Such playful, tactical responses are in themselves evidence of girls' active agency. Bay-Cheng (2019) asserts that researchers should move beyond viewing agency as just a transparently self-advancing category performed by only a particular set of girls; that is to say, only the reserve of girls who identify as characteristically fearless, autonomous and assertive – typically masculine virtues. Instead, agency can be seen and appreciated in all the actions girls perform, and is, as such, an all-encompassing quality. Bay-Cheng (2019) further claims that agency should be conceptualised as an individual ability that all girls can draw upon; while some girls instinctively put it to good use, others still need to learn to use and develop it. This interpretation then allows us to delve into more inquiries and interventions aimed at bringing about constructive change for girls. By altering our understanding of schoolgirls' agency, we can potentially direct our revolutionary aims and efforts beyond a strict focus on girls' lives to consider the larger social and structural inequalities that otherwise shape their minds, in addition to narrowing their choices (both sexual and otherwise).

Girls' immediate circumstances, and the social and structural conditions they function under, work to either broaden or confine the limits of their active agency (Klocker, 2007). The warnings and imperatives passed down by their parents, or other elders, may limit their sense of personal autonomy, in addition to the general brunt of poverty and rural isolation. Moreover, their imaginations may be disciplined by the ethical constrictions placed on sexual and health choices and prospects (Smith, 2002). Klocker (2007, p. 84–85). Attempting to schematise these influences puts forth "a continuum of agency, where at one end of the continuum lies 'thin' agency, which refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterised by few possible alternatives. At the other end, 'thick' agency as having the autonomy to act within a broad range of options." Payne adds too that knowing "the context [they live in] does not diminish young women's vulnerability, but […] counters the tendency to see them reductively (i.e., noticing only their suffering and overlooking their actions), reminding us that [t]hey live and make life meaningful outside of, and beyond, the categories of 'at-risk' or 'vulnerability' in which they are so often confined" (2012, p. 408).

A move away from obsessing over girls' vulnerability, or their more obvious acts of resistance and spectacular attempts to assert independence, will allow us to notice how their sexual agency is evident even in their daily efforts to go forward, to reach the next day, to slightly improve their circumstances, whether in the present or for the long term (Bay Cheng, 2019). Even under the gun of dominant gender norms, schoolgirls still use their daily choices, their small empowered acts and their insistent voices to make progress for themselves (as the work of Harris and Dobson (2015) make clear). In our contemporary society, women and girls do have much greater autonomy as choice-makers than in past eras. They have access to far more career opportunities and can wander into many more fields in which they can potentially express their autonomy. Yet the bare choices schoolgirls make are still not transparent. Their own preferences and rationales can still by no means be separated from the societal context in which they undergo their formative years. With more occasions to make choices, girls are allowed to consider more abstract notions of empowerment. This is the scholarly definition of 'girl power' (Harris & Dobson, 2015). Rottenberg (2014) elaborates on this point when they note how in contemporary society there already exists a surfeit of literature which documents how women and girls can be empowered through their individual accomplishments: in the educational sector, at work, through the manner in which they negotiate relationships and through the ways they present themselves on social media platforms. In the same way, schoolgirls' agency is obvious when they demonstrate their abilities to transcend difficult situations, focus on their

studies, and classify themselves as equal citizens who can be whoever and whatever they desire to be (Banet-Weiser, 2015). As Harris and Dobson (2015) note, the last category to consider when theorising schoolgirls' agency is the power of 'voice'. It is through schoolgirls' own voices that we may recognise their own experiences, beliefs and expressions concerning the diverse femininities and sexualities they adopt.

Thus, conceptualising schoolgirl agency simply as a process of constant resistance is flawed. Coffey and Farrugia remind us that: "[R]esistance risks obscuring the ways in which young girls also agentically reproduce inequalities, and potentially results in a position where those identities or actions that are not seen as emancipatory become labelled as structurally determined" (2014, p. 13). Sexuality researchers often tend to classify certain behaviours as agentic only when they are recognized as firm oppositional stances - for instance, when women insist on condom usage or on initiating, accepting or rejecting desired relationships. In their study of ascribed forms of agency within childhood studies, Coffey and Farrugia (2014) assert that researchers tend to mark childhood behaviour that resists dominant or dominating forces as being authentically autonomous, as it criticises the established gender order and societal norms. This fixed association between agency and open opposition to the status quo "risks obscuring the ways in which structural and political inequalities are reproduced by young people themselves, and erases forms of active subjectivity that do not conform to the ethical or political commitments of youth research" (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014, p. 467-78).

Dominant gender norms and social and structural conditions really permit only a minority of girls to make such challenges. Coffey and Farrugia (2014) emphasise here that not all girls are predisposed to oppose the status quo; most girls are inclined instead to (re)produce it. Many young girls endure the weight of various societal inequities and adversities at the same time as being disadvantaged with regards to societal and material resources. Many schoolgirls have to collaborate in order to meet their most instantaneous needs, while others seek to accomplish their greater educational goals through asserting their sexualities. This shows us the omnipresence of sexual agency amongst young girls, whilst acknowledging its limitations within our society for fully securing their welfare, (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Fahs & McClelland, 2016). Classifying agency merely as acts of non-compliance ignores young girls' capacities to affect their sexual agency through both audacious and cunning forms of claiming autonomy (Fahs & McClelland, 2016).

In one of Bay-Cheng's (2019) subsequent studies, she found that heterosexual violence and abuse also regularly feature as underlying elements in the relationship's girls have with males (boys and men). Despite having so little sexual autonomy and expressing far less sexual power, girls do occasionally choose to endure certain expenses and possible risks knowing that these personal relationships will meet their instantaneous requirements of safety, constancy and progress towards their goals. Some young schoolgirls construe having a boyfriend as a projected form of individual superiority, social capital or perhaps even a post-school life arrangement. Fine and McClelland claim that: "[F]or [such girls], sexual agency [is] not aimed at or driven by sexual desires at all, but rather by their thick desires for material security, intellectual stimulation, emotional and physical intimacy, and hope for the future" (2006, p. 300).

5.3.4. Femininities in South Africa

Femininities are multiple and usually oscillate in accordance with variations in class, culture, race and general society. According to Morrell: "[T]he relationship between race, subordination and marginalisation is central to an understanding of gender in South Africa. Colonialism and imperialism created race as a marker of inferiority" (2002, p. 21). Variables related to class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and age thus all give rise to different experiences of gender domination (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). All of these factors also intersect and persist within the present gendered hierarchy so as to sway constructs of gender which are habitually accommodating to inequality and dominance (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). But this is not to say of course that individual women and girls are devoid of agency (Bhana, 2016a, 2018).

On another level, societal conditions relating to race, ethnicity, class and age inequality all still portend adverse outcomes for the choices young schoolgirls are compelled to make about their social performances (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). As such, other scholars too have attempted to draw awareness to such multifaceted power relations by disagreeing with the notion that women and girls are completely disempowered (Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Schippers, 2007). They do argue though that the female capacity to apply power and construct diverse types of femininities are obviously and desperately restricted by the societal, cultural and financial resources of the dire settings in which scarcity and socially-entrenched thoughts of male power remain difficult to dispel or disrupt (Bhana, 2018; Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Schippers, 2007; Shefer, 2016). As a pertinent example, within HIV-dominated environments, gendered inequalities make girls even more vulnerable to contracting the virus. Nonetheless, within a

conceptual framework that recognises feminine resistances to male domination and heteronormativity, it can still be affirmed that schoolgirls are not merely subordinate to male power, but that they themselves paradoxically choose to maintain and/or challenge their own domination (Foucault, 1978). In South Africa, schoolgirls' constructions of their femininities need to be read in tandem with the influence of their wider social worlds – spaces in which poverty, historical inequality and indigent patriarchy have all combined to characterise and contour their lives. There are, for instance, a multiplicity of femininities and masculinities at play at any given time, but this does not suggest that boys and girls can make totally free choices of which versions of femininity or masculinity to assume. Pyke (1996) states that race, class, culture and embryonic sexuality all chip in to this process, and all of these can act as restraints, as well as catalysts, for creative identifications. They add: "[H]ierarchies of social class, race and sexuality provide additional layers of complication. They form the structural and cultural contexts in which gender is enacted in everyday life, thereby fragmenting gender into multiple masculinities and femininities" (p. 531).

In a South African context, Jewkes and Morrell have found that flirtatious performances, free partner choice and negotiating multiple boyfriends are presently common practices which suggest extensive agency, as well as degrees of autonomy that were not previously widespread in past eras (2012). However, they still note that female agency is exceedingly controlled by the social and structural spheres in their lives, highlighting repeated accounts of patriarchal control, age-ranking and socio-economic environments of relentless poverty (Bhana, 2018; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Parkes, 2015). Such studies emphasise that, whilst women and girls are still held back by patriarchy, poverty and limited familial support, when they begin to date, girls do get the chance to exercise their agency. It seems that young women and girls wield their autonomy most clearly through partner selection; however, this particular structural freedom can also be credited to pervasive ideas of suitable gender relations, as well as the task of choosing a partner to whom one feels capable of submitting (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). On the other hand, once dating, women and girls often find themselves wedged into a powerful and complex mould of heterosexual masculinities that closely polices their agency (Patmann & Bhana, 2009). In this regard, women and girls often confirm their own complicity in constructing a type of femininity which accepts and endorses male domination (Connell, 1987). In spite of this, there still remains a multiplicity of femininities, as well as indications of nuanced sets of circumstances. Whilst some women are complicit, others freely assume the

'modern-girl' type of femininity which openly contradicts emphasised femininity (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012).

This modern femininity can be simply defined as the gender performance of a girl who freely applies their agency. Jewkes and Morrell (2012) have noted how this almost always flies in the face of traditional acquiescent femininities. Centred mainly in urban areas, 'modern' women and girls present and project themselves as being in charge of their lives. However, this archetype is often found to be only a partial reality, and mainly an aspirational fantasy (2012). The modern girl is, stereotypically, a young female, perpetually navigating issues of adolescent sexuality, such as teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, and heartbreaks, whilst still being buffeted by males on all sides via technological devices. Clearly rejecting conservatism and submission, modern femininity is often depicted as seeking empowerment by imitating a few of the traditions and contentions of men. Likewise, another notably emergent femininity is one which presents a quasi-feminist challenge to patriarchy whilst still somewhat accommodating men's power in the quest for more respect and the maintaining of peace within relationships with males. All in all, it is reasonable to say that a broader 'feminist' consciousness has awakened in our society, beyond its variations. These multiple and nuanced femininities disclose prospects of personal transformation to all young women (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). Women and girls use their sexuality to bargain for their own progress beneath circumstances and conditions of patriarchal inequalities; but as such they are never merely passive subjects, even when still very young (Bhana, 2018; Campbell, 2000; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). By concurring with this new understanding of feminine agency (Bay-Cheng, 2019), this study does not at all mean to underappreciate the constrictions or risks that women and girls do still experience. But simply acknowledging the new multiplicity of femininities helps us to build on the hopes, desires, passions, pleasures and circumstances of girls' emotional agency (in addition to their relational self-accomplishments), as this offers an avenue through which to sponsor better involvement, revisions and interventions in young girls' lives whilst still recognising gendered inequalities and verifying the bounds of female agency. However, the odds are not always with girls. Of all social ills, rape culture perhaps provides the greatest threat to girls' collective progress.

5.4. Rape culture as a gendered phenomenon

The term 'rape culture' originated in 1975 and was coined by scholar Susan Brownmiller, who described 'rape' – almost for the first time – in the terms of a political and social problem.

‘Rape culture’ as such is founded upon heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies of gender and sexuality (Brownmiller, 1975), that boys draw power and authority from in order to employ violence to assert masculine power and exert control over girls’ bodies (Mayeza et al., 2020). However, within postmodern feminist thinking, the ideology surrounding ‘rape culture’ is still under construction, and thus its meaning is fluid and subject to change at any time, just like constructs of gender, sexuality and violence (Butler, 2004). ‘Rape culture’ alludes to a specific form of heterosexual violence that operates within a gendered system of power wherein girls and women are subordinate and boys and men are privileged. Indeed, Brownmiller (1975) argued that rape is a tactic of domination that can be used by all men and boys to keep all women and girls in a constant state of distress in order to maintain a system of patriarchy where men are dominant over women. The theoretical basis of ‘rape culture’ is underpinned by an ideology which normalises male sexual violence and often results in victim-blaming (Brownmiller, 1975; Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Drawing from Foucauldian theory, some researchers argue that rape is perpetuated as a behavioural phenomenon through the societal construction of a rape culture (Brownmiller, 1975). Herein social viewpoints and behaviours in relation to gender and sexuality which condone and normalise sexual violence are persistently reconstructed and reproduced in society through the re-validation of a dominant gendered order. Rape is thus perpetuated via the endorsement of a ‘rape culture’ within which men and boys are taught to be sexually aggressive and women and girls are taught to be sexually submissive (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). As a result, society as a whole has been insidiously socialised to normalise male sexual aggression and violence within the span of relationships as just a normal part of life.

In complement to the construction of male sexuality as being naturally aggressive and hypersexual (Connell, 1995) is the construction of female sexuality as submissive and innocent (Connell, 1987). Under ‘rape culture’, schoolgirls become subordinated, and their physical and emotional vulnerability is perpetuated in tandem with their subjection to the hegemonic masculinities operating within the school environment. But again, such an observation does not discount girls’ own negotiations and contestations of it. In making sense of girls’ own accounts of ‘rape culture’, it is important to consider Connell’s (2005) aforementioned relational theory of gender, in as much as it emphasises and recognises how uneven power relations first come into effect. Globally, many scholars who have performed research on gender violence in educational environments powerfully emphasise that unequal power relations work towards reproducing and encouraging prejudiced relationships by reinforcing

male dominance over women and girls (Leach et al., 2014; Morojele, 2011; Muhanguzi, 2011; Renold, 2005).

The 'heterosexual matrix' helps us to understand and recognise how boys and girls are expected to conform within normative gendered roles founded upon a desire for the opposite sex (Butler, 1990). Heteronormative discourses perpetually label female sexuality as passive and vulnerable, and male sexuality as dominant and aggressive (Butler, 1999). In the same way in which male heterosexual violence is considered as a customary practice, there is a normalisation of the female tolerance of it (Stanko, 1985). Messerschmidt (2012) asserts that normative heterosexuality implicitly presumes that men 'suffer' a unique, perpetual and inescapable desire towards heterosexual intercourse. This results in the construction of women as individuals who are merely inevitable - even justifiable - objects of sexual exploitation. These discourses work to normalise the stubborn trope that downplays the problem of male sexual aggression via a 'boys being boys' discourse (Connell, 1987; Messerschmidt, 2012). Stanko argues particularly that: "[W]omen learn, often at a very early age, that their sexuality is not their own and that maleness can at any point intrude into it" (1985, p. 73).

As boys and girls enter the school gates, heterosexual assumptions about masculinity and femininity implicitly shape their performances. Being a 'real boy' or a 'real girl' is thus only made intelligible to them via their performance of heterosexuality (Bhana, 2018; Butler, 1990; Renold, 2005). Boys and girls thus unknowingly subject themselves to the heterosexual compulsion of performing gender and sexuality with the intention of living up to the gendered ideals of a 'real boy' and a 'real girl' (Renold, 2005). Girls are often compelled to comply with gender norms and a compulsory urge to project heterosexual desires, whereas boys must immediately invest in hegemonic masculinity and a heterosexuality laden with latent power and domination (Connell, 1995). Pascoe (2007) argues that these sexually aggressive behaviours are not just a fragment of masculine sexuality, but instead boys actively uphold their masculinity by virtue of performing these aggressive behaviours. She elaborates that this masculine sexuality frequently works to project itself as a 'will-to-conquest'; in order to lay claim to their masculinity and be accepted, boys are required to make advances toward girls. A boy must constantly display his heterosexuality if he wants to be considered as a 'real man'. A disinterest in having sex is then treated as an abnormality among men and boys, and their aggressive sexual behaviour is often dismissed as 'boys being boys'.

However, the dominant conceptualisations that conflate male sexuality and sexual aggression

are highly problematic, as they not only incite men to be sexually aggressive, but are also used reactively as a kind of 'common sense' defence for the very same aggressive behaviours among men (Pascoe, 2007). Even when very young, boys are encouraged to participate consciously in relations with the opposite sex and to assert their dominance, wherein girls are often construed as the submissive victims of sexual violence (Bartholomaeus & Senkevics, 2015). At the primary school level, boys jockey for power and perceived authenticity through their concomitant bodily displays of strength, excitement and sexual violence (Renold, 2005). Additionally, this male-controlled configuration of socio-cultural practices consequently fortifies binary gender roles that position men/boys as authoritative and strong, whether physically or emotionally, and position women/girls as powerless, compliant, susceptible, and devoid of any power or agency (Connell, 1987, 2005). The legacy of oppression which persists to this day due to apartheid and the plague of political violence in South Africa has played a significant role too in subordinating and disempowering women en masse (particularly black African women), and has especially contributed to the normalision of our societal tendencies towards gender-based violence, male power, and passive femininity amongst ordinary South Africans (Morrell, 1998; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012).

For primary schoolgirls, femininities underlined and confined by age, race group, gender, social class and sexuality are perpetually reproduced in the classroom, irrespective of their own active agency (Mayeza et al., 2020; Paechter & Clark, 2016; Parkes, 2015). Despite girls often actively articulating their identities, dominant gendered norms and ideologies continue to position femininity as subordinate and female submission as inevitable (Paechter, 2010; Paechter & Clark, 2016). Various studies have, of course, highlighted girls' persistence in contesting and challenging unequal social relationships (Bajaj & Pathmarajah, 2011; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana, 2021 et al., 2021; Haavind et al., 2015; Pincock, 2019), thus broadening the definition of feminine agency to include an ability to perform as autonomous individuals within sociocultural contexts. The notion that girls are, by definition, pensive, resourceful and witful agents is paramount. Agency here is a category thickened or thinned, as Klocker (2007) notes, by structural and social inequalities, violence, socio-cultural norms and poverty (Bay Cheng, 2019), and, as Bhana (2018) reminds us, age, social class and sexuality amalgamate to diminish girls' capacity to enact their fundamental freedoms. There are unavoidable restrictions to what 12-13-year-old schoolgirls can and cannot achieve within a hegemonic schooling environment where patriarchal masculinity is still standardised and culturally endorsed, and in which boys and girls are expected to be completely acquiescent to the ideas of their forebears.

Therefore, throughout this thesis I apply a 'double-edged sword' approach when analysing primary schoolgirls' experiences of femininity, sexuality and 'rape culture' within the schooling context. Butler (2004, p. 217) claims that: "[gender, sexuality and violence] are open to transformation - by mapping out how 'girls' manipulate norms, exceed them and re-work them". Thus, young girls' subjective understandings, experiences, negotiations and contestations of gender, sexuality, and violence are perhaps the most crucial sites for the eventual deconstruction of 'rape culture'.

5.5. Conclusion

The schoolgirls who made this research study possible came from diverse cultural backgrounds, although most were from working- to middle-class families. Thus, a range of theories had to be utilised in order to better analyse their lives across all of their distinctions and identities. Connell argues that the "cultural character of gender" should not be discounted in such studies (1995, p. 52) and so this principle is particularly ascribed to here during my interviews with the young schoolgirls (and emphasised throughout the preceding chapters of this thesis). The theories drawn upon in my analysis offer perspectives which serve an imperative role in advocating the progress and diversified understanding of schoolgirl femininities. No singular theory can be utilised to explain certain phenomena; thus, it was necessary to adopt an eclectic approach that combined many theoretical frameworks so as to approach my subjects with more insight and guile. This research study made extensive use of post-structuralist feminist theory as its underlying intellectual foundation, followed closely by a great deal of Connell's ideas and theories, which the researcher found to be all-embracing and thorough. Theories on gender performativity, the heterosexual matrix, gender power and rape culture were also liberally employed to achieve the aims of my analysis.

The experiences of primary schoolgirls, like the girls captured in this study, rarely come to the fore and are seldom captured using girls' own voices. In the chapters that follow, detailed descriptions of the experience's girls have undergone are provided and illustrated. Throughout, girls' own interpretations and articulations of their constructed femininities are shown, and their social and cultural influences analysed. Agency, both sexual and otherwise, is defined by the schoolgirls themselves via the situations and examples they themselves disclose. In this vein, scholars have previously cautioned against over-simplifying girls' agency (Bhana, 2018); thus, I sought to apply a double-edged sword approach in my analysis, considering every possible aspect of feminine empowerment set against the context of rape culture. Bhana (2018)

further warns that it is better in this regard to use the concept of 'lite' agency, as this also alludes to girls' restrictions, their potential incapacity to make comprehensive decisions, and their difficulties in choosing and contesting their circumstances within a wider heteropatriarchal environment that relegates their power. Her concept of 'lite' agency is here crucial, as it powerfully signifies the importance of recognising young girls' agency whilst confessing how exceedingly complex and nuanced the issues of gender, sexuality and violence are influences constantly playing themselves out in the lives of schoolgirls. In the next chapter, the research design and methodology that was utilised to undertake this study on girls, gender, sexuality and violence will be presented.

Chapter 6

Researching 12-13-year-old schoolgirls: The process, design, and methodology.

6.1. Introduction

Having completed the literature reviews and theoretical framework of the study, in Chapter 6 I will unpack the research design and methodology utilised to achieve the aims of this research study. This research study will examine how gender, sexuality, and violence manifest in the lives of a group of 12-13-year-old primary schoolgirls. The study gives specific consideration to the ways in which 12-13-year-old primary schoolgirls construe their femininities within the context of gender norms, ideologies, and inequalities that put their agency at risk and otherwise normalise rape culture. The study seeks to provide a window into their lives to shed light on how femininity is experienced and constructed within prevailing hetero-patriarchal gender norms. In doing so, this study builds on the growing body of formal research on gender, sexuality, and school rape-culture research in South Africa by providing a detailed focus on young schoolgirls' femininity and agency. The study adds to the corpus of new research in South Africa which will expand the position of girls in our society as being more than passive victims. This study puts forth that South African schoolgirls actively reproduce, negotiate and contest dominant gender norms when they engage in femininity and sexuality and are therefore more sophisticated than a normative understanding of femininity allows for.

Overall, this research study was carefully propelled by the three questions below:

1. How do primary schoolgirls, aged between 12-13 years old, articulate the meanings of their feminine positionality within gender relations?
2. How do schoolgirls express heterosexuality in their construction and negotiation of femininity in the primary school environment?
3. How do primary schoolgirls experience, negotiate, and challenge the manifestations of rape culture in their primary school?

With the purpose of answering these questions the study had to be designed in a schematic manner. This research design and methodology chapter is comprised of three clear sections - in the first section, the research design locates the study within an interpretivist research paradigm using qualitative data and adopting an ethnographic case-study approach. In the second section, a full description of the research site is offered along with the narratives of how access to the site was achieved, how the sampling-type was adopted, how piloting was utilised

and - most importantly - how the methods of data collation were chosen and assessed. Lastly, in section three, the nature of data analysis used for this research study is described, thereafter followed by a critical explanation on vital ethical considerations and the role of self-reflexivity. Finally, the chapter concludes by laying out the limitations and challenges of the study.

Section 1

6.2. The Research Design

Cresswell declares that a research design involves:

> [P]lans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (2009, p. 3).

Similarly, Ponelis (2015) explains that, prior to designing a research study, the researcher needs to map out the study and then execute it in such a way that it will smooth out the progress of the researcher in achieving the envisioned results, thus supplementing the likelihood of obtaining real and useful data that is genuinely allied with the real-life phenomenon to be studied. Therefore, it is vital to situate this study within an interpretivist paradigm, and to employ qualitative-based methods and adopt a single-site ethnographic case-study approach. Yin (2011) goes on to remind us that research designs are an eloquent preparation, or a skeleton, of how the research will be conducted, collected, and analysed. In essence, an outline of the study in the form of a coherent plan serves to link the research aims, objectives, and questions of the study to the research process itself with the aim of aiding the pragmatic process of data compilation and data analysis from the findings generated (Ponelis, 2015).

6.2.1. Interpretivist Research Paradigm

The research design also involves and depends on a well-chosen research paradigm (Creswell, 2009). To accomplish the aforementioned aims of this research study, the ‘interpretivist’ paradigm was utilised. This paradigm specifically aims to understand people as they endeavour to make meaning of the world around them. Babbie and Mouton (2010) state that, “human beings continuously interpret, create, give meaning, define, justify and rationalise [their] daily actions” (p. 28). Through interpretivism, an enhanced focus on the intricacy of societal phenomena aids us in investigating the complexity of human beings’ own individual responses. Rubin and Babbie (2010) remind us here that the main justification for researching within the

interpretivist paradigm is the need to recognise and interpret everyday activities and experiences in addition to the greater meanings that human beings affix to these phenomena. However, interpretivists also acknowledge that social realities can be assessed as being a totally subjective and shaded phenomena, in as much as they are produced by the viewpoints and insights of the research participants themselves over and above the morals, beliefs, and aspirations of the researcher. There are three basic principles which inform interpretivism; Blumberg et al. (2011) and Wisker (2008) helpfully list them as:

- The social world is a construct and meaning is given to it subjectively by individuals; they are the subjects who are very much aware of their reality and their behaviour is embellished by their own knowledge of the social world.
- The researcher is an element of the 'pragmatic' world of their subject.
- Research is always determined by certain prior interests that need to be acknowledged.

Wisker (2009) concurs with the authors above and further notes that interpretivism perceives the social world as something which can be perpetually constructed and reconstructed day after day by human beings. A subject's interpretation of reality which may seem true in the moment might not automatically appear true the day after, or even in a dissimilar societal environment. Social situations and conditions constantly change, and the deeper interests of human beings not only channel their thoughts but greatly impact on the ways in which they examine their world and gather their knowledge of it (Blumberg et al., 2011).

This research study delves into the nature of schoolgirls' reproductions of, and resistances to dominant gendered norms. Therefore, situating this study within the interpretivist paradigm is appropriate as I seek to observe how 12-13-year-old schoolgirls - in their own right - make sense of and experience gender and sexuality, as well as violence, in the construction of schoolgirl femininities. How gender, sexuality, and violence manifest in the lives of young schoolgirls can only be understood by delving into their experiences and everyday realities. Granting them a platform to be vocal, and understanding that they too have thoughts, feelings, desires, traumas, and ample opportunities to express agency, is vital. The schoolgirls' experiences, viewpoints, and understandings, as well as how they make sense of, construct and give meanings to their environments, helps one understand how they experience, give meaning to, and make sense of their social worlds. Since the core aim of interpretivist research is to comprehend the means through which individuals experience and understand their worlds, data collection methods which not only formulate realities but examine and describe the various

connotations and nuances of their circumstances are ideal. As such, a qualitative research approach was also employed. Such data-gathering methods advocate that information should be gathered principally via straightforward, communicable methods – essential for an interpretivist research paradigm (Creswell, 2009). Thus, it is for these reasons that I was convinced to use a qualitative approach for my research study.

6.2.2. Qualitative approach to research

Denzin and Lincoln describe qualitative research as:

> [A] set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self … qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2011, p. 3).

This explanation reminds one how qualitative research is habitually linked with particular types of data: particularly writing or illustrations instead of processed figures. Silverman (2013) states that the very richness of qualitative data is the distinguishing virtue that qualitative researchers convey through their interpretations and analyses. In the same vein, Hammarberg et al. (2015) note how qualitative research methods are commonly employed to answer questions regarding the experiences, meanings, and perspectives from the stance of the participants. Data, on the other hand, that embraces qualitative methods, is not so easily counted nor measured (Hammarberg et al., 2015).

Other authors (like Creswell (2013)) categorise a research study as being qualitative in nature if it includes a concern with key words such as ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ instead of mere quantity or the question of ‘how many’. Creswell (2013) clarifies that certain data-gathering methods - for example observation(s), semi-structured and in-depth interviewing, as well as focus group interview discussions - have been largely accepted as being worthwhile qualitative research. Although qualitative research does not deal in numbers per se it is still research that provides in-depth data (Ritchie et al., 2013). Research participants provide interpreted perceptions of their social worlds, which researchers seek to learn about the logic these participants make of their social circumstances, experiences, and perspectives along with the narrative of their personal histories.

Qualitative research takes into deliberation the views and feelings of individuals towards particular subjects that affect their lives, and in this way is profoundly subjective (Creswell, 2013). In such papers, social phenomena are studied in home settings, with the lived experiences of individuals being directly investigated while the researcher attempts to remain non-intrusive (Silverman, 2013). Another key element of qualitative research, underscored by Ritchie et al., (2013) is that the researcher themselves becomes the most critical tool for gathering relevant data. Thus, the researcher takes on a reflexive role in which their own perspective is documented throughout the process. The researcher is at all times occupied in the research process and is therefore, more often than not, in direct contact with the research participants (Ritchie et al., 2013). Creswell's meta-research (2013) presents a few characteristic traits of qualitative researchers, which are as follows: qualitative researchers are said to analyse social incidences in a holistic manner; they constantly reflect on the role they play throughout the research process; they consider how their private world-view has an impact on the research study; and they utilise a form of reasoning that behooves all the factors implicated.

In order to achieve the aims of this research study, the qualitative approach was used because of the dense data that needed to be collected. The manner in which the 12-13-year-old schoolgirls' made sense of and experienced their gender, sexuality, and everyday violence in the construction of their femininities was not a simple subject to process. This process was incredibly complex and required in-depth data to be collected over an extensive period of time. Qualitative research recognises fully that each contextual setting and period is distinct and dissimilar, even to its neighbours. In other words, the conclusions from studies like this cannot always be perfectly generalised (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2013). Accordingly, I do not aspire to extrapolate any of my conclusions beyond the schooling context in which this study originated. In summation, the qualitative research approach that underpins this study seemed the most suitable means of accomplishing the aims of the research, as it promised to provide careful accounts of subjects, and analysis which would aid in answering my three research questions stipulated in the introduction of this chapter.

6.2.3. Single-site ethnographic case-study

Creswell (2007) explains how an ethnographic research case-study approach is only selected once the researcher recognises that they need to gather data and understandings within a particular culture-sharing group. This approach is then suitable for this study as my primary aim is to investigate a specific age-group of schoolgirls in their final year of primary schooling.

Thus, this research is an ethnographic study, as it observes a singular primary school, with focus only placed on schoolgirls aged between 12 and 13 to examine how they construct their femininities (Creswell, 2007). As a 'case' study this research intends to offer a thorough and holistic account, as well as an interpretation of a single functioning unit: one primary school, one grade, and one gender - Grade 7, 12-13-year-old schoolgirls.

The benefit of adopting this approach to my research is that in-depth data can be generated within a clear understanding of diverse phenomena (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the complex experiences of gender, sexuality, and violence in the lives of these young schoolgirls needed to be broadly explored. Additionally, the concentration of the study's sample allowed various data-collection methods to be utilised. Data for this research was collected via many different methods, such as semi-structured individual interviews, non-participant observations, and focus-group discussion interviews. This then made it possible to authenticate the data through triangulation; thus, it is crucial to note the flexibility of this approach. Simons (2009) discloses how it is neither time-dependent nor defined by any one data-gathering technique. Therefore, the data is dependent on shifts in focal point and even unforeseen consequences. The flexibility was suited to the aims of this study, in which diverse data collection methods were eventually required and time could not be a constraining factor in the research process.

The following section describes how the methodology was adopted to arrive at the aims and objectives of this research study. The descriptions regarding the research context, site, setting, participants, data collection methods, and the analysis methods are all carefully covered below.

Section 2

6.3. Methodology

In addition to the research design above, the research methodology that will follow is an organised and purposefully planned means for massing data on specific research phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The research methodology greatly strengthens the research design (Wisker, 2009) and offers a thorough description of how the researcher conducted the study. The succeeding section will then consider the methodology that was set out and followed in order to conduct this research study.

6.3.1. The research context and site

This research study originated from a local primary school in KwaDukuza. KwaDukuza is interchangeably referred to as 'Stanger'. It is situated in KwaZulu-Natal [KZN], 1 of the 9 provinces in South Africa, and is positioned on the North Coast.

Figure 2 – A Map Illustrating the Location of Stanger in Relation to Other Areas on the North coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

In keeping with the 2011 South African National Census population statistics, which are conducted every 10 years, the following figures can be ascertained:

KwaDukuza residents	Gender	Percentage
26 707 people	Females	51. 82 %
24 829 people	Males	48. 18 %

Table 1 – The Gender Composition of KwaDukuza (Census, 2011).

KwaDukuza residents	*Population race groupings*	*Percentage*
Blacks	27 319 people	53. 01 %
Indians	22 535 people	43. 73 %
Coloureds	973 people	1.89 %
Whites	360 people	0.70 %
Other	349 people	0.68 %

Table 2 – The Racial Composition of KwaDukuza (Census, 2011)

According to figures 2 and 3, the population dynamics in KwaDukuza present a multi-racial populace. The population of KwaDukuza stands at 51 536 people (Census, 2011). The population is predominantly Black (27 319), followed by Indian (22 535), Coloured (973), White (360), and a minute fraction representing 'Other'. Anderson (2009) states that the 'Coloured' race grouping in South Africa is historically utilised to classify individuals of a mixed racial heritage. The Coloured race group originated in South Africa due to mixed or inter-racial marriages that took place before, during, and after the Apartheid era. People classified as 'Other' on table 2 constitute the minimum population figure of 349 people, or 0.68 %. Here, 'Other' refers to the small population of Pakistani, Chinese, Mozambique and Nigerian immigrants who reside in KwaDukuza.

6.3.2. The School – Penguin Primary School

Gender	**Boys**				**536**	**Girls**				**577**
Race	**Black**	**Indian**	**Coloured**	**White**	**Other**	**Black**	**Indian**	**Coloured**	**White**	**Other**
Total	420	109	7	0	0	481	87	8	1	0
Percentage	37	10	1	0	0	43	7	1	1	0

Table 3 - Learner Demographics at Penguin Primary School

The majority of learners in attendance at Penguin Primary School are Black students - 901 learners (80 %). The remaining 20% of learners are either Indian, Coloured or White. The Black learners come mostly from the surrounding townships, namely: Shakaville, Melville, Ntshawini, Maphumulo, Groutville, Thembeni and Doringkop. The scholars Harber and Muthukrishna (2000) provide a particularly dismal image of life in KZN townships, describing immeasurable social ills that manifest and persist in the residents' daily lives. These social ills include elevated stages of poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, rape, teen pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS which are al seemingly unavoidable facets of life. The latter fraction of learners meanwhile reside in the surrounding residential areas in KwaDukuza, such as Indian Village, Northlands Park, Sunny Park, Glenhills, Newtown, Rocky Park, with a few learners commuting from as far as Mandeni which is about a forty minute drive to the school.

Penguin Primary School does not have readily available transportation routes such as: taxi ranks, bus terminals or access to the train station. Thus, young boys and girls have to walk long distances before reaching the school grounds. Furthermore, I discovered that a majority of Penguin Primary School students do not reside with their biological parents, but rather with their extended families: grandparents, older siblings, uncles or aunts. Additionally, a large number of their biological parents work mostly from afar, in other cities within the KZN province and other provinces. Those learners who experience better socio-economic conditions primarily stem from backgrounds where their parents/guardians hold affluent positions at work - such as leadership and other managerial positions. However, the majority of the population of learners at Penguin Primary School come from a working-class socio-economic background. Some of their parents/guardians are professionals (teachers, nurses and so on), and other parents/guardians work as domestic workers and manual labourers (these learners are not totally disadvantaged, as they qualify for RDP homes, exemption to pay school fees, and have access to social grants etc.). However, there are a few parents/guardians who are completely unemployed and rely solely on social grants. Moreover, a new mall has been erected near Penguin Primary School, and the school building neighbours a busy main road and a dangerous highway which leads to the main entry and exit points in and out of KwaDukuza. There is a small percentage of learners who still walk home, as their place of residence is near the school, but most of the learners who attend Penguin Primary School need to travel via taxi, bus, train or a combination of these to get to school on a daily basis.

The first buildings you see as you enter the schoolgrounds house the main office block and staffroom**.** The next two buildings comprise junior primary classrooms - the first is for grades R to 3, and the second for intermediate and senior primary learners from grades 4 to 7. The school library is in a separate block and a separate building is designated for the school toilets. The school has three distinct 'fields' due to the land not being completely levelled out. These are, namely, the boys' ground, the girls' ground, and the 'long jump area'. The latter 'field' previously housed the sand pit, but the area is now being used for the planting of fruit trees in the hopes of growing a mini-orchard in a few years' time. The boys' ground is substantially larger than the girls' ground. The school also has a designated motor vehicle parking area and an entry point where a security guard keeps watch throughout the day. This ensures that there is a controlled entry and exit point into the school premises via an automated gate. Penguin Primary School have installed security cameras throughout the school blocks. The school has two entrances for learners, yet only a singular security guard. At times this poses a problem as the area behind the school, Indian Village, is notorious for its social ills (substance abuse, petty crimes, violent outbursts) and these inevitably manifest in the school even without learner involvement. Men have walked into the school and stolen teachers' personal belongings out of classrooms, two teachers have been threatened and their phones stolen, and in another incident in 2016 a classroom door was broken down with the teacher's belongings stolen.

The playground, taps, and toilets are shared by all learners from grades R to 7. The girls' and boys' toilets are separate but are located in one building. Behind the toilet building is a grassy area with a back exit to the Indian Village and surrounds. Learners will usually employ either exit, depending on their convenience. Certain transgressive schoolboys and schoolgirls play in the out-of-bounds areas, as these areas are not monitored by their teachers, leaving prefects in charge of keeping them in order. Various incidences of bullying and fighting regularly take place in these unmonitored areas. Former learners of Penguin Primary School and occasional passers-by are still free to stop at the fence to converse with the learners inside the school premises. The two playgrounds are mostly used during interval breaks and during physical education periods. During breaks and class time, playing in the corridors, schoolrooms, parking areas, and behind the school library - or any other school buildings - is prohibited for safety reasons. Additionally, a tuck shop is run from a small building within the school, of which the rent obtained generates extra income for Penguin Primary School. Snacks and other low-priced food items are sold, with the tuck shop remaining cognisant that the economic and social backgrounds of the learners are not alike. The school infrastructure remains fairly well

maintained. The electricity, fans, and plug-points all work sufficiently. Fortunately, Penguin Primary School has sufficient furniture to accommodate all its learners, and each classroom has its own bin, cupboard, teacher desk, and chair. The Junior Primary classrooms have chalkboards, while the Senior Primary has whiteboards. Additionally, each classroom has a bookshelf mounted on the wall to promote reading. Classrooms that are conducive to tutoring and promoting knowledge are endorsed by the schools' management teams. Thus, the majority of the classrooms have classically eye-catching and informative posters, as well as large educational charts mounted on the walls. The school library is rented out to a church group each weekend, an additional sub-let which generates more income for the school's expenses. It is here where the researcher set up to conduct the interviews and hold focus groups with the participants of the study.

Penguin Primary School educates learners from grades R to 7. At the time of collating data there were three classes for each grade - besides Grade R, which had two classes, and Grade 7, which had four classes. In keeping with Penguin Primary School's latest records during the period of data collation in 2018 there were, in total, 1113 learners at the school – 536 boys and 577 girls.

The table below depicts the learner population at Penguin Primary School, according to grade and gender:

Grades:	Number of Boys:	Number of Girls:	Total number of learners:
R	51	45	96
1	58	76	134
2	64	74	138
3	71	63	134
4	71	72	143
5	71	74	145
6	73	69	142
7	77	104	181
Total	**536**	**577**	**1113**

Table 4 – Penguin Primary School Population According to Grades and Gender.

Penguin Primary School has a male principal, a female deputy principal, and four departmental heads (three of whom are female). In the Junior Primary phase there are two heads of department, and in the Senior Primary phase there is one male and one female departmental head. There are a total of thirty teachers employed, with one teacher assigned to each class per grade. Only one teacher is a non-form teacher - this was required as the roll of learners eventually necessitated the employment of an extra teacher. Overall, Penguin Primary School comprises of twenty-eight female teachers and two male teachers, with a teacher-learner ratio which is approximately 1:36.

Below are their demographics:

Gender → Positions held	**Male**	**Female**	**Race groups→**	**Black**	**Indian**	**Coloured**
Principal	1				1	
Deputy principal		1			1	
Junior phase Hod's		2			2	
Junior phase teachers		12		5	6	1
Senior phase Hod's	1	1			2	
Senior phase teachers		12		2	10	
Total	**2**	**28**		**7**	**22**	**1**

Table 5 – Teacher Demographics at Penguin Primary School

The teachers employed at Penguin Primary School are paid by the South African state. There are four caretakers of the school, with one counsellor who intercedes in troubling matters and

counsels troubled/troublesome learners. Additionally, there is one ex-teacher who regularly volunteers and helps learners progress their reading skills in the school library; a rare one-on-one session which significantly helps struggling learners. Penguin Primary School offers a variety of sporting codes, such as soccer, cricket, netball, volleyball, chess, and table tennis, some of which are gendered, for instance cricket is only offered to the boys and netball only to the girls. In addition, there are three other schools nearby: a primary school which is adjacent, and two secondary schools that are in front of the estate. The researcher noted that this setting occasionally distracts the senior phase girls (grades 6 and 7) who aspire to be seen by the high school boys. Penguin Primary is a fee-paying public school. As of 2018, the school fees stood at R650-00 per annum. Learners whose parents/guardians are unemployed qualify for fee exemption, partially or fully depending on the details of income or lack thereof. The rest of the learners who can pay their school fees within the first term may obtain a R50-00 concession. However, many parents/guardians were unable to attain this concession. To keep the school fully functioning, fundraising initiatives have been held within the community, and support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is required. The school has a borehole, pump, and a JoJo tank which was sponsored by 'Gift of the Givers' in 2016 (Gift of the Givers is a South African non-governmental organization and disaster relief group. It offers disaster relief and response together with other humanitarian work). The main bills of the building, such as water, rates, and electricity, are paid for by the DBE, which also provides schoolbooks such as textbooks, exercise books and workbooks in addition to stationery for all learners each year. Learners may lose or damage these resources over the years, so their numbers tend to steadily decrease between provisions. At Penguin Primary School, most of the learners are within their age restrictions per grade. Nevertheless, there are a few learners who are old for their grade; for example; the oldest learner in the school is aged 14 and is in grade 7. This is due to a variety of social circumstances - one clear reason that has emerged, mostly from the researcher's observation, is that the absence of parental involvement in the lives of children inevitably has an enormous impact on learners' lives, conduct, and academic growth at school. In the following sub-section, the researcher will explain how access to the site was gained.

6.3.3. The process of gaining access to Penguin Primary School and to the 40 schoolgirl participants.

6.3.3.1. Privacy and discretion, voluntary participation, and informed consent/assent

Undertaking research in any given site or setting(s) requires careful attentiveness to the way one gains formal permission to study certain participants and otherwise obtains access to them (Yin, 2011). To gain entry or access to a site or setting, Yin (2011) emphasises that the fieldworker/s will need to seek permission and assistance from the seniors on the particular site or setting in question who may know more about the setting than they do. Attaining and maintaining access to a research site or setting is therefore a vital part of the process, as it allows the participants to be attentive to what is happening, and it also permits legal recognition for the researcher to be given access into an institution.

6.3.3.2. Permission

For this complex research study, the researcher ensured she took into consideration the feelings, wellbeing, and constitutional rights of the schoolgirl participants. The ethical clearance certificate was obtained on the 11th of July 2018 from the Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix A). The following code is the reference for the document: HSS/0589/018D. This is just the first step of the process, and it is followed in conjunction with the set of laws and rules of the university which pertain to conducting research that utilises human beings as subjects. In addition to obtaining consent from the university, the Department of Basic Education and the school itself had to also be sought out and re-assured through the research process. As such, written authorisation was also gained from the KZN Head of the Department of Education in the KwaZulu-Natal, as well as the Regional Director, in order to execute this research study. The letters of permission are attached. On the 17th of May 2018, permission was granted to conduct research with the schoolgirls at Penguin Primary School (See Appendix B). The principal of Penguin Primary School was then approached to sign a consent letter (see Appendix C). This letter fully described what the study entailed and what its aims and objectives were. The researcher then personally described to the principal of the school what the research study was about and what was needed and thereafter answered a few questions and concerns that he had raised. He was helpful and hospitable, and keenly signed the letter conceding to the researcher the right of scholastic entry into the school. The researcher happens to be a teacher at the very same school and was completely conscious of most of the actions in and around the school environment, making the ethnographic case study approach

that much easier. The researcher was already recognised and valued by the participants at the time of the study and had previously established a sociable and professional rapport with both the teachers and learners at the school.

6.3.3.3. Privacy and discretion

Privacy, in this context, means handling the data pertaining to the participants in a private and discrete manner. The schoolgirls were assured that their real names, in addition to the name of the real school, would not be exposed at any cost. The school principal, parent/guardian(s), and participants were all guaranteed that the resultant data would remain private, and every possible identifier would be substituted with pseudonyms. At this point, the principle of trust was an asset, as participants were assured that the researcher's credibility would not be broken for her personal advantage. Participants were assured that they would not be betrayed, either during the research process or via the published outcomes.

6.3.3.4. Voluntary participation and informed consent/assent

The schoolgirl participants were briefed on what their voluntary status entailed. They were cognisant of the fact that they could withdraw from the research study at any given time if the need arose. In addition, the principle of informed consent/assent was verbally explained to the participants. Acquiring voluntary participation and informed consent/assent both required explaining the research process adopted in full, in addition to describing the study's aims and objectives.

6.3.4. Sampling Procedure and Recruitment Strategy of Participants

Although this research sought to adopt a single-site case-study approach, it would have been impracticable to research the entire populace at Penguin Primary School. Best and Kahn (2006) explain a population as such to be a group of individuals with a minimum of one shared trait. For example, in this study, being learners at Penguin Primary School distinguishes this group of learners from other schools and individuals. As such, the whole school population would be too large a number for a research study of this specific scope. Such broad data would be too miscellaneous to simplify into tangible qualitative findings. Thus, it becomes essential for studies like this one to have a target population. Scholars Best and Kahn (2006) describe a target population as a particular group from whom findings may perhaps be generalisable. In this research study, the target population comprised the 40 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls who formed the crux of the data gathered.

Grade 7	Boys	Girls	Total population
	77	104	181

Table 6– Grade 7 Learner Composition at Penguin Primary School

To resolve the dilemma of a large sample size, it became vital to select a very specific sample from the entire target population that would constitute the source of the phenomena that would structure this research study. In this vein, Best and Kahn (2006) refer to a sample as a tiny quantity of the actual populace that is carefully and critically selected for observations and investigation. The main purpose of choosing a certain fraction of the entire population is to be able to more or less represent the thoughts, beliefs, and experiences that the entire population may also recognise in their own experience. This is identified as accurate sampling.

The advantage of using a sample is that it saves time and requires less resources and capital, as carefully choosing a sample to be studied is far less demanding than attempting to study the entire population of 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls (figure 8 illustrates that there are 104 school girls). Yin (2011) emphasises that this choice in selecting or sampling the population in specific units, in addition to their exact number, needs to be incorporated into the research study. So, for the purpose of this research study, 40 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls were chosen to participate.

Conversely, one disadvantage of this technique is that the findings which emanate from the selected sample cannot be strictly pertinent to the entire primary school population, as every age-group, gender, sexual orientation, and personal experience differs. Therefore, the conclusions of such findings cannot and should not be applied to the entire population, as this would leave a wide periphery for inaccuracies to materialise (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). 'Representativeness' is thus especially vital to the process of sampling for quantitative research because the sample selected must come to stand for the broader population being studied (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). But the key purpose of such research studies is just to understand a phenomenon or phenomena devoid of any need to apply the explicit results to the entire school population, and O'Reilly and Parker (2012) remind us that a wealth of representative data can be gained without ever negotiating on the soundness of the study. Therefore, in qualitative-based- research studies, it is vital to grasp a saturation point by probing for new data pending the acquisition of no new data from the group in question (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

Fox and Bayat (2007) state that transferability is far more substantial in qualitative research, as it allows for the researcher to do a comparison of the findings against other parallel contexts (Fox & Bayat, 2007). Moreover, by scrutinising the features of the chosen sample, they can formulate varied deductions regarding the features of the population from which it has emerged. Merriam (2009) emphasises two varieties of sampling: firstly, probability sampling, and secondly, non-probability sampling. The former permits the researcher to extrapolate the results of their study from their one sample to the entire population. In qualitative-based research studies, generalisation is not the goal, and thus this type of sampling is unnecessary for this purpose (Merriam, 2009). Within non-probability sampling, 'convenience', 'volunteer', 'purposeful', and 'snowball' sampling are all sub-category techniques (Merriam, 2009). For this research study, purposeful sampling was used, and I chose it because my aim was to gain insights into various phenomena centred on how 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls constructed their femininities in relation to their gender, sexuality, and experiences of violence. Merriam (2009) adds that it is vital for such a study to choose a sample from which the most data can be derived in order for more to be learned. Prior to using purposeful sampling, it was vital to first decide on the selection criteria most essential to choosing the participants and site of the research study. Thus, participants were chosen depending on the following criteria: participants had to be from Grade 7, and between the age-groups of 12 and 13-years-old. These were crucial factors, as the key objective of my research study was to discover how schoolgirls in that age-group constructed their femininities. The interview sample then ultimately comprised 40 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls.

Yin (2011) describes the best advantage of purposive sampling as being the ability to simultaneously glean the most pertinent and plentiful sets of data. Here it should be noted how purposive sampling can be differentiated from one of its complementary alternatives. Gibson (2010) explains that 'convenience sampling' means choosing certain data-collection participants, or a certain data site, purely because of its availability. In addition to utilising purposive sampling, convenience sampling was also used for this study, as mentioned above. Nieuwenhuis (2007) states that convenience sampling does not have a detailed academic purpose beyond being budget-friendly and undemanding of resources, whilst providing a modest and most straightforward access to the subjects of research. They go on to explain how such sampling not only relates to the selection of participants, but moreover the site itself. In this case, Penguin Primary School was purposefully chosen because it was a convenient setting

as the researcher taught at the school, which meant that it was an effortless drive to and from the research site devoid of sustaining any added costs or logistical time on travelling.

Penguin Primary School, is a big school, consisting of Grades R up till 7. It has 181 learners in Grade 7, of which 77 are boys and 104 are girls. To reach the goals of this research study, I initially circulated a total of 50 letters of assent in addition to consent to schoolgirls who were willing to participate. Most of them were primarily eager to partake in the study. However, only 40 signed letters were returned to the researcher. I began to draw on these 40 girls to constitute the total sample size. Receiving the consent and assent letters thereby granted me as the researcher access to observe and interview the Grade 7 schoolgirl participants.

6.3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Collecting primary data is the heart of qualitative studies. As Polkinghorne (2005) notes, it offers the final verification for what is being claimed by the researcher. The manner in which data sets are collected is significantly steered by the research questions they start with, the research design they conceptualise, and the research paradigm they work within. This research study additionally utilised the principle of triangulation to establish its validity and reliability, and this was achieved through the utilisation of diverse data gathering methods. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted beforehand. On top of this, non-participant observations, individual semi-structured interviews, along with focus-group discussion interviews were used as methods of collecting data.

6.3.5.1. Piloting

According to Simon (2011), a pilot study is a fragmentary study meant merely to test the research aims, objectives, questions, data-collection instruments and methods, and sample strategies in preparation for a larger research study. Pre-testing a research study can help the researcher in various ways. Simon (2011) advises that 10 % of the actual sample size be used. He further states that a pilot study is crucial to any study, given that it may save the whole endeavour from a so-far-unrecognised fatal flaw.

The pilot study for this research drew upon 20% (8 participants) of the actual sample size. This rehearsal period assisted the researcher greatly in terms of readjusting and refocusing the study. This empowered the researcher to ascertain that the aims, objectives, and questions as they initially appeared, did not tally. Saturation point was reached very quickly, as the semi-structured individual interview questions were not efficiently structured or well-enough aligned

to the aims, objectives, and questions most pertinent to the study. This reckoning can be put down as an enlightening learning experience - one where the researcher was still able to get a feel for the kind of data their participants were willing to divulge. This allowed the researcher to then restructure the interviews in a manner that was better suited to the larger aims of the study.

Participants	Sex	Race	Date of interview	Duration of interview
1. Mygirl	Female	Black	06/06/18	00:16:37
2. Siyethaba	Female	Black	08/06/18	00:11:51
3. Mandisa	Female	Black	12/06/18	00:13:54
4. Asanda	Female	Black	12/06/18	00:22:11
5. Zena	Female	Black	24/08/18	00:50:00
6. Amahle	Female	Black	27/08/18	00:21:56
7. Stombe	Female	Black	28/08/18	00:32:00
8. Ayanda	Female	Black	28/08/18	00:30:00

Table 7 – Details of Pilot Interviews

6.3.5.2. Observation

According to Urquhart (2015), observation can, at least at first, be a rather intrusive research method to adopt. However, it can still complement other investigation methods utilised in a research study. For my part, I used observation in conjunction with interviews - "When the researcher(s) examine and listen to relations or incidents as and when they transpire, this is referred to as observation" (Kumar, 2005). This was in line with Kumar, Marshall and Rossman (2006), who describe the technique as occurring when a researcher thoroughly records and notes behaviours in a site of study, the record of which is called 'field notes' (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This method of collecting data rests on the assumption that all human conduct ultimately reproduces the natural views, values, and cultures that individuals hold (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Scholars Wood and Griffiths (2007) alert us here to two kinds of observation: participant and non-participant observation. The scholars De Clerk et al., (2011, p. 8) define them as so:

- Participant observation is the data-collection technique that requires the researcher to be present at, involved in, and recording the routine daily activities of people in the field setting.

- Non-participant observation, or observation from a distance, refers to the researcher's long-distance observation of activities related to the topic of interest.

As such, the former refers to the researcher taking on a more dynamic role in the events as they occur (Kumar, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Wood & Griffiths, 2007), whereas non-participant observation suggests that the researcher plays no part in the proceedings, and that he/she/they, to a certain extent, observe from the side-lines (Kumar, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Wood & Griffiths, 2007). Additionally, Urquhart (2015) concurs with the scholars above when they reiterate that non-participant observation means "looking on", while at the same time not engaging in any active role.

Observational methods are variously valuable to researchers. Urquhart (2015) notes that, via observation, researchers are able to verify non-verbal expressions of emotions, establish who interacts with whom, and overall gain a feeling of how participants converse with one another. In contrast, it is essential to note that observation can also be particularly subjective. At any given time, the researcher has the option of pre-selecting what he/she wishes to incorporate, or else eliminate, in their transcription of occurrences over and above how he/she interprets those occurrences (Jones & Somekh, 2005). Thus, such subjectivity may threaten to compromise the validity or reliability of the new data being gathered. As such, several precautions were undertaken to reduce such risks in this study; such as triangulation of the data. This greatly helped to evaluate and compare the data collected by using the diverse methods adopted.

This research study utilised the technique of non-participant observation as one of its methods of collecting data. The motive behind this was due to its well-recognised virtue of objectivity (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005), and the fact that it permitted the researcher to study events separated from their direct involvement (Ritchie et al., 2013). In an endeavour to reach the aims of this research study, the researcher observed the 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirl participants outside the classroom environment day after day for several months. The researcher made sure to stand on the periphery, watching and writing field notes pertaining to the girls' behaviour as they carried out their daily routines. The rationale for this was the need to acquire additional, non-verbal data on how 12-13-year-old schoolgirl participants reproduced, and resisted, dominant gendered norms, in addition to how they instinctively made sense of their femininity, albeit their experiences of gender, sexuality and violence. They were observed out on the playground, whilst training for school concerts, collaborating on plays, enduring sports, and as

they arrived and departed the school grounds. Consequently, the researcher was able to jot down field notes to support the general analysis of the girls, both within their ordinary classroom setting, and as they went about their various other daily interactions and experiences. This provided a strong, dense foundation of understanding about Penguin Primary School, its code-of-conduct and its administrative processes. Moreover, it helped to link what was said in the interviews to what was actually observed at the school (Kumar, 2005).

It should be made clear that the researcher observed the schoolgirl participants through a post-structuralist feminist theoretical lens (Graff, 2012), and with the aid of its associated theories of alternative femininities and sexualities (Campbell & Mannell, 2016). In doing so, careful attention was placed on the dynamics that played out between these 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls in relation to the diverse ways in which they expressed their thoughts, feelings, and desires, and also how they used and were used by power through their expression of agency in their emerging sexualities, as well as how they reproduced and resisted the predominant rape culture present within and outside of the primary school.

Collating the field notes obtained via non-participant observation added to the rich data obtained and to the broad analysis of the study. As Swain (2006, p. 202-203) writes: "Describing what has been observed and noted must be compiled with as much care as possible." In reality, only a small portion of what we really observe will actually be written down, and therefore various feelings and unrecorded moments derived from portions of our memory will unavoidably encroach upon the production of the final analysis.

Many researchers have highlighted that the distinctive and crucial virtue of a poststructuralist feminist theoretical approach is its reckoning with the nuances of power (Cannon et al., 2015; Campbell & Mannell, 2016; Graff, 2012). By applying a power critique to contemporary notions of gender, sexuality, and violence, I was able to view schoolgirls as agents who have power and use power, but also as the ones most abused by power. In essence, this approach granted myself as the researcher a window of analysis into how power can be exercised and systematised that is far more sophisticated and relevant to the aims of the study than the conventional feminist perspective on patriarchal/hierarchical ideologies of power. This study focuses on 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls to illustrate how they go about deconstructing the binary categories for which they're socialised. This reveals the ways in which the negotiations of power affect both victims and perpetrators at any given time, and in any given situation. Post-structuralist feminist theory primarily uses a Foucauldian conceptual

understanding of power (1978). Michel Foucault emphasised how power manifests through a great terrain of interpersonal relations. In a similar manner, this study aims to portray how these Grade 7 schoolgirls used certain tactics and strategies on hand to negotiate the dynamics of power, starting from their particular social locations and circumstances. Using a post-structuralist feminist approach in this study is a means of illuminating the fact that women and girls ought not to be understood as merely defenceless victims, and that males are not the only ones to hold and exercise power. Women and girls do exercise their power, and through forms comparable to their male counterparts (Cannon et al., 2015; Foucault, 1978).

Along with this approach, I reviewed the physical setting of Penguin Primary School to provide a valuable factual context for the research study as a whole (Kumar, 2005). The participants' bodily language, facial expressions, and responses were informally observed as they continued their daily routines (over and above the interviews conducted (Mack et al., 2005)). A lengthy journal was kept documenting all semi-relevant events observed at Penguin Primary School. Nonetheless, one drawback arose from conducting these observations. The 'Hawthorne Effect' took place. This term refers to the research phenomenon which occurs when participants grow to be acutely aware they are being observed, and so begin to behave uncharacteristically to surprise the researcher (Anderson, 2009). Girls who would usually hang out with boys during the breaks quickly moved away from the boys whilst smiling politely. Here, I noted that since the girls were aware they were being observed, they clearly changed their behaviour on occasion to fit the mould of an ideal schoolgirl. However, I was still able to form a good working rapport with the Grade 7 schoolgirls, and they often visited me to authentically disclose their concerns and hardships. If they needed such things as tape, a few Rands spending money, or stationery items, they always felt comfortable enough to come to me for help. The 12-13-year-old Grade 7 schoolgirls gradually became used to my presence, and in most instances, they behaved as they normally would, allowing me to better understand and observe them.

6.3.5.2. Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

Cohen et al. (2006) emphasise that, "interviewing is a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting" (p. 29). Similarly, Berg states that the significance of questioning lies in the virtue that individuals "speak in their own voices and express their own thoughts and feelings" (2006, p. 96). Additionally, Schostak (2006, p. 54) states that, "[the] interview is a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of

the [life-world] of the interviewee with reference made to the analysis of the meanings of the phenomena described." Thus, the aim is to produce detailed data about a certain phenomenon or phenomena through recording and interpreting the construed meanings conveyed by the interviewees. Amassing such data sets can be accomplished in diverse ways, of which one-on-one consultations are perhaps the most common. This form, along with individual interviews and focus-group discussion interviewing, is also especially common (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Interviewing as a data-gathering method benefits the researcher greatly, in as much as it provides them with the data they seek in an efficient, prompt manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviews provide the chance for interviewees to offer clarifications on actions that may have been observed out of context, and lets the researcher put forward their own understandings of the meaning's individuals affix to various dissimilar situations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, interviews helped me to clarify what was said and what was done so that the correlation between words and actions could be noted more clearly. Edwards and Holland (2013) describe interviews as a methodological continuum that can be of a structured, semi-structured, or unstructured nature. The structured technique of interviewing is merely quantitative, whereas the semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews are predominantly qualitative in nature. Qualitative researchers prefer high-flexibility discussions and a lack of structure, as such interactions provide for rich, and in-depth, data. The structured interview is rigid - it is a survey with a series of pre-planned questions, raised in an identical order - and in the same manner as all other topics of the research study and its key rationale is for unbiased interviewers to gain similar data from a hypothetically big group of participants (Edwards & Holland, 2013). In contrast, semi-structured interviewing is, as and Rubin state more agile and "allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (2005, p. 88).

To achieve the goals of this research study, in-depth, individual semi-structured interviews with forty schoolgirls from Grade 7 were conducted. In preparation, an unrestricted plan of questions to discuss was prepared (see Appendix F and G). Kumar (2005) may classify this type of interviewing as structured interviewing, but it was never anticipated that all of the questions asked would be answered in a consistent way. Instead, the questions were utilised as a schematic guide and were meant to allow the participants to convey other pertinent issues, which were then picked up on and explored further. For this reason, Barbour and Schostak (2005) refer to this type of interviewing as semi-structured interviewing.

Beneath is a table that provides demographic details of the Grade 7 schoolgirls who were interviewed. Pseudonyms are used for all of the names:

Participants (pseudonyms)	Ages	Date of Birth	Race groups	Date of interviews	Duration of interviews	Residential addresses
1. Siyetaba	13	08/08/05	Black	15/10/18	00:41:39	Ntshawini
2. Mbally	13	13/10/2005	Black	05/11/18	00:52:23	Ntshawini
3. Nosipho	13	15/09/05	Black	29/10/18	00:29:57	Groutville
4. Ziyanda	13	13/02/06	Black	02/11/19	00:52:29	Shakaville
5. Malwande	12	27/06/06	Black	25/10/18	00:38:11	Ntshawini
6. Senamile	12	04/03/06	Black	10/10/18	00:33:11	Shakaville
7. Nosipho	12	10/03/06	Black	23/10/18	00:38:11	Ntshawini
8. Jaydene	12	31/05/06	Indian	16/10/18	00:33:59	Zamani Township
9. Amahle	13	23/10/2005	Black	27/08/18	00:32:00	Ntsahwini
10. Andiswa	12	22/01/2006	Black	16/10/18	00:32:01	Groutville
11. Mandisa	12	26/03/06	Black	11/10/18	00:27:10	Shakaville
12. Priscilla	13	17/09/05	Black	/11/18	00:34:0501	Groutville
13.Ayabonga	13	07/04/05	Black	12/10/18	00:41:33	Maphumulo
14. Yaka	13	08/08/05	Black	22/10/18	00:32:40	Groutville

15.Syble	13	11/09/05	Black	26/09/18	00:33:04	Stanegr Mnaor
16. Zipho	12	31/05/06	Black	14/11/18	00:34:15	Melville
17. Sihle	12	22/12/05	Black	09/10/18	00:45:10	Maphumulo
18. Ngema	13	12/03/05	Black	8/11/18	00:48:29	Ntshawini
19.Thembeka	12	06/02/06	Black	09/10/188	00:32/19	Melville
20.Kerina	12	27/02/06	Indian	01/11/18	00:54:50	Indian Village
21. Zenani	13	13/02/05	Black	20/08/18	00:42:12	Etete
22.Stombe	12	06/06/06	Black	28/08/18	00:32:00	Ntshawini
23. Anga	12	06/05/06	Black	8/11/18	00:34:48	Shakaville
24.Annastacia	13	24/11/05	Black	11/10/18	00:42:28	Thembeni
25.Asanda	12	20/05/06	Black	12/11/18	00:45:27	Shakaville
26. Inhle	12	15/12/05	Black	26/09/18	00:37:17	Maphumulo
27. Ayanda M	12	02/11/05	Black	15/10/18	00:43:15	Shakaville
28. OlwethuB	12	04/12/05	Black	11/10/18	00:33:11	Shakaville
29. Akhona	12	03/12/05	Black	13/11/18	00:30:57	Hillview Glenhills
30.Thobile	13	27/11/05	Black	04/09/08	00:20:00	Groutville
31. Manzi	12	14/08/06		08/10/18	00:31:49	Maphumulo

			Black			
32. Magwaza	12	31/06/06	Black	17/10/18	00:35:12	Thembeni
33. Jnane	12	22/04/07	Black	28/01/19	00:40:07	Gledow
34. Karuna	13	06/12/06	Indian	28/01/19	00:58:07	Stanger
35. Ansu	12	11/02/07	Indian	31/01/19	00:30:03	New Guelderland
36. Sbahle	12	10/01/07	Black	28/01/19	00:50:08	Groutville
37. Yolanda	13	11/09/06	Black	28/01/19	00:48:19	Melville
38. Amanda	12	18/01/07	Black	28/01/19	00:23:25	Glendale
39. Aphiwe	13	03/09/06	Black	28/01/19	00:20:25	Darnall
40. Allan	13	12/12/05	Black	04/09/18	00:29:57	Shakaville

Table 8 – Details of Semi-Structured Interviews Conducted

A voice recorder was employed to archive and verify the interviews. I gained the participants' permission to record every word spoken in the interviews, both for accuracy's sake and to permit time in between to write down extraneous notes. For instance, the girls' non-verbal reactions, facial expressions, and body language were all documented. These are all vital facets of interview data, as they help provide the evidence that indicates what the participants were actually thinking (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A day before the interviews were set to begin, I double-checked the voice recorder to make certain that it was in a functioning state (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Initially, some of the schoolgirls were apprehensive when they saw the recorder in use and became timid in response, but they quickly forgot that it was there and soon spoke excitedly. The interviews took place in the school's science lab. This was equipped with an air-conditioner, which just by itself made the schoolgirls eager to come join in and be interviewed (as the summers in KZN are known to be infernal). The windows were set high on the wall, which meant that nobody could gaze in or out, ultimately leading to fewer distractions.

This made the school lab an ideal setting for both the individual and focus-group discussion interviews, as it was a serene and comfortable environment with minimal disturbances (Mack et al., 2005).

Before commencing the semi-structured interviews, it was clearly and simply explained to the participants who exactly the researcher was. The rationale of the research study was then explained so that the schoolgirls would be able to negotiate it from their own perspectives. Mack et al. (2005) declare that it is imperative for participants to fully understand what endeavour the researcher is engaging them in, and, accordingly, that they are not coerced into doing something not in their favour, as this would be exceedingly unethical. All the schoolgirl participants were explicitly assured that their responses to the interview questions were personal. Furthermore, they could drop out at any stage of the process if they desired (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I carefully clarified every detail by asking them if they would grant me permission to conduct in-depth interviews. Once they agreed, the interview process began. Since the I was simultaneously teaching at Penguin Primary School and was used to interacting with the participants by this time, they immediately felt comfortable with me as an interviewer. This was vital for the sake of facilitating the breaking down of residual power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewees, seeing that such worries could impinge on the data the participants were willing to reveal (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). To achieve an authentic rapport with the schoolgirls, I also began by telling the participants the story of her own life. This technique worked well, and the girls gradually began to trust me enough as a researcher to divulge their intimate personal experiences regarding gender, sexuality, and violence in their own lives.

6.3.5.3. Focus Group Interview Discussions

Here, focus group interviews can be defined: "[A]n interviewing technique in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population - this group being 'focused' on a given topic" (Barbour & Schostak, 2005, p. 46). In terms of size, researchers claim that "a focus group consists of a small group of people, usually between six and nine in number, who are brought together by a trained moderator (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 115). This type of discussion usually provides a space for a moderately unified group to discuss and consider the enquiries presented by the person interviewing. A vital aspect of all focus group interview discussions is the potential interaction

between the group members. Indeed, this element is what differentiates the focus group from an individual interview. This method of data collection seeks to recognise how individuals' opinions are not formed perfectly autonomously but are somewhat influenced by the beliefs and reflections of others in their proximity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Such a method of collecting data is extremely suitable for gleaning some of the most valuable data from participants, as it is usually conducted in a more comfortable setting with a more informal approach of speaking. A topic or question is first offered by the researcher and then the participants can instantaneously give their opinions, dispute, discuss, concur, and deviate while the researcher guides the discussion. Holding the discussion in a focus group manner may even lead the discussion to snowball into insightful and unexplored avenues that the researcher can later probe into. The attention and pressure of the discussion is here not placed on one person only, such as in individual interviews. In focus-group discussion interviews, the participants are cosier and more relaxed, as they can always choose whether to speak or not (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). On the other hand, one defining drawback of using a focus-group interview is that some group members may therefore not feel obliged to contribute to the discussion at all, and their voices could subsequently be muted by others (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). Thus, it requires cautious planning from the researcher to carry out focus-group interviews successfully. This research study made use of five group interview discussions with Grade 7 schoolgirls. Eighteen of the schoolgirls who contributed to the individual semi-structured interviews joined in on one of the five focus group interview discussions held. The composition of each focus group was primarily dictated by the participants' own availability.

Below is a table providing the details of the focus group members:

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5
Nosipho	Priscilla	Ayanda	Ansu	Aphiwe
Siyethaba	Yaka	Akhona	Karuna	Sbahle

Senamile	Zipho	Thobile	Jnane	Amanda
Amahle	Annastacia	Sisanda		

Table 9 - Details of Focus Group Interviews

Before commencing with the focus group interview discussions, I composed a list of a few questions and topics to potentially be addressed in conversation (see Appendix G). This provided some structure to the groups' meetings and prevented any of the participants from becoming distracted (Gibson, 2007). The same school lab was used as for the individual interviews and these discussions were archived using a tape recorder. I had so far already established a strong rapport with the girls in the individual interviews, and thus they were immediately comfortable with me and familiar with the process. As a result, they were far more enthusiastic participants than in the one-on-one sessions, and there were no complications in addressing the topics at hand. As with the personal interviews, I explained to them fully the reasons behind the research study and proclaimed their freedom to exit the focus group at any stage during the discussion. The schoolgirls were then adequately informed that it was not compulsory for them to respond to any of the questions which made them feel uneasy. The focus group interviews usually lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour, contingent upon what and how much the schoolgirls had to divulge. Copious snacks were provided by me for all interviewees, as a gesture to show gratitude for their involvement and contribution to the research study.

Later, whilst reflecting on the focus-groups, I observed that the girls had behaved in a different manner than they had originally in their individual interviews. In the latter, some girls had been more informative, while others were reserved and timid. In the focus-group interviews many of the girls were obviously far more at ease and had opened up at length about what they had seen in relation to the phenomena at hand, both at Penguin Primary School, and beyond the classroom. They were also more actively involved in the project and even helped each other to introduce different incidents for discussion. Occasionally, a few of the girls were outspoken in their blaming of each other for various incidents. The girls could differ greatly in their private opinions, whilst also full agreeing with each other on some points (Cameron, 2005). Some used the opportunity of the study to show off and exaggerate their prowess (in whatever sense they valued) in front of the other girls. Overall, the focus group interviews added greatly to the data obtained from the individual interviews. They were especially useful when it came to examining the dynamics between participants, in addition to how they naturally influenced one another in the classroom and overall primary school environment (Cameron, 2005).

6.4. Triangulation

The conclusions of this research study were primarily supported through the procedure of triangulating the data which emerged from the various data collection methods. Such measures added to the study's credibility as well as its trustworthiness. Heale and Forbes describe how; "[T]riangulation originates in the field of navigation where a location is determined by using the angles from two known points" (2013, p. 98). Triangulation simply means using supplementary methods to accumulate data; the ultimate intention being to augment the trustworthiness of the findings. The blend of findings from various methods of collecting data provides a further diversified image of the results than either of the data collection methods could have generated in solitude (Heale & Forbes, 2013). The purpose of using triangulation in research studies, in particular, is to attempt to evade possible biases that may arise from the usage of a particular methodology. Thus, methodological triangulation remains one of the most widespread and efficient types of triangulation used in qualitative research studies (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

This qualitative research study made use of three dissimilar data collection methods as explained above. The key aim in converging the study's findings was to amplify the validity of the research through verifying the ways in which the schoolgirls reproduced and resisted dominant gendered norms, along with how they made sense of and experienced gender, sexuality, and violence in the construction of schoolgirl femininities. However, although triangulation is meant to incorporate richness, as well as depth, into a research study, there are still numerous faults to be accounted for with any usage of triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). For instance, some authors have criticised the use of triangulation because it implicitly takes for granted the idea that the data emanating from diverse research methods are alike. Thus, when two or more data collection methods diverge in findings, researchers must be cautious in interpretations. However, despite such points, triangulation is thought to encourage a more inclusive understanding of the phenomena investigated, in addition to enhancing the overall rigour of a certain research study (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

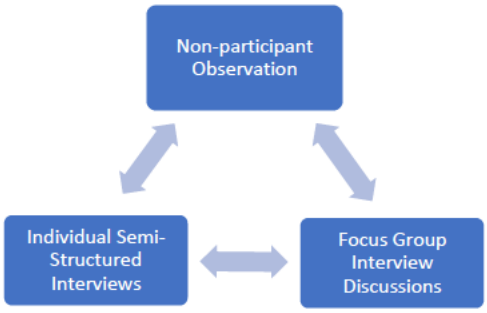

Figure 3 – Depiction of data triangulation

Section 3

6.5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Cohen et al., (2006) mention how data analysis is a process which involves the organisation, accountability, and rationalisation of the data derived in a study in regard to the participants' descriptions of the phenomena – noticing a common thread of patterns, themes, regularities, and contradictions. The main aim of this research study was to subsidise the existing body of knowledge on young schoolgirls' femininity, sexual agency, and the prevalence of rape cultures in South African educational institutions, particularly in the primary school setting. Previous findings on the topic were revisited and built upon. Other scholars have described data analysis as a way of generating and validating declarations made by participants regarding the diverse themes and relations established in the data sets (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This research study primarily utilised the thematic technique of analysis to evaluate data. Here, Braun and Clark define thematic analysis as "a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality" (2006, p. 81).

To analyse any data that emanates from a research study, the information needs to be presented in its raw form, so that links can be self-evidently derived from what was definitively observed, heard, and understood throughout the data compilation process. After the collection of the data for study was complete, the I had the recordings transcribed by an experienced transcriber. Thereafter, the recordings were examined, carefully listened to and the transcriptions were finally read over to guarantee that the capturing process was accurate. Subsequently, the data was sorted through a process called 'open-coding'. Here, the data was categorised under diverse themes, as well as logical sub-themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This was accomplished by simply combing through the data and recognising the emergence of different themes in

conjunction with the participants' responses, all of which mirrored the immediate meanings that the participants had wished to articulate and communicate to the researcher in conversation. The sub-themes were then worked out as a development of the main themes under which the responses of the participants were inserted. These themes were finally analysed in the analysis chapters. Liamputtong (2009) specifically defines thematic analysis as being a means to uncover and analyse common themes in a given set of data. Here, analysing the data denotes the researchers' efforts to make sense of, and interpret, the phenomena at hand with regards to the meanings that the participants themselves had conferred on them (Creswell, 2009). This type of analysis was valuable to the purpose as it provided a deep and comprehensive elucidation of the data that was obtained from the research study.

Below is a flow diagram which outlines the research design, process, and methodology utilised to reach the objectives of this research study:

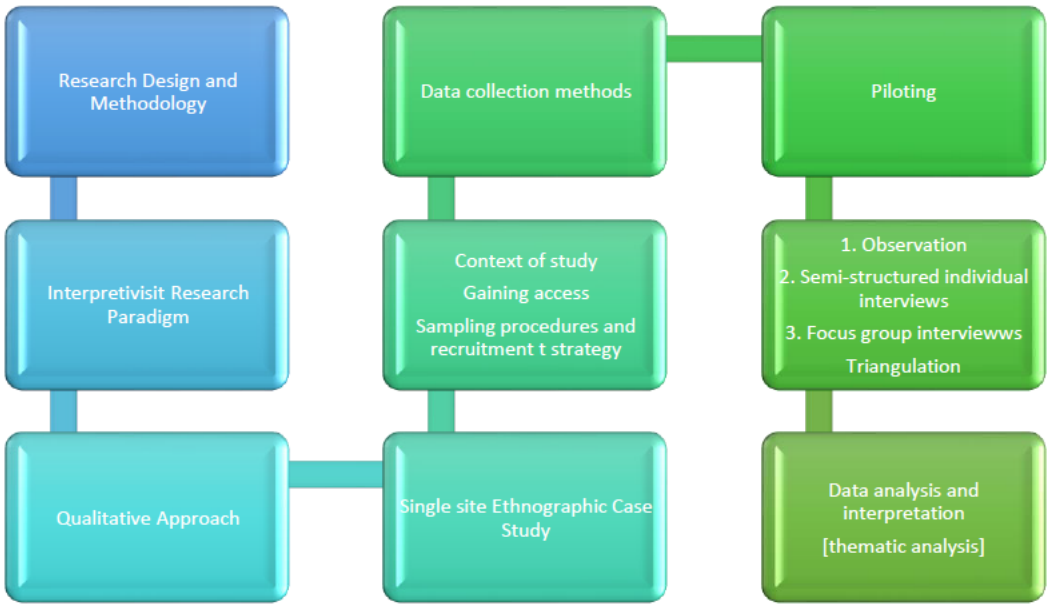

Figure 4 – A table summarising the research design and methodology utilised.

6.6. A Note on Ethical Considerations

Research studies of a qualitative nature have certain universal imperatives: to be ethical, to be comprehensibly described, and to utilise suitable and rigorous data collection methods (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). In quantitative research, replicability is the fundamental goal. On the other hand, as Cohen and Crabtree (2008) note, when qualitative data is gathered for the sake of finding answers to questions of delicate or socially taboo meanings (or to encapsulate real-life experiences) the findings which result are seldom one and the same between individuals.

Hence, it is particularly crucial for us as researchers to co-operate with the human resources and data at our disposal in a most ethical manner. Kumar (2005) here defines ethics broadly as 'behaviour that is deemed to be correct and does not harm anybody'. In any form of research, ethics serves an imperative role in warranting that no harm is caused in the process of seeking knowledge, especially to young children whom the knowledge is meant to help and defend.

6.6.1. Achieving ethics

As mentioned above, to gain access to the research site and schoolgirl participants it was first crucial to apply for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (Appendix A) and from the Department of Basic Education (Appendix B). Once these were granted, permission from the principal at Penguin Primary School was required (Appendix C). Lastly, once the administrative documentation was complete, access was gained, and thereafter I met with the schoolgirls, handed out consent forms for their parent/guardian(s), and assent forms for the girls themselves to sign respectively (see Appendix D and E). This is because children are not emancipated under the eyes of the law (Piper & Simons, 2005).

It is vital to note though that research ethics does not merely apply to the research participants, but also to the researcher of a study. Avoiding bias, for example, is one way in which a researcher can endeavour to be ethical (Kumar, 2005). In line with this, I did my best to ensure that the findings were not concealed or distorted in any way. I also sought to use the most appropriate methodology for this research (Kumar, 2005). Prior to selecting the research methods, I studied the diverse range of techniques that can be used in qualitative studies. Having built up substantial knowledge of these methods and their advantages and disadvantages, I proceeded to select the best methods to suit the research at hand. Here, Kumar (2005) adds that the researcher should not inappropriately use the information that s/he collects. In compliance with this, I made all the relevant promises not to divulge any of the data provided by the schoolgirls with the other girls, or with boy learners, teachers, or the principal of the school. Furthermore, I did not use the information against them, as to do so might cause harm to them and their fellow participants. The data that was finally collected will henceforth be reserved in a safe location for a period of 4-5 years, before being discarded.

6.6.2. Ethical principles

Piper and Simons remind us that it is crucial for researchers to uphold the ethical principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence (2005).

6.6.2.1. Autonomy

Accordingly, the ethical principle of autonomy, as Piper and Simons (2005) highlight, provides that participants must freely partake in any study and should be able to pull out at any point if they so desire. By giving out informed consent and assent forms, respect for participants was demonstrated and so their autonomy was guaranteed. I also created a relaxing setting at the school lab with a casual ambience, in which participants attested to feeling comfortable. This meant they were able to talk without restraint if they cared to. The schoolgirls were also repeatedly assured that their participation in the research study was purely professional and voluntary; they could exit the study if they desired to, and they were not obligated to respond to any questions which made them feel uncomfortable. Moreover, I placed an excessive importance on the fact that their anonymity would be preserved at all times in the process, and that their actual names would not appear at any point in the research study. A mobile tape recorder was employed to record the interviews conducted, and to obtain verbatim responses. The schoolgirls provided explicit permission to record the interviews.

6.6.2.2. Non-maleficence

Piper and Simons states that non-maleficence simply refers to the fact that research participants ought not to be harmed whatsoever throughout the process of research (Piper & Simons, 2005). Before beginning with the semi-structured individual interviews and focus-group discussions, I made my own role in the research study apparent to the students before explaining what the undertaking the study represented and what would be required from them to assist the endeavour. This was conducted in a manner that they could understand. It was made blatant from the beginning that partaking was purely voluntary, to guarantee that no participants felt pressured in partaking in the research study. The underlying principles of the research study, along with the schoolgirls' roles in the research study, were explained in full. Participants' actual names, and the actual name of the school itself, would remain unknown so as to facilitate sheltering their confidentiality. Pseudonyms were utilised as substitutes. Occasionally, current news reports on gender issues in South Africa were mentioned. By employing such free-form methods, participants were able to unwind and feel at ease. Equal respect was bestowed upon all the schoolgirl participants, although some ground rules were presented. All these methods together helped to ensure that the schoolgirl participants could speak openly, free from any fear

of being judged, or blamed. In so doing, I facilitated the study so that the data could be as truthful and as free of harm as possible under the circumstances.

Prior to commencing with the focus group interview discussions, I declared the group a 'safe space'. Thus, whatever was said would not be spoken of, or about, to anyone else beyond the lab. This quickly gave the girls the self-confidence to speak freely, and, in addition, it prevented secondary victimisation. Participants were advised to approach the school guidance counsellor if they felt victimised at any stage for what they had said during the focus group interview discussions. According to Adams and Cox (2008), trust and privacy constitute the crucial factors of research ethics. Equally, interview questions were always made understandable to participants. The words used were straightforward and clear, all to increase participants' trust in me as the researcher. I also made sure to provide extra information when required. This further increased the sense of trust between myself as the researcher and participants.

6.6.2.3. Beneficence

Lastly, beneficence affirms that the research study ought to be of some use or benefit to the community or environment it centred upon, or else it should generate constructive transformation in one way or another (Piper & Simons, 2005). I that the transferable data gleaned from this research study will be used to help design initiatives to better understand and support young femininities and schoolgirls' agency (both sexual and otherwise), and to directly tackle the spread of rape culture in schools (Adams & Cox, 2008). In addition, schoolgirls must be recognised as not merely 'living' through violence, in the same way that they do not merely live as powerless victims. These girls must be viewed as autonomous beings that grasp the value of their agency (Campbell & Mannell, 2016).

The paramount aim of this study was to illustrate both the nature of primary schoolgirls' reproduction of, and resistance to, dominant gendered norms and reveal how they made sense of, and currently experienced, gender, sexuality, and violence in the construction of their schoolgirl femininities in the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. This study aimed to further broaden the academic spotlight on young schoolgirls' sexual agency and the prevalence of rape culture in South African primary schools, to recognise and address an embryonic area of younger girls' femininities and agency.

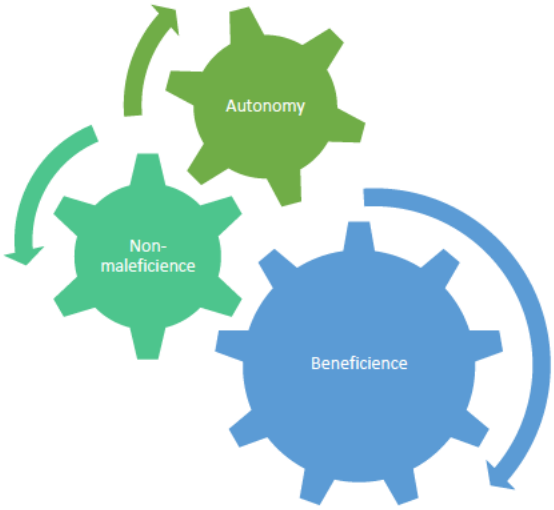

Figure 5 - Ethical principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence

6.7. Issues of Trustworthiness

6.7.1. Rigour

Yin reminds us: "[W]hichever view you embrace, and however you end up analysing your data, the most important part of the scenario is the part about [its] rigour" (2011, p. 177). A research study can achieve this rigour by exercising three vital precautions: firstly, by checking and rechecking the accuracy of the data that emerges; secondly, by making the analysis section as detailed and inclusive as possible; and lastly, by constantly acknowledging the redundant biases inflicted by one's personal values when analysing the data (Yin, 2011). Scholars Twycross and Shields (2005) define rigour for us as the manner in which the research study has been planned and accomplished, and whether or not it has followed a complete and dependable process. In attempting to accomplish complete rigour, White et al. note that the researcher should inspect the credibility, in addition to the dependability and trustworthiness, of the research study step by step (2012).

6.7.2. Dependability

A robust procedural description is vital in this regard. This entails the underlying rationale of the research study, the manner in which it has been conducted, the various procedural decisions along the way, the fine points of how the data has been collated and analysed; all such aspects should be communicated as clearly as possible (Kitto et al., 2008). Any reviewer ought to be able to track this sequence of measures, as well as the decisions made by the researcher, and

then be able to easily recognise the logic applied due to a sufficient depiction and explanation of the research design and methodology utilised (Kitto et al., 2008).

Accordingly, I ensured that this study was trustworthy by carefully choosing participants in an unprejudiced way. Additionally, the data was presented truthfully, fairly, and in full. To accomplish this purpose, verbatim answers were reproduced within the three analysis chapters. Regarding the matter of trustworthiness, I included schoolgirl participants of various different backgrounds (socio-cultural groups). Consequently, I ended up with a rich data set that could be intricately analysed for its underlying themes. Forty schoolgirl participants engaged in the study, as this was deemed enough to reach a point of saturation whereby no more new data could possibly be derived from the study's participants (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

To ensure the study's dependability, a reflective journal was kept which recorded a self-critical description of the factors that influenced the study; such as the researchers' emotions, thinking processes, and beliefs, all of which accounted for the need for self-reflexivity (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Morse and Richards (2002) state that dependability is particularly vital because it alone supplies the validity of data. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) comment that 'dependability' should not simply imply that equivalent findings will emerge from other contexts. Nonetheless, other researchers could also discover comparable patterns of data that assumed the contours of similar studies. To ensure that their data is dependable, researchers must attempt to seek out the utmost differences in the explanations and experiences of a particular phenomenon or different phenomena - not only to shed light on them but to pre-emptively refute any accusations of narrow researcher expectations.

6.7.3. Validity and Reliability

McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 407) define validity as the "extent to which the interpretations and concepts [of a study] encompass communal meanings linking the participants to the researcher". In contrast, Silverman (2004, p. 285) defines reliability as "the extent to which the findings of the research study are self-regulating of unplanned conditions." In other words, if the findings of a research study can be deduced utilising methodologies which are comparable, it is at this point that the methods may be deemed reliable. An in-depth outline of this research study's methodology and methods has thus been presented with the aim of safeguarding the validity, as well as the reliability, of this study.

6.8. Researcher Self-reflexivity

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) emphasise that in qualitative-based studies, the paradigm is set whereby the researcher is seen to be the instrument or tool of research, and the subjects are the participants whose inputs inform the basis of their data interpretation and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) go on to clarify that researchers should prove the credibility of their studies through a process of self-reflexivity. Yin (2011) notes that this species of reflection should always represent, and take cognisance of, the ongoing influence of the researcher on the research study.

In qualitative-based research studies, the researcher is primarily the main tool for collating all data and thus, whether intentionally or unintentionally, their subjectivity will impact how the data is collated and analysed. A researcher's non-verbal communiqué, which correlates to their unconsciously performed emotions, could influence what participants choose to disclose during interview sessions. Self-reflexivity is therefore a modus operandi meant to address the humanity of the researcher with care, as they are the fallible human instruments that make qualitative research studies possible (Tracy, 2010). Moreover, self-reflexivity can be referred to here as a special procedure with which to reflect significantly on the identity of the researcher implicated in the research process (Lincoln et al., 2011). Researchers who are self-reflexive are open about the strengths and weaknesses they have demonstrated during the course of the study, and they will ideally seek to scrutinise their own effect on the entire research situation and make notes of how others respond to their involvement in the course of the project (Tracy, 2010). Thus, in keeping with Lincoln et al. (2011), the researcher guaranteed that the assumptions, expectations, behaviours, emotional reactions, and silent responses were all extensively recorded in a journal.

Self-reflexivity guarantees rigour, good quality work, and trustworthiness (Teh & Lek, 2018). A clear description of the researcher's background, not only enhances the credibility of the data and analysis (Berger, 2015), but also serves to deepen the reader's understanding of the meanings of the overall work. Along with the self-reflection, I also clearly addressed all the research design and methodological steps undertaken. Here, transparency was a critical element of the study (Dodgson, 2019). For instance, within this chapter I describe the choices I made throughout the study's formulation, always keeping in mind my positionality. Below is a section in which I reflect on my position within the study.

6.8.1. Reflecting on my PhD journey

To understand this thesis, and to make sense of my approach, I thought it was vital to convey a little about myself as a writer and researcher. Going beyond my name and professional affiliation, I include my personal background. I found this reflection difficult to write initially as I thought myself to be just a conservative 'Indian girl' doing research on femininity. Why would my life story be of interest to the readers? It was only during, and after, reading my research and the analysis of this thesis that I realised I could not exclude myself from the study. I was part of the study, fully immersed and inclusive in it, as is the nature of ethnographic studies. While this thesis is about the forty 12-13-year-old grade seven schoolgirls, it is also certainly about me.

I was born on the 4th July 1990. Both my parents were employed at that time. My dad was a truck mechanic and my mother had been a sales-lady at a local spare shop. I have an elder brother. My mother was the home caretaker, disciplinarian, and the one who ran the household. My father suffered from perpetual bouts of alcoholism. In 2007, I lost my mother to cancer, when she was 43. This was the first traumatising experience of my life. I was in the first term of my matric year (final year of schooling). I felt despondent for a very long time afterwards. My mother's passing posed many challenges for me throughout my late adolescence and then followed me into adult life. However, my mother taught me to always be gracious, decent, sincere, and hardworking. She always maintained the importance of education.

Our paternal home was one where gender roles prevailed. It was the duty of the female to complete the household chores. My father has battled with alcoholism throughout his life, so accommodating my father's substance-abuse was a daily regime. Life, for me, has always been more about surviving than actually living. I am hopeful that will change one day.

As a conservative, typical Indian female, I chose the route to study as an escape from what I could not change in my life. Through studying I was able to escape from a reality I had no control over and had gotten a chance to progress in my career. I completed my undergraduate degree in 2011, my Honours degree in 2017, my Masters degree in 2018, and thereafter I registered for my Doctorate in Gender Education. In the first year of my PhD I had experienced a heart-wrenching dissolution of a relationship that I had been in for over a decade. This loss was the second most traumatising experience I have had to endure in my life. However, it has enabled me to restructure and review my entire life-path and choices.

As a young schoolgirl, I had my mother's support until her demise when I was 16. But I still feel I needed her to be around, to teach me about self-love, life, and relationships. Similarly, young primary schoolgirls need every bit of emotional, mental, spiritual, physical and academic support and guidance they can get at a young age so they can feel fulfilled and make educated life decisions now and for their futures. This will help them rise from any situation or circumstance they may find themselves in. Just as many social and structural factors affected my life, young girls also encounter these difficulties and need to be carefully guided and supported.

Social, cultural, and economic complexities infringe on our lives one way or another. As an independent Indian woman today, I myself exemplify female agency, and whilst I am not the epitome of it, I am still a work in progress, as are young primary schoolgirls' identity constructions. I could have easily succumbed to my situation. I had not been a passive girl then, and I see this again with the girls of today. I have noticed the schoolgirls whom I interviewed carefully selected different qualities of femininity that suited them and benefitted them, and very carefully moved away from that which was not deemed useful in and to their lives. I was grateful to observe.

6.9. Challenges and Limitations

All research studies have limitations, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out. This research study is no exception. Firstly, its findings cannot be generalised and are linked purely to the context at hand. Scholars McNeil and Chapman (2005) declare that qualitative research studies are usually too multifaceted to substantially simplify, as they remain fundamentally subjective and the participants are often selected purely by their ability to meet specific criteria. This statement implies that research studies like this one seldom, if ever, represent an entire population. An additional restraint of this research study was its duration. In some cases, participants were called back to class, or the bell rang after lunch break, signalling the impromptu end of an interview. As a result, some questions that would have been asked under perfect conditions may not have been put forward. This was overcome by taking the time to call participants back at a later stage to finish incomplete interviews and focus-group discussions. In addition, multiple sessions with narrower time frames had to be held, as they solely depended upon the accessibility of the schoolgirls at that certain period.

Consequently, one of the confines of the research study was the availability of schoolgirl participants, because interviews and focus groups required time to be taken out of their usual

school days and thus may have otherwise impinged upon their class schedules. I overcame this by offering to conduct the interviews after school and during periods where formal assessments were completed for the term. I also offered to swap classes with other teachers and serve as a relief overseer in order to conclude the interviews with the participants.

However, still, not all the schoolgirl participants made themselves available for the focus group discussion interviews. Gorman and Clayton (2005) back up the idea that various drawbacks are connected to focus-group interviews. They note how it is particularly difficult to gather together all voluntary participants simultaneously, as many may not arrive on time for the group sessions. Additionally, participants who are loud and distracting may obscure other members' contributions during group discussions (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). In this case I found that due to the particular power dynamics of the focus group interview discussions, some participants agreed with the responses of the other participants, although they did not actually concur in private. Moreover, it was somewhat difficult to find a group of girls who could engage as a group. The type of questions that were asked may have been limiting, as some participants may not have felt totally comfortable providing answers to these questions. This was partly overcome, as I've said, by making it clear from the beginning that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not want to. The principles of anonymity, as well as confidentiality could also have been affected if their names or similar names were disclosed in the data analysis sections. This was also pre-emptively overcome by ensuring that pseudonyms were utilised for each and every name so that the schoolgirls could not be identified and thus could not be judged based on their revelations. In addition, none of the other adults involved at Penguin Primary School would have any knowledge of, or right of use to, the data collected, and transcriptions was done by an external professional transcriber so that confidentiality was completely guaranteed.

On the other hand, as much as there are numerous advantages of utilising an ethnographic case study approach, disadvantages may also surface. Being a teacher at the school had many advantages for me as the researcher, such as, easy access to the grade 7 schoolgirls during the mornings, after school, when they were free, during the lunch breaks, savings in terms of travelling to the field to actually carry out the fieldwork. Moreover, as a teacher and researcher - the girls could relate to me as they would refer to me as a sister or a friend and in this way I could easily break down researcher dynamics by talking about fashion trends, latest music. The young girls would always come up to me to comment on my clothes and accessories which was trendy and spoke of how they too like wearing similar stuff – and I used this connection

with them to break down researcher barriers. However, it was still evident that the girls often spoke in the third person narrative. While some girls did speak of their experiences, I did gather that some girls felt guarded and so spoke about others and very minimally about their own experiences and encounters. The data gained was substantial and in-depth, therefore through the schoolgirls accounts despite at times being spoken in the third person narrative I was able to provide an in-depth analysis.

Merriam (2009) states that while a rich and dense data description and analysis is usually required, researchers might not always have the time, physical energy, or funds to follow up such undertakings. Additionally, as Best and Kahn (2006) note, subjective bias rears its head as a continuous peril to the aims of objective data collation, as well as the analysis process as a whole (Best & Kahn, 2006). It is vital to note that ethnographic case-studies can also be constrained by the basic levels of understanding and honesty that the researcher brings to the study (Merriam, 2009). In this case, I backed up the recordings and transcripts for future reference should any discrepancies later arise. Sometimes access to research papers, individuals, and settings can perhaps lead to ethical reflections and considerations such as concerns around discretion (Meriam, 2009). At this point, I had composed one co-authored book chapter from the data that has arisen from this research study. Most of the students who attend Penguin Primary School are African learners, and thus another constraint of the study was that many of the schoolgirl participants were second-language English speakers, and some experienced difficulties in understanding some of the interview questions. As such, at times, some participants could not satisfactorily answer certain questions. I overcame this issue by immediately adapting the words employed to attain a simpler level of understanding, and then repeated the questions in several different ways. I also went on to provide various accurate definitions of particular words and phrases. For instance, some participants did not comprehend what the terms heterosexual and homosexual meant initially. However, when the term was defined, they quickly understood it and were able to allude to many instances of its effect in their own lives.

Adams and Cox (2008) note how, through triangulation, researchers are usually able to conquer the flaws or inherent preconceptions that emerge from qualitative methods, especially when data is drawn from only a small pool of observations. They declare that utilising an assortment of methods specifically helps avoid the limitations of any single method. One more way to further validate the results from a qualitative study is then to acquire multiple data sources,

utilise more current theories, and draw upon multiple methods. Hence, this research study utilised various methods to collect and triangulate the data obtained.

6.10. Conclusion

In summation, this chapter has critically examined the motivation for the research design and methodology employed to accomplish this research study. This research study is a qualitative ethnographic case-study that explores the lives of young schoolgirls as they negotiate gender, sexuality, and violence. The study explores how these girls have sexual desires, and how they find themselves free to live in a heterosexual matrix while at the same time facing oppressive gender relations in their final year of primary schooling. Purposive and convenience sampling methods were utilised to carefully choose the participants, and the data collection methods employed were semi-structured individual interviews, non-participant observations, and focus-group interview discussions. The data was analysed thematically, and all ethical principles were upheld throughout the research study. The self-reflexivity of the researcher has been taken into account too.

Chapter 7

Schoolgirl femininities: Respect and Resistance

7. 1. Introduction

This is the first of three analysis chapters - the aim of this chapter is to illustrate the ways in which primary schoolgirls articulate the meanings they interpret about their feminine position within gender relations. How schoolgirls describe and understand the racialised and class-divided experience of their femininities should provide critical insight into the realities of their lives in school, in their families, and in the broader social and cultural context which continues to grant pre-eminence to an emphasised femininity based on female subordination and unequal gender relations. Connell coined the term 'emphasised femininity' to describe a kind of femininity that is based on compliance and is "central to the pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support; oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (1987, p. 183). This precise understanding of femininity informs the analysis throughout this chapter. The latter is set against two contradictory gendered narratives in South Africa. On the one hand, 'celebratory femininity' upholds a post-Apartheid version of girls' educational success and is potentially underlined by girls' power and agency. On the other, girls' experiences of femininity are said to occur within the wider context of undergoing continuous exposures to rape culture and the dominant cultural norms which pervade both their family and their school. Thus, this chapter sheds light on how schoolgirls alternately reinforce and resist dominant gender norms in the process of fostering various expressions of femininity. Moreover, it brings to the forefront the complex relationships between existing structures, inert institutions, and girls' socio-cultural positionings.

The analysis in this chapter comprises two main themes - 'Proper girls: Reinforcing Respect', and 'Resisting Proper Girls'. These sub-headings reveal how the girls in this research study reinforced and/or resisted the dominant gender norms prevalent to their environments. The first discusses how girls shape and are shaped by the dominant ideologies prevalent within their families and cultures - by the time girls go to school, they have already been thoroughly exposed to a set of gender and cultural norms as constructed and reinforced within the family environment. These family norms are usually highly hetero-patriarchal, which, as the data shows, nearly always has lasting repercussions on schoolgirls' identity constructions. Indeed,

the gender norms which dominate the realms of family, community, culture, and society most often serve to instil messages that reproduce an emphasised femininity premised on male power, cultural norms, and assumptions of girls' vulnerability and victimhood. Whilst these are obviously not the only messages most girls receive; such norms do succeed in positioning them within subordinate gender roles. However, theme 2 points out that girls do have, and utilise, the ability to exercise their personal agency in response. While the domains of family, community, culture, and school are extremely powerful in setting the parameters of acceptable femininity, schoolgirls do very often contest those parameters, rather than merely (re)producing them.

7.2. Proper girls: Reinforcing Respect

At Penguin Primary School, girls spoke of how they had been disciplined to carry themselves in public in 'a proper manner':

> Andiswa: It ['proper'] means like ma'am, the way you speak … should be in a good, respectful manner.

From Andiswa's perspective, behaving respectably had been equated for her with a form of 'proper feminine behaviour' – a view that closely resonates with Sennott and Majola's (2017, p. 788) study of schoolgirl behaviour in South Africa, which listed respectable behaviours such as: "talking well, respecting others, being humble, avoiding gossip...". The implicit point being that respect would only be gained by a woman if they 'reciprocated' this type of behaviour. It appears that idealised respectability is specifically stringent for girls in their relations with boys. This is also noted by Jewkes and Morrell (2012), who argue that 'respectability' as a criterion for proper girl femininity can be interpreted as a nascent version of social control, whereby girls may only gain respect through following behaviours that align with expected norms. A respectable status becomes dependent on the whims of their society. Schoolgirls like Andiswa are made aware that an adherence to sociocultural norms is vital to their survival, thus reinforcing and maintaining unequal gender relations (Bhana & Anderson, 2013a, b). Another factor that is just as integral as respectful speech is the distribution of household chores:

> Kerina: I am supposed to help my mother in the kitchen and clean the house and my brother must do the gardening and fixing the things. A boy is not supposed to be in the kitchen, my granny always told me a boy is meant to be in the garden

> or fixing things and a girl is meant to be in the kitchen to support her husband and child.
>
> Ayanda: At home we respect my father a lot, he's the head of the house, we respect him, and it is our culture [IsiZulu] to do so. At home while I clean the house, cook food, and wash clothes, my brother has to clean the yard and wash the car.

What these quotes depict is that we can see the family household as a space in which discourses concerning the roles of girls and boys emerge. From the brief narratives above, a gendered discrimination in the division of household labour becomes tangible, as Kerina and Ayanda both speak of how they are subjected to duties that are socially constructed as feminine. Despite substantial research (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006; March et al., 2016) highlighting the ongoing shift of traditional gender roles - where women are increasingly gaining entry to male-dominated fields of work - the findings suggest that the majority of schoolgirls still showed deference to the regulation of gendered chores. They knew which chores were acceptable for them (housework, cooking, washing clothes) and that they contrasted to those of boys (cleaning the yard, washing the car, gardening, fixing things). It is important to note that the gendered chores the girls were expected to execute were never incidental - rather they were reflective of the favoured forms of hegemonic femininity in which behavioural injunctions are regulated by the elderly. This is clearly seen in the case of Kerina's grandmother: "[A] girl is meant to be in the kitchen to support her husband and child." Such assertions show how dominant discourses construct the roles of 'mother' and 'nurturer' through a process stemming from norms that are deeply generational and patriarchal. As girls invested in the performance of their chores, they simultaneously accumulated the expectations of hegemonic femininity that would help them navigate the gendered roles of adulthood where dominant discourses would require them to be motherly, supportive, and domesticated, whilst the boys would receive no such stringent instructions (Chantelois-Kashal et al., 2020). Hence, submitting to gendered chores would help steer the girls into womanhood and reinforce the traditional norms that sanction such inequitable behaviours within the binary. As such, the dominant discourses on gender roles also prevent men from engaging in more 'feminine' chores and help reinforce their own traditional roles as providers and disciplinarians (Wall & Arnold, 2007).

The girls' adherence to these stipulations was viewed as compulsory to the acquisition of a respectable status, as their households were still governed by discourses of male power and

authority. This can be seen in Ayanda's narrative when she says: "[W]e respect my father a lot, he's the head of the house…". Here, Ayanda can be interpreted as drawing on long-standing discourses of male authority where males are considered to be the generational leader of the household (Clowes et al., 2013). This framing suggests that, while gendered chores confined girls within the realm of specific tasks rendered as feminine, this isolates their access to tasks reserved for boys, and also minimises their opportunities for future roles that are predominantly male-orientated. Such restrictions are not specific to chores, and thus become apparent in their interactions with boys. As seen below:

> Sisanda: My mother told me not to be too close to a boy. Boys are dangerous for my future. I don't want to end up pregnant when I am not supposed to be pregnant.
>
> Kerina: My mother told me don't get a bf [boyfriend] when you are small because it doesn't help you with things, you don't get to enjoy life.
>
> Asanda: I must stay a virgin and I don't have to chase boys, and my dad told me if he sees me on the road playing with boys, he will kill me.
>
> Olwethu: When they [parents] find out if you have a boyfriend, they will hit you.
>
> Andiswa: To respect myself. I must respect all people and at this age I must not love boys, because boys are bad, and they will only make babies. They [boys] only like sex. They go and bet on girls and sleep around with a girl.

Such excerpts demonstrate that the established social discourse has filtered down into the wide-scale impulse of regulating girls' sexuality. Here, identifying respectable femininities rests on the paranoid enforcement of sexual abstinence and/or chaste purity. As the girls in this study navigated their years of puberty, their sexuality was clearly put under surveillance. Moreover, this was done for the purpose of successfully attaining a hegemonic femininity. This can be seen in Bhana (2016b), where classification as a 'good girl' required sexual obedience, romantic decency, and suitable feminine conduct. The severity of their parents' warnings is reflected in their narratives: "boys are dangerous…", "…you don't get to enjoy life", "…he will kill me", "…they will hit you" and "…boys are bad". Each of these expressions infer how an enforced form of femininity created within a discourse of male-imposed danger is pressed upon the sexuality of young girls. They are quickly made to fear the consequences should they

ever default, thereby reinforcing their sexual docility. Kerina's repetition of the phrase, "[D]on't get a bf [boyfriend] when you are small", illustrates explicitly how parents perceive their daughters as being perpetually innocent naïfs. Such raw data also resonates with several other studies that have explored how the regulation of childhood innocence and sexuality reproduces the complex relations of inequality which have insidiously led to the proliferation of docile femininities. Rasmussen (2015), for instance, posits that many parents stay ignorant of their daughters' sexualities due to the underlying fear that girls who pursue their own sexual education will come to challenge the socio-cultural norms that govern the dominant discourses to which they subscribe. While other scholarly works show how restricting access to discourses on girls' sexualities merely serves to reinforce the conception that sexualities as such are "taboo" (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 341) and should be completely avoided by parents until children become adults. This notion of girls' sexuality as being somehow dangerous, "feeds into a categorisation of girls as passive or problematic", as argued by Pincock (2018, p. 916). Such conclusions suggest that while children are often perceived as requiring protection, the devout regulation and management of childhood innocence continues to be construed as a normal practice, leading to the reproduction of young girls living under forced piety. While girls were being cautioned against exercising their sexuality, this was not the case with boys:

> Andiswa: Nothing happens to boys when they have girlfriends - they say it's good, it means he's growing up.

This statement by Andiswa depicts the pervasive double-standard whereby boys are permitted to engage in sexual activity (even with multiple partners) whilst the same precociousness is abhorred in girls. To understand Andiswa's narrative, we should consider a study by Pattman (2006, p. 509) which explored the construction of sexual identities amongst girls and boys and found that while boys gain status by embodying the masculine liberty to embrace their innate sex-drive, girls are never expected to articulate their sexual desires or even speak about boys for fear of being classified as 'bad'. This polarisation of gendered sexual identities is self-evident whenever boys are positioned by girls (and their parents) as being highly sexually active and irresponsible, whilst girls are made to stand accountable for their sexual actions and are advised to ignore their sexual desires, resist boys, and maintain proper girl femininities (Egan, 2013). As restated by Shefer and Ngabaza (2015, p. 9), girls have an "increased responsibility to protect themselves from sexual activity because of the consequences", in comparison to boys who are perceived as "immune to the consequences," thus reproducing

discourses of inequality wherein women are seen as solely responsible for the consequences of precocious sex.

The enforcement of accountability upon girls by parents also illuminates how dominant discourses seek to control and confine femininities that remain in alignment with hegemonic ideals. This draws attention to the varied expectations of girls' sexuality, which stand in stark contrast to that of boys and reflect deep-seated inequalities. Through a process of self-policed desexualisation, girls keep in mind an idealised femininity which reinforces the gendered power relations that sustain the gender-binary system (Renold & Ringrose, 2013). However, the preservation of schoolgirls' virtue is not a trope specific to family institutions, but lends itself to a broader patriarchal discourse evident in cultural norms such as the ones seen below:

> Kerina: I need to respect myself by not showing my body parts and not allowing people to touch my body parts.
>
> Sisanda: Christianity teaches me to be neat, to be helpful, to listen to my mother and family, don't worry about the boys saying you are nice and beautiful. At the end of the day, they will make you pregnant.
>
> Ayabonga: I follow the traditional [Isi]Zulu culture. They tell us we are still small. We go to the reed dance. It takes place in Nongoma. It tells you that you must be a virgin. Don't sleep with boys, don't like boys.
>
> Nosipho: …[T]he boy is allowed to choose a girl from the reed dance he's going to marry, and they have to be virgins.

The attainment of respectable status within certain cultures (Tamil, Christian, and IsiZulu) often centres on virginity as the paramount value for an ideal hegemonic femininity, compelling girls to perform a conspicuous asexuality. To ensure the preservation of their status as chaste, the girls in our study were expected to distance themselves from boys. It is apparent that cultural norms strategically pathologise boys as bad and manipulative agents who engage with girls solely for sexual pleasure (as seen from Sisanda's narrative). Whilst girls were aware of the demands of their culture, they also invoked some complicity with 'obligatory' cultural norms, as can be seen from Kerina's narrative. The phrase, "I need to respect myself…", illustrates her compliance as the fulfilment of a compulsory injunction rather than a desirable behaviour. This can also be seen in the case of Ayabonga when she states, "…we are still

small", thus reaffirming the sanctity of childhood sexual innocence and inferring how cultural norms seek to constrain girls' sexuality for the benefit of broader patriarchal discourses.

Ayabonga's testimony also shows a focus on practices such as the "reed dance" that serve to celebrate the value of virginity amongst IsiZulu girls. The reed dance is considered an essential part of womanhood in the IsiZulu tradition, as much as it reflects "*hlonipha*" [respect] - a customary norm in "behavioural practices" which associate men and boys and women and girls with "social identities and relations" (Irvine & Gunner, 2018, p. 35). Integral to the "reed dance" is "*umhlanga*" - a ritual that involves the parading of young women girls in the presence of young men and boys, whilst adorning a reed (a symbol of their virginity) which is ultimately presented to the king of the IsiZulu (Harrison, 2008). Successful participation in umhlanga confers on virgins their status as being desirable and respectable - key elements to an idealised IsiZulu femininity. Although girls recognise the performance of umhlanga as merely a means by which to claim a respectable status, the practice is still suggestive of a dichotomy. While umhlanga serves to desexualise girls through virginity preservation and conspicuous abstinence, the ritual is simultaneously a patriarchal imposition on female sexuality which serves the interests of male entitlement and power. This is largely reflected in Bhana's (2016b) study, set against the themes of virginity, culture, and respect. Her findings showed how customary rituals like umhlanga serve to mobilise male power and sanction girls' behaviour in ways which exploit and promote the subordination of girls within the traditional binary.

An example of this is observed in this study; Nosipho's narrative shows that boys are given priority over girls in selecting their prospective spouse for the purpose of matrimony, profoundly limiting the rights of girls. While perceived chastity remains a decisive criterion for girls to be successfully chosen, an emphasis on male virginity is never as stringent. On the contrary, a greater emphasis and innocuous celebration of the sexuality of IsiZulu boys is considered to epitomise their hegemonic masculinity (Cinthio, 2015). This is evident in the Zimbabwean context, where similar feelings were echoed by boys who perceived non-virgin girls as being undesirable and demanded that their brides be virgins irrespective of their own engagement in premarital sexual intercourse (Matswetu & Bhana, 2018, p. 5). The irony implicit in their demands for virgin brides reflects how male power is consistently reinforced through various cultural norms, such as the legalisation of polygamous marriages where IsiZulu men are permitted to have several partners, while girls are not afforded the same rights (Hunter, 2010). A polygamous marriage most often perpetuates spaces of inequality for girls, as they become increasingly vulnerable to the risk of sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV and

AIDS due to their spouse freely having multiple sexual partners (Hunter, 2005). Additionally, the practice of umhlanga puts young girls at risk of sexual victimisation by older men who may seek them out to callously fulfil the myth that sexual intercourse with a virgin can substitute as a cure for HIV and AIDS (Zaikman & Marks, 2016). Despite the existence of this double-standard within umhlanga, the girls in our study remained fully aware that their compliance with the ritual meant the accrual of material benefits to accompany their virginity:

> Amahle: If girls are virgins, they get a lot of cows and money.
>
> Ayanda: …when she reaches the age of 21 without falling pregnant her mother has to do another ritual called *umemulo* - this means she knew how to behave herself as a girl. They use the cow's stomach and they going to cover it on her shoulder and people are going to be invited and will put some money on her hair, clothes, and all she's wearing on that day. The skin on the shoulder shows how she took care of herself and if she is still a virgin. And if she lied to her family, the cow's stomach will fall off her shoulders it means she's not a virgin. Everyone in her family will know, they will feel ashamed.

The girls at Penguin Primary School all recognised the importance of maintaining a chaste status and could each perceive the connection between their chastity and their prospective economic value through an increased payment of *ilobolo* (bride wealth) as well as gifts during umemulo (a ritual celebrating virginity). In South Africa, ilobolo is a customary practice that refers to the payment - usually in the form of cows or capital - given by the groom to the family of the prospective bride, partly as the price of her good sexual conduct (Parker, 2015). Drawing from my collected narratives, premarital sex would not only be a source of shame for girls but impact on the negotiation of their wealth as brides. Although Amahle and Ayanda accepted that submission to ilobolo and umemulo provided access to privileged benefits (such as respectable socio-cultural status and monetary gain), several South African studies (Bhana, 2016b; Parker, 2015; Sennott et al., 2021) have shown how ilobolo contributes substantially to the subjugation of girls, particularly within the context of poverty. This occurs because girls perceive ilobolo as a source of financial stability, which simultaneously blinds them to its many inequitable consequences and discourages them from pursuing any further education.

Notwithstanding the valorisation of girls' and women's rights in post-Apartheid, the presence of women and girls during ilobolo still remains forbidden. Thereby undermining their innate dignity and regulating them as commodities who are mute in the negotiation of their own self-

worth. Thus, rendering them liable to men. Given that men are responsible for the payment of ilobola, this also works to reinforce cultural discourses which position men as "economic providers", thereby elevating their masculine status and bolstering their egos through gender inequity (Hunter, 2010; Rudwick & Posel, 2015, p. 289). For both boys and girls, investing in the practice of ilobolo raises expectations of women's obedience. Thus, restricting their agency and ensuring a 'docile disposition', which Rudwick and Posel (2015) have found to be one of the prime sources of gender-based violence. In this same vein, an international study based in Papua New Guinea which analysed similar customs relating to bridal wealth discovered that a payment in this form of ritual currency often created an issue of fraught ownership, where even the slightest sign of agency shown by wives in resisting their partner's authority resulted in violence (Eves, 2019, p. 1376). Within KwaZulu-Natal, where the rate of HIV and AIDS infections is considered to be the highest in South Africa, and polygamy is still an accepted practice for IsiZulu men, a connection between ilobolo and the spread of HIV and AIDS is extremely pertinent, as polygamy exacerbates the consequences of girls' disempowerment, making it far more difficult for young women to negotiate safe sex (Hunter, 2005; Parker, 2015, p. 175).

Our findings here suggest that girls are often made complicit in their own subordination, as they invest in their oppression by quietly adhering to practices such as ilobolo and umemulo that valorise their respectability, whilst simultaneously constraining their agency as individuals. This ultimately leads to the reinforcement of normative constructions of gendered behaviour that help widen the gap between men and women, resulting in girls' subordinance. However, no acquisition of respectability or reward is granted to girls without the proof of their virginity being made public knowledge, as seen below:

> Ayabonga: They [older women] do *uhlola*, they check. They check the private part to see if you are still a virgin and if you are not, they scold you, hit you and say why did you sleep with boys…
>
> Senamile: Girls end up feeling so low and sometimes boys are teasing her. They sometimes say bad things. Sometimes they say she went to the reed dance and but you are not a virgin, you are not supposed to go because you know you are not a virgin. The girls are then called sluts or bitches and sometimes the girls even start to cry… Sometimes they [the elders in the family] treat the girl bad, like they don't take her seriously if she is not a virgin. It's like, they don't treat

her as human, they treat her just as if she is another object. They don't even notice the girl - they ignore her.

Thando: Some girls are happy to be tested because they know they are virgins…

The customary practice of uhlola involves the inspection of the hymen, on the assumption that a ruptured hymen would be a foolproof indication of the experience of sexual intercourse (Abboud et al., 2015). Whilst an intact hymen is used as an indicator of female chastity, there is of course no complementary culturally imposed indicator of male virginity, which inherently reinforces a sexual double-standard. Several studies have documented the existence of a similar double-standard of virginity, where girls are both expected to abstain from sexual activities as well as be solely responsible for maintaining their virginity – an honour code which privileges boys and is at the same a regulation which is just not equally applicable (Palit & Allen, 2016; Scorgie, 2002; Tolman, 2016). For example, Senamile's accounts of girls who are ostracised and humiliated as "sluts or bitches". The latter is a term associated with "girls known to have many partners", conferring on them a "lower social status", as reflected in Bhana and Chen's study (2020, p. 1282-3), while for boys an increased sex drive, along with multiple sexual partners, is perceived as valorising masculinity (Matswetu & Bhana, 2018). The impact of such unequal expectations not only subordinates' girls but also serves to marginalise those men who practice abstinence, rendering them less masculine, given the hierarchy of masculinities, and casting them as incompetent in the provision of sexual pleasure. This suggests that the constant reinforcement of masculinity's dependence on sexuality results in the proliferation of sexism and misogynist behaviour. This is despite the laws in South Africa that stipulate the protection of children's rights through the abolition of virginal testing - recognised to be an infringement on girls' rights (resulting in fury amongst traditionalists who opposed the ban) (Kale, 2016). This issue presents a particular dilemma in a country like South Africa where our constitution institutionalises democratic rulings concerning human rights whilst also protecting the practice of independent cultural ideologies, thus creating conflicts in the pursuit of defending girls' rights to equality. For example, girls like Thando choose to embrace uhlola by actively defending virginity testing, knowing that their compliance will help afford them a respectable status. By defending virginal testing, she also helps reinforce cultural norms, as her agreeing serves to silence the necessary discourses concerning her consent to virginal testing, her pleasure in sexuality, and the inclusivity of the oppressive binary to which she accedes. Hence, a complex web of patriarchy survives, whereby girls who comply with, as well as contest,

cultural norms are eventually obliged to submit to their own oppression, thus regulating hegemonic femininity and exacerbating gendered inequalities (Rudwick & Posel, 2015).

7.3. Resisting Proper Girls

Schippers (2007) argues that femininities are not fixed but are rather innately alterable. This notion is epitomised by an idealised 'respectable' femininity and how it can be transgressed through the production of multiple feminine identities that contest seemingly insignificant cultural norms, which can have a severe impact on the binary construction of gender. In this study, girls were not merely the receptors of patriarchal norms and customs; they resisted and, in some cases, even openly rejected notions of 'proper' girl identity, revealing some heterogeneity within the gender binary. This section offers some insights into how their plural femininities were constructed, and how these plural femininities created the space for contestation as the girls used various strategies to access their own forms of power. The girls at Penguin Primary School performed their agency within five key domains - cultural practices, dating, dress, games, and homosexuality. However, they still remained firmly subordinate within the gender binary. The following excerpts give an idea of how the girls contested 'proper' behaviour within cultural practices:

> Amanda: Every Saturday they [girls] say they going for the reed dance and then they don't go there... Christian and sometimes Zulu traditional old ladies, they tell you to lie down on traditional mat and see if you are a virgin. They tell you that you are not a virgin anymore and some of the girls take money to Durban and pay those ladies to say that they are still virgins then when you go to the reed dance, she will see you over there....

> Sisanda: They [girls] only talk about their relationship with their bfs [boyfriends]. She said sometimes she runs out of the house at like 10 p.m. like that and go sleep with her bf and come back. Also, some girls drink something to lie they are virgins, but they are not virgins.

Here, the traditional binary that seeks to uphold a caste femininity through oppressive norms is directly challenged by these girls who have chosen to deviate from the cultural practices that valorise respectable femininity. From the narratives above, we can see how the girls became invested in the performance of their femininities as non-virgins, demonstrating far greater

control over their sexuality. Other scholarly works concerning girls within the context of virginity and culture (Bhana & Pillay, 2018; Matswetu & Bhana, 2018) also note how girls are never completely powerless, as they consistently construct discourses that challenge the patriarchal value of virginity. Likewise, in our study, non-virgin girls asserted their agency by strategically lying and utilising bribery to negotiate the recognition of their virginity with elderly seniors (as seen from Amanda's statement). Similarly, the spectrum of girls' transgressions, from docile to fearless, is highlighted by Sisanda as she describes how girls claim agency by escaping till the late hours of the night to explore their sexual desires. In doing so, these girls can be perceived as embodying the archetype of the "sexualised girl", juxtaposing their expected behaviours with multiple "acceptable constructions of feminist femininity" (Egan, 2013, p. 61).

However, this discourse of 'asserting agency' through escaping an oppressive sexuality is also somewhat ironic, as the girls' autonomy in such moments simultaneously served to subordinate their position within the gender binary. For instance, the girls who showed sexual agency by breaking their virginity still recognised the importance of a chaste status. The girls often attempted to reclaim an idealised IsiZulu femininity through similarly cunning tactics. On the other hand, girls who engaged in pre-marital sex were positioned as being at risk of stigmatisation and of losing moral value, rendering them even more vulnerable and subordinate (Scorgie, 2002). This form of patriarchal subordination must be understood within the discourse of the sexual double-bind mentioned above - girls are subjected to an array of expectations regarding their virginity, whilst the same is never expected of boys. The impact of such unequal standards is evident in Matswetu and Bhana's (2018, p. 9) study of virginity, culture, and inequalities amongst young adolescents, which found that sexually-active girls who contested the idolisation of virginity were subjected to a myriad of consequences such as: "HIV or AIDS, pregnancy, school dropout[s], and fewer job prospects… and dependence on a male breadwinner." All in all, such traditional constructs seek to perpetuate a heteronormative culture by reinforcing male entitlement and ultimately reproducing the subjugation of girls. Although boys were also complicit in the exercising of their sexuality, their presence in discourses of accountability for their behaviour was marginal.

Returning to my study, while girls did often go out of their way to destabilise norms of virginity, their resistance was manifested through adapted cultures of dating:

Andiswa: In our culture, it doesn't feel good for the girl to ask the boy out but today girls ask boys out... So, this one girl decided to ask him out, then they started dating.

Sbahle: Some girls like dating boys because they think they are [more] powerful than other girls because they are dating.

Priscilla: It is like a competition to have a boyfriend because ma'am if you don't have a boyfriend, they call you names and make it seem like it's a bad thing. They call us 'isishimane'.

Ayanda: They [girls] like to date naughty boys and who have no interest in schoolwork, they just go around. Uhmm they find them as if they are ghetto, bad boys. They think this is cool; they also want to be seen as cool.

Ayabonga: Some girls see a boy wearing grasshopper or got style, wearing nice clothes, it attracts the girls.

Defying the radically feminist notion that heterosexuality is merely complementary to patriarchal discourses advancing the domination of men over women (as argued by Rich (1980), among others), the girls in our data often discarded their cultural ideals of shyness and sexual obedience by asserting control in their dating choices. Although girls are still expected to engage in compulsory heterosexual dating, Andiswa's narrative illuminates how their exercising of sexual agency by choosing their own boyfriends was perceived as a threat to acceptable femininity. Within the frame of an idealised femininity, it is generally perceived as 'right' for boys to ask girls out (Renold et al., 2017), yet when girls ask boys out they immediately present an alternate version of femininity - one that is autonomous and implicitly defiant of passive femininities.

On the other hand, girls like Jadine produced a different version of femininity through social media - one that didn't require unanimous validation from boys, whilst simultaneously producing material gain:

Jnane: I used to be friends with one girl Jadine, she was a bad influence. She's a PTW.

N.G.: Oh, what's that?

> Ansu: Prostitute through WhatsApp. Some girls know all about her and she's like she doesn't care, she's naughty on social media - WhatsApp, she gets boys numbers from anywhere, she get[s] high school boys' numbers and they buy airtime for her too.

Here, Jadine brazenly breaches the norm of 'proper' girl femininity by adding boys' numbers to her WhatsApp contacts; a practice which Ringrose et al. (2013) remind us is, even on the surface, morally incorrect for idealised forms of femininity. For Jadine, social media is utilised as a platform for sexual empowerment and mutual benefit, on which she actively asserts her sexuality for monetary gain whilst the list of boys she curates contact her to satisfy their sexual desires. This led other girls to openly denigrated her, yet Jadine can be viewed as practicing a nuanced form of self-conceived agency - especially when it is mentioned that "she doesn't care what others think of her". Such a description does not present her as simply a passive victim of stigmatisation. Rather, she embodies a sophisticated way of challenging and destabilising the meanings attached to local identities, such as "PTW." She defiantly chooses a peaceful approach which ignores the actions of her judges and never indulges in vengeful recriminations with the girls who discriminate against her. Her behaviour demonstrates how she actively strategises to protect her wellbeing – a tactic which closely resonates with the findings in Haavind's (2014) study, wherein Chinese girls subjected to discrimination still maintained a modicum of personal agency through choosing not to indulge in revenge. Here, Jadine's behaviour reflects a kind of patriarchal bargaining approach, whereby women or girls exploit their own sexuality and gendered positions to attain financial benefits - as seen in a study by Kandiyoti (2009). This approach complicates our established dichotomy between feminine agency and subordination. Whilst Jadine obviously contests normative standards of sexuality by displaying sexual agency, she also submits to the rules that govern an oppressive binary system by fulfilling male requests over WhatsApp, thereby marketing her sexuality, and positioning herself as subordinate to their desires.

Here, this sexual double-bind becomes pertinent, as our data emphasises the gender inequalities in texting, re-positioning from Jadine exercising her agency to being a victim of her own sexuality. In sending sexual texts to Jadine, these boys gained sexual pleasure, along with hegemonic status, yet this was not the case for her, as she subjected herself to the risk of being slut-shamed and devalued (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015, p. 214). Such stigmatisation creates harsh implications and positions girls like Jadine as subordinate to male entitlement due to her demeaned social status (Renold & Ringrose, 2008).

Social media platforms provided a digital space of contestation for Jadine, but other girls in this study similarly utilised material platforms at school to express their sexuality. The excerpts below show how girls performed their sexuality through games:

> Ayabonga: It's a group of girls and boys that play this game. You sit together and spin the bottle. If the bottle points to you, you must hug or kiss the boy…. whoever it points to; they will ask you truth or dare and if you say truth, they will ask you a question then you have to tell the truth and if you say dare, then you will have to maybe do something sexual to them....

> Andiswa: The love dice game. They write kiss, hug, touch, suck, and the others had parts of the body (boobs and bums). It's your choice to play. Then we also have 2 dices one is for lips, neck, bums, cheeks, legs and the other is a kiss or hug. Some shops sell it. The numbers mean certain things, if it turns on a kiss on the lips, means you have to kiss the person on the lips or neck; they are not scared they do it.

> Ayanda: I was playing with my friends on the ground, my brother he was counting, while we were hiding, I saw my friend and my brother's friend in the corner kissing. All this while we were playing hide and seek, we were hiding, now what's going on with them, my brother friend was holding the girls' bums.

As Bhana et al. argue (2021, p. 142), "sexuality is social" and the data above helps demonstrate how games aid in creating platforms for increased play between girls and boys. In this way, sexually playful games can help to interrupt normative constructions of sexualities by sanctioning new engagements between boys and girls and by allowing for a mutual investment in desirability. The data shows how girls deliberately use games (spin the bottle, love dice, hide and seek) as a resource for claiming their own romantic agency. Previous scholars have noted how the school environment, particularly the playground, functions as a space in which gendered power relations are both contested and simultaneously reproduced (Bhana, 2018; Mayeza, 2015; Paechter & Clark, 2007). Breaking from a conventional femininity aligned with asexual docility and passiveness, these games provided girls with an innocuous context in which to engage with boys under the aegis of scheduled education. Such games reflected emerging libidinous drives, providing girls with opportunities to explore sexuality through the kissing and touching of private parts, and ultimately rupturing the culturally imposed barrier

that marginalises girls from boys, as depicted in Andiswa's response, "they are not scared, they do it."

Whilst the femininity of a 'proper girl' involves the submissive projection of a desirable femininity for the male gaze, these games created the space for a form of mutual submission to compulsory heterosexual performance. However, despite the girls' acts of agency, these games simultaneously reinforced normative heterosexuality within the binary that sexualises girl's bodies ('boobs' and 'bums'), thereby reproducing the discourse of objectification that ultimately helps sustain gender inequalities (as reflected in other studies (Bhana, 2018; Paechter, 2017; Renold, 2005)). In overview, the girls were still submissive to the requests made by boys and helped to maintain boys' traditional power within the gender binary.

Not all girls submitted to games though:

> Karuna: Ma'am we don't play any games during the breaks. I think because they think including myself, we think we are too big for games, ma'am I like to play games I'm being honest but my friends don't like to, it's like too childish for them.

Here, it's fairly obvious that Karuna's friends perceived the aforementioned games as being silly and immature, and therefore reflective of childish behaviour. It should be understood then that their choice to avoid playing was not a sign of weakness or a recognition of their own muteness, but rather demonstrated an even more sophisticated sense of agency. They attested their awareness of the risks that libidinous games entail, and they chose to abstain from games that require submission to boys' requests. By positioning themselves beyond the appeal of such games, Karuna's friends sought to establish safe zones that would protect them from becoming victims of any of their risqué consequences. In this way, their decisions were also reflective of agentic femininities.

At this point I should declare that, throughout this study, the operations of the heterosexual matrix that governs dominant gender relations were never completely unchallenged. Indeed, some girls at Penguin Primary School openly identified themselves as being more masculine than feminine:

> Amahle: I am a girl, but I like to be a boy… I am like a tomboy. But when I told my mother I want to be a boy, she said NO!!! My grandfather won't allow that.

> And my culture won't allow it either. My grandfather is a chief in Zululand so I can't be a tomboy.
>
> Thobile: They swore me and called me the f… word. Some tease me for the way I am. Londeka always says that I am a boy. I don't care. I am not happy the way I am. I prefer to be a boy. But I am a girl and there is nothing I can do about it.

Both Amahle and Thobile unrepentantly identified with the masculine aspects of their characters. Their narratives depicted the unhappiness associated with being forced to be a girl, and they consistently found a surreptitious comfort in embodying masculine behavior. It must be noted that when breaking their silence, they did not perceive themselves as passive victims of their divergent sexuality. For instance, when Thobile is ridiculed for being masculine, she shows off an unapologetic sense of agency stating, "I don't care", and portraying herself as a rebel against the prevailing social order. Similarly, Amahle's identification as a "tomboy" is self-perceived as a rejection of the feminine ideal, as she owns up to a clearly defined alternate version of her own femininity.

Previous studies (Holland & Harpin, 2015; Paechter & Clark, 2007; Paechter, 2010, p. 230) based within the context of London primary schools have broadened the "tomboy" discourse by identifying how most tomboy characteristics are congruent with how 'regular' boys start displaying their own emergent masculinities through discourses of aggressive behavior, dress codes such as "trouser-wearing," and sports such as football. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to note that while the girls in my study recognised their identities as being essentially tomboy-ish and masculine, they remained exceedingly conscious of how their assigned gender restricted them from exercising their nuanced sexuality in the presence of others. For example, Thobile's statement, "But I am a girl there is nothing I can do about it." One can infer from such a phrase that while her express desire is to freely present the masculine side of her character, the gendered perceptions of her biology forbid her from exercising any further agency, resituating her as being powerless and trapped within the rigidity of the traditional gender binary. Likewise, in the case of Amahle's narrative, "…[her] culture won't allow it." In other words, such a realignment of her femininity through her own autonomy may give rise to tensions that lead to her detachment from her family and community.

It is then apparent in both cases that the girls' free construction of their sexualities reflects an agency that cannot co-exist with a compliancy to patriarchal discourses of power - like those

recorded in Bhana and Anderson (2013b). For Amahle, embodying a gender non-conforming status represented an immediate risk to her family's reputation, as such a total reconstruction of her femininity would invoke accusations of disrespect and impropriety. This positions girls like Amahle within a painful, intractable dichotomy between asserting agency and upholding family values; in this case, preserving the chieftaincy status of her grandfather by protecting both her own sexual reputation as well as her family's respectability. While sexual agency is attempted by the girls in my study, they are simultaneously trapped in the dilemma of needing to disguise their sexuality to uphold dominant generational and patriarchal norms.

In a school setting, not all schoolgirls subscribed to heterosexuality and adhering to normative forms of femininity forms part of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), Ayanda's narrative is one such example of deviance from normative forms of femininities that are rooted within the heterosexual matrix and demonstrates how girlhood is often performed in fluid, complex and contradictory ways (Butler, 1990):

> Ayanda: I am not like a girl, I am not clever, I am not quiet, and I don't wear short things and I don't love boys. I always wear pants to school. I like to fight. Because when I am fighting, and I don't use pants, what is going to happen?
>
> Researcher: So, you really don't like being a girl?
>
> Ayanda: No, I don't … because girls are not strong; girls are … I don't like to be girl. I don't know but I don't like to be a girl. I like to be a boy a lot, your mother doesn't tell you anything if you are a boy, always my mother does not give my brother anything at all to do because this one he is a boy. I hit boys and girls. They get hurt, I can fight, I can fight but I am a girl, I don't know. I just learned to fight. When I am fighting, people make me fight. I feel powerful because people in this school [they] take me like I am mad because of my behaviour. I am behaving wild because when I am keeping quiet, I don't feel myself. I don't like to be wild but that's how I am. I feel like when I didn't do something, they say it's me anyway. So, I fight. In Grade 2, I came to this school and some girls were calling me something and in Grade 3 continuing saying that: "you stubborn". When [they] lost a pen, they say I stole it. In Grade 4 I started to change, one girl Portia was saying I steal her things that's when I

> started to fight and be violent. Now people are not treating me like they used to, they don't accuse me anymore, now they fright for me.

Here, Ayanda openly rejects the stereotypical virtues of girls being studious, docile, and passive victims of social and cultural processes. Instead, she chooses to enact her agency through a far more physical, proto-revolutionary approach. Her choice to wear pants demonstrates the tomboy qualities that give her an added sense of masculine identification during fights. In her specific case, violence was not only a response to victimisation from other learners but also served to help reconstruct her identity as the peak of a new hegemonic order which threatened other girls and boys. Reflecting on how she perceived the hierarchy of masculinities, Ayanda found herself able to exert power over boys who were vulnerable to the reach of her violence, rendering them as subordinate. Thus, the regulation of a new hegemonic identity helped Ayanda assert her dominance over other girls as well as other boys.

However, Ayanda's embrace of hegemonic violence must be understood within the discourse of hegemonic masculinity as a whole, wherein the use of violent and aggressive behaviour is the unavoidable tool of boys who display hegemonic masculinity – particularly prevalent in the findings of Bhana and Mayeza (2016). Ayanda's assertive behaviour can also be viewed in relation to Jackson and Lyons' study (2013, p. 238), in which the "aggressive girl" is perceived as an individual who rejects the interdependent relationship of femininity and masculinity. As Ayanda transgressed the expectations of normative femininity, she also projected qualities associated with the 'pariah' femininities conceptualised by Schippers (2007, p. 95). These refer to femininities regarded as subordinate because they "are considered socially undesirable" and inherently "contaminating to social life". While a conventional form of femininity is hegemonic in as much as it displays the qualities aligned with 'proper girl' femininities in a specific context, 'pariah' femininities, as depicted in Ayanda's narrative, are considered to be deviant forms of femininity that inevitably become stigmatised for challenging the prevailing order of masculine hegemony.

Despite these fraught tensions, Connell (1995, p. 163) notes that it is simply, "logical to talk about masculine women or masculinity in women's lives, as well as men's." For instance, although Ayanda's femininity served to marginalise her from any identification with heterosexual girls within the binary, her aggressive and violent behaviour did not equate to her then being positioned as hegemonically masculine. As Schippers (2007, p. 96) argues, these

characteristics "are not perceived as an enactment of masculinity when performed by a woman," but are merely considered as feminine characteristics which are uncannily inconsistent with the performance of hegemonic femininity. However, while Ayanda disrupts idealised femininity, her actions may still appear to endorse existing hierarchies within the traditional binary. Her performance of violent dominance acts as a form of agency which insidiously valorises male power at her own expense, ultimately serving to reinforce the gender divide rather than transforming it. Despite the regulation of non-binary identities through personal agency, the rejection of gender and sexuality non-conforming girls from both structures of the gender binary results in their social subordination, both by hegemonic femininity as well as dominant masculinity, which acts to only perpetuate a complex web of inequalities.

However, agency and resistance were also fascinatingly regulated within same-sex relations. When asked if they would date other girls, the subjects stated the following:

> Sisanda: I will never ever date a boy; I will only date a girl.
>
> Ayanda: I have seen where two girls are dating. Syble and other girl from the neighbouring school. This girl is only buying for Syble you know, and I always see them. Syble says aaai this girl only buys me things and likes me. She loves Syble but she can't see that Syble is tricking her and only wants the money. Syble says aaai I am hungry, then she says there buy a pie for R10. Syble does not like her, she just wants her money. This girl can fight - the other day this girl was walking with another girl and Patrick wanted to talk to the other girl. Then he was calling her names, you tomboy, you like this, like that, where is your thing? Then they started fighting. She acts like a boy. She asked what is your problem you… They were just shouting, arguing, and hitting then some uncle came and separated them.

Lesbian relationships at Penguin Primary School were obviously viewed as being characteristic of 'pariah' femininities. Nonetheless, girls who "exhibit[ed] sexual desire for other women…" and showed "aggressive behaviour" in rejecting compliance with hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007, p. 95) were clearly visible. For example, Sisanda and Syble showed their agency through the performance of same-sex dating, there-by demonstrating the fluidity of their femininities and contributing to the de-naturalisation of dominant gender roles within

social relations of power (Budgeon, 2014). By indicating her preference for only dating girls, Sisanda insistently validates her position as a lesbian, and in doing so appears to take charge of her own happiness. However, Syble chooses to exploit her own divergent sexuality for food, money, and protection from others. As girls like Syble transgress and affirm their femininities, they find themselves able to deviate from the norm whilst still making calculated choices that serve to benefit their quality of life in an insecure world - as seen in other studies (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Pincock, 2019). However, Syble's girlfriend is subjected to ostracization in the male-dominated, hetero-patriarchal school environment by Patrick who seeks to humiliate her by asking: "where is your thing (private part)?". For boys like Simakahle, lesbianism is simply equated with pure abnormality - as seen in Msibi (2012). Despite being tormented, Syble still protects herself by asserting agency through violence. However, as noted earlier, this response has, at best, an ambiguous effect on the dominance of hegemonic masculinity within the binary (Budgeon, 2014).

Discursively, Connell maintains that hegemonic gender relations are never fully homogenous: "All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men. For this reason, there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men" (Connell, 1987, p. 186-7). Hence, the dominant form of femininity – 'emphasised femininity' - always remains subordinate within the binary. Subordinated masculinities in patriarchal ideology are merely "the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity" and are "easily assimilated to [the hegemonic] femininity" which hegemonic masculinity oppresses and defines itself against (Connell, 1995, p. 78), thus perpetuating a culture of asymmetrical relations between masculinity and femininity within the gender binary system.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways gender has been constructed within the sociocultural context in which the study's respondents found themselves. It showed how the domains of family and culture enforced an emphasised femininity which then filtered into the context of formal education. A context-specific analysis of gender and sexuality was presented, which illustrated how particular constructs either promote, or hinder the development of gender-equitable relations for girls. The potent, ideologically conservative messages circulated by the respondents' families were seen to have shaped how the girls behaved, sometimes harming

them, but at other times somewhat benefitting the process of constructing their identities. While some girls contested, deviated from, and even ruptured dominant norms, most acquiesced, and (re)produced an emphasised femininity. The overall influence of both family and culture on gender, sexuality, and femininity was immense, but it was also obvious that these sociocultural norms were subject to transformation. This is because the girls often strongly resisted dominant gender norms and expressed their agency, thus illustrating their innate potential to dismantle gendered differences and inequalities in society at large. These social processes were seen to be highly complex, comprising historical, political, cultural, and economic influences that serve to shape (but are also shaped by) girls' interpretations, experiences, and contestations.

Following Bartholomaeus: "[B]eing a girl was more about a greater self-regulation of bodies, appearance, and behaviour than for boys" (2012, p 162). Such a phrase depicts how the ideal of an emphasised femininity is simply unrealistic. As an aspirational model, it doesn't reflect or accommodate reality, and is instead a deeply problematic construction for girls who are trying to forge contemporary and agentic identities. The girls' various acts of resistance were indicative of their fundamental sense of agency, despite the reinforcement of an emphasised femininity. Despite the pervasiveness of the discourse of emphasised femininity, girls spoke openly and articulately about the challenges and tensions they had experienced in response. Even though the girls' experiences demonstrated how powerful dominant gender norms are and can be, they also showed their power to resist and negotiate these expectations. In the next chapter, empirical insights into an almost silenced aspect of school life are examined: namely, the ways in which sexuality is mobilised by South African schoolgirls in the construction of heterosexual femininities.

Chapter 8

Girls and the Negotiation of Heterosexual Femininities in the Primary School Environment

8.1. Introduction

> "Girls' twerk—thrusting their hips and squatting in a sexualized way in the school playground" (13-year-old Bettina).

The 'sexualized' movements that 13-year-old Bettina describes here are, as we will soon see, just one of the key practices through which heterosexual schoolgirls make claims to, and participate in, their everyday practices. Her statement emerges and serves as a point of entry into a deeper consideration of how young girls work on, and claim inclusion into, "local practices of heterosexuality" (Paechter, 2017, p. 277). To this end, my analysis in this chapter serves to illuminate the ways in which girls engage with the topics of boys, boyfriends, bodies, and dress as they discuss the ideal of a "real" expression of femininity and its connection to heterosexuality. Given the relative scholarly silence about the lives of primary schoolgirls during a pandemic of gender-based violence, addressing and attempting to understand how sexuality is navigated amongst 12–13-year-old girls is undoubtedly a prescient cause. The age-group itself adds further urgency, given that heteropatriarchal notions of femininity manifest early in life - as Robinson (2013) reminds us.

In this chapter, I aim to show how girls draw on particular strategies of self-performance and self-defence in their primary school environments in order to express heterosexual femininity. As Paechter (2017) and Renold (2013) suggest, primary schoolgirls are overwhelmingly subjected to, and subject themselves to, the societal compulsion towards obligatory heterosexuality. But when children do get to talk about sexuality, they express their romantic feelings and often assert their right to be recognized as active agents. In their early adolescence, the pursuit of heterosexual practices allows them to claim a semblance of power and status as a part of their broader social world (Paechter, 2017). This chapter will therefore comprise the three themes which trace this process: 'Boys and boyfriends', 'Bodies and dress', and 'Sexual talk and practices.'

8.2. Girls: Femininities and Heterosexuality

8.2.1. Boys and Boyfriends

Notwithstanding the diverse ways in which gender and sexuality are experienced and practiced by actual people, Rich (1980) refers to a traditional "compulsory heterosexuality", predominant in our society, which entails projecting, conforming to, and performing heterosexual desire. This phenomenon featured strongly in this study, particularly in how the girls of Penguin Primary School were constructed as "cool girls." For example, in the following excerpt, Kerina and Stacy illustrate how girls often unthinkingly busted the myth of childhood innocence when they invested themselves in their first relationships with boys:

> Kerina: A lot of Grade 7s are dating [boys]; they think it is cool.
> Stacy: They [girls] feel more popular and feel that everyone likes them more if they are dating [boys] and everyone wants to be their friend and they think they are really cool.

The girls' perceptions here suggest that the "cool girl" femininity status ultimately depended on their maintaining a conspicuous heterosexuality; early interest and investment in relationships thus served as markers of "coolness." Other studies have similarly documented how primary school boys and girls implicitly understand the elevated social status and popularity that becoming (and having) a boyfriend or girlfriend can bring (Bhana, 2016a; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). In this study it quickly became apparent that the "cool girls" derived a sense of power and popularity from being in heterosexual relationships. This finding complements and contrasts with other studies that have associated "cool girl" status primarily with fashion and beauty - wearing brand-label clothing and getting expensive hair highlights, for example (Pilcher, 2011) - or else with being assertive, or cheeky, or finding a role in a group of "mean girls" (Paechter & Clark, 2010; 2016). Most of the participants instead subscribed to heterosexual femininity by actively engaging in heterosexual relationships; although many of them also made up the dominant group of girls who wore their 'coolness' openly and mobilised power through obvious displays of heterosexual desire.

As my interviews demonstrate, most of the girls in this study made use of adolescent boyfriend–girlfriend culture in pleasurable and fundamentally empowering ways. Paechter, (2007, p. 103) supports this conclusion when noting that "for some girls, heterosexual relations [are] the only relations where they [can] exercise some power over the boys." Of course, this

is just one of the clearest ways in which femininity is deep-rooted in heterosexuality - which, as Butler (1990) claims, has been naturalized to such an extent that heterosexual desire is now a universal compulsion.

Paechter continues in regards to her own study: “Our participants often emphasized how they viewed their school as a kind of arena in which to destabilize conventional sexual relations and assert their personal dominance, without rendering themselves ‘unfeminine’” (2007, p. 103). In other words, the school was, for them, an important laboratory for the making of their gender and for the public debut and performance of their femininity. Indeed, writing in the context of the United Kingdom, Paechter (2007, p. 95) asserts that “most ‘relationships’ [are] ‘school bound’”, i.e., the school is the main social arena for boys and girls to enact heterosexualized expressions. And one of my respondents, Ayanda, agreed:

> There are lots of couples in school. They meet by the school gates, outside the school fence, by the taps, upstairs in the corners, and behind the library. They just hug each other when they first meet then they go into hiding. If we follow them, we find them kissing and boys touching the girls’ private parts and they [the couples] get scared when they see us approaching them.

Ayanda here discloses the hidden spaces on the school grounds in which girls covertly expressed their heterosexual femininity and young couples surreptitiously realized their desires. As Allen (2013, p. 56) notes: “Schools are often sexualizing agencies where the so-called mundane spaces and those assumed to be non-sexualized can constitute sexual significance for young people.” Ayanda's phrase here - “going into hiding” – shows clearly how sexual activities play out in the more private spaces of the school, where no teachers are likely to intrude. Thus, these overlooked areas are employed by the children as perhaps their most important resource in their experience of, and experimentation with, sexuality (Bhana, 2016a).

The more explicit expressions of heterosexuality - "hugging, kissing, and touching,” as Ayanda suggests - are undoubtedly key elements of the school experience for both girls and boys; many other studies have documented similar patterns of behaviour (Paechter, 2007, 2017; Renold, 2005). Moreover, a growing corpus of research has demonstrated the pervasiveness of low-key sexual activity in the course of formal education, noting how primary school learners regularly engage in boyfriend–girlfriend cultures; participate in heterosexual games; kiss, fondle, and

otherwise devote themselves to heterosexuality long before most adults are ever made aware (see also Paechter, 2017 and Huuki & Renold, 2016).

In the South African context, Bhana's (2016a) study placed a particular focus on the heterosexual expressions prevalent among young learners and noted how these performances served to challenge assumptions regarding the cultural myth of childhood innocence. Altogether, the behaviours documented exposed the different ways in which gender, as well as sexual relations, are perpetually reproduced and re-articulated, and how they come to affect the sexual economy of any given primary school. On this point, another of my respondents, Annastacia, spoke about how the aforementioned "cool girls" at Penguin went about engaging in heterosexual activities:

> During breaks, you know the boys' ground—where the bottom place is, by the steps, that place—it's where the boys sit there with their girlfriends and kiss there. The girls and boys come late to class; they [the girls] often take their time sitting with boys. They hug and kiss and sometimes make them [girls] sit on their [boys'] laps. They talk. They always hang out in that kind of corner and kiss and touch each other.

Annastacia's perspective highlights how sexual pleasure unabashedly suffuses the boyfriend–girlfriend cultures that so many schoolgirls pursue and subscribe to. As Paechter (2017, p. 288) notes: "Th[e] pleasure that children gain by inserting themselves into the heterosexual matrix should not be underestimated." Girls derive power from pleasure through the heterosexual expressions of femininity they engage in. Through it, they recognize and claim their future as heterosexual girls; and then, in the very same manner, they insert themselves into the heterosexual matrix and derive an enduring sense of belonging. Other, more general studies into primary school environments have found that heterosexual expressions feature robustly in the lives of most learners: kissing, holding hands, touching, boyfriend–girlfriend cultures, and written love notes all combine to constitute the sexual economy of any given primary school community (Bhana, 2016a; Martin, 2011; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). In my study, it became clear that girls' investments in boys and boyfriends also counted as precocious articulations of heterosexual femininity. The girls' expressions of heterosexual desire were, thus, femininity-constructions: they entailed the adoption of an emphasized femininity which accommodated boys' desires.

8.2.2. Bodies and Dress

In the South African primary school environment, the prevailing discourse of childhood sexual innocence codifies the body itself as being, in every sense, taboo and off-limits. Education is assumed to be a purely academic process whereby the operations of a learner's mind alone can be nurtured and refined. (Paechter, 2007). However, as Butler (2004, p. 217) notes, "the body is that which can occupy the norm in myriad ways, exceed the norm, rework the norm, and expose the realities to which we thought we were confined as [being] open to transformation". Through non-participant observation in the playground have shown how girls already perform this in the real world; by openly negotiating dominant gender norms, they reorient their bodies from being sites of 'risk' to being sites of resistance, as well as the primary means of asserting heterosexual power. Paechter (2012) chimes in here that the body is an essential site whereby gender, along with sexuality, are made into meaningful categories of experience, and then expressed and negotiated within the social worlds of children.

Ayanda's observations in particular reveal how the body and its chosen clothing can become the crucial means to attaining what Paechter (2007) calls 'social and sexual capital'. Hence her words paint a representative picture of an emergent heterosexual femininity:

> There is a girl named Owethu. When she leaves home, she comes as a decent girl from her [manner of] dressing. She listens to her mother, but what she does out of school is so bad. We saw her and her friend Zianda coming to school, when she [Owethu] saw me and Parsons and Lusanda [boys] she changed the way she walks, she pushed her bums out and pushed her breasts out too. She changed her whole dress code. I was so shocked. She left home with a long dress and a most respectful image, she was wearing a jean, and underneath the jean she wore bum shorts and carried a vest like this over her shoulders and took her sneakers out [off] and wore sandals. The vest was showing the side of her boobs. She says she likes having fun.

Ayanda's observations depict Owethu as straining to project her body within a heterosexual framework of desirability. Despite ostensibly moving away from a conventional femininity by exhibiting her agency through her dress, her gait, and her bodily autonomy, Owethu still invests

herself into a prevailing heteropatriarchal culture which seeks to discipline and idealize the eroticized female body – at least according to Ayanda's perceptions.

As previously noted, some of the girls garnered the "cool girl" label by investing in heterosexual relationships. As Paechter and Clark (2016, p. 464) note, "sexual attractiveness and an interest in liaisons [are also] markers of coolness." From Ayanda's account of Owethu's actions and words, it seems that she deemed her body desirable only through the explicit validation of others (both boys and girls) and whether they perceived her as being sexually attractive. It must be noted here that most of the girls in this study performed their heterosexuality within the context of deep structural inequality and generational poverty. As such, their special focus on dress, bodily performance and sexuality can be interpreted as a diversified means of mediating the sting and consequences of poverty. Skeggs (1997) argues that girls often seek to mediate the effects of class and gender injustice in ways that reveal the incredible complexity of power relations among the young. In her study of girls, gender, identity and class in particular, she notes how "some girls clearly stated that they would tailor their 'look' depending upon the presence of boys. This could involve 'dressing up' to 'attract the boys' or 'dressing down' to avoid 'looking attractive'" (1997, p. 113). In my study, Owethu similarly used her dress to assert her heterosexuality - dressing up primarily to attract the boys and otherwise project an unimpeachably heterosexual femininity. The following excerpt from my study field notes supports this contention:

> It was a Thursday afternoon; I was put on relief in a Grade 7 class. I decided to take the learners out, on the playground. A girl came up to tell me about the excitement at the taps. She said, "the girls wear sexy clothes, like ma'am you know, body suits, bum shorts, colourful bras underneath. I nodded and asked why. She smirked and said, "Ma'am, through the white school uniforms you can see everything, I mean everything when it is wet." I immediately realized the girls' intention was to expose not only the contours of their bodies but also the sexy pieces of clothing underneath. [Field notes, 20 August 2018, 13h30, Girls' playground].

As one amongst many other such entries, this paragraph reveals how girls often attain delight and pleasure in the projection of their heterosexual attractiveness. As Jackson (2009, p. 152) quips: "[W]hat confirms masculinity is being (hetero)sexually active; what confirms femininity is being sexually attractive to men." The girls in this study emphasized how the wearing of

sexy clothes (body suits, bum shorts, colourful bras) augmented their sexual desirability. And they wanted so much to be desired in this way that they wore such items even at the risk of breaking school rules. Showing cleavage, thrusting out buttocks, and projecting breasts were their methods of publicising their sexual desirability and claiming the status of heterosexual femininity. Through this process, girls sought to gaze upon their own bodies, and the bodies of their peers, as authentically sexualized objects.

In this regard, my findings resonate with Renold's (2013, p. 44) UK-based study of 11–12-year-old boys and girls. One of her respondents is quoted as saying: "Girls our age wear sexy clothes because they want boys to like them". Likewise, the girls at Penguin often modified their official school uniforms to imitate dominant fashions (perceived as attractively sexualized), in their bids to attract boys. Thus, the 'data' shows how the body and its dress can function as tools by which primary schoolgirls make claims to heterosexuality - both to convince themselves and for the sake of impressing others. Girls' enthusiastic participation in heterosexual practices - through body and costume - offers them opportunities to embody a gendered normativity that allows a specific, disciplined version of sexuality to materialize.
Other research focusing on the sexualization of girls has already established that girls strongly value the perceived virtue of 'sexiness' along with an eroticized outward appearance (Paechter, 2007; Renold, 2013). This study makes the additional point that girls negotiate and give meaning to such norms of 'sexy' femininity in a diversity of ways. According to Bettina, for instance:

> Girls they like to show their bums and boobs, ma'am [giggles]. It is a way to attract boys—that's what they say. They say if you know how to wear short and tight things, you know how to earn and keep a man.

Here, Bettina describes how the "cool girls" consciously defy conventional 'respectable' femininity by dressing in shortened school uniforms, in ways that "show their boobs and bums" as they claim their right to boyfriends. "Cool girls'" bids for heterosexual attractiveness often become entangled with issues of class as well as gender - as Bhana (2018) has noted. Dressing up serves well to express heterosexuality, but in a context of poverty dressing up also provides a means of asserting personal dignity and confirming status. Bettina's statement, "if you know how to wear short and tight things, you know how to earn and keep a man", also suggests the use of clothing as a financial flaunt, in as much as 'earning' and keeping a man implies the

attainment of men's provider status. However, although "cool girls" might achieve a momentary sense of economic freedom through dressing to impress (Bhana, 2018), in the process they may paradoxically lose or sully their reputation by breaking with normative constructions of femininity. Mbali puts it this way:

> The girls are wearing short skirts every day, even when the form teacher tells them not to, they don't listen, and they don't wear tights or shorts under, only panty, so when they bend it shows, ma'am, and the boys look at them. These girls are happy but others they call them a bitch, you know—slut. In isiZulu they say *isifebe*, ma'am.

Implicit in this description is the process by which girls mobilize heterosexual desire only to suffer the consequences of their freedom. While these girls resisted normative constructions of docile femininity through the adapted manners in which they dressed and acted, they found themselves immediately subject to sexual harassment, mockery, and being called "bitches," "sluts" or "*isifebe.*" That's not to presume their naivete, however. The girls were fully conscious of their own resources in the heterosexual market, and, in complying with the dictates of heteronormativity, they used their bodies as commodities to exchange for new-found power (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). Schoolgirls recognize at a very early age that they can gain power and express agency through showing off their bodies, using makeup and jewellery, and dressing up to attract boys and boyfriends. Renold's (2013) research on primary schoolgirls in the United Kingdom similarly notes how her subjects used their bodies and their awareness of up-to-the-minute fashion trends to boost their sexual currency and attract boyfriends: "Girls are well aware of the sexual double standards through which they are "constantly judged and valued" (Renold, 2013, p.39). She states further that schoolgirls' investments in fashion and make-up should be interpreted as measures of "heterosexual desirability and in many cases heterosexual availability" (Renold, 2013, p.44). Likewise, Ringrose and Rawlings' (2015) qualitative research on adolescents in the United Kingdom and Australia found that, as girls negotiated positions of sexual availability, desirability, and social popularity, they constantly employed material agents like makeup, jewellery, and hairstyles to augment their status. My research only bolsters theirs. As Zenani illustrates:

> Girls wear makeup to school because they want to attract the boys, they use eyeliner, and mascara and they use their mother's pearls [necklaces]. They even

> use fancy earrings, chokers, watches—and expensive watches—but [even] you, the child, you can see that this watch, it belongs to the mother.

Girls' everyday investments in their appearance feed into a broader culture of eroticized cosmetics and make-up. And similarly, the act of restyling school uniforms may be interpreted as a form of internalizing the sexualized male gaze (Paechter, 2012). It can't be doubted that the male gaze is omnipresent in Zenani's description, constantly confirming and re-confirming heterosexual desirability as the girls continually tailor their appearance to achieve an ideal with the aid of make-up and jewellery. In short, from a very young age, they choose to use material agents to look good, to fit in, to belong, and to ensure that they are recognized as "real girls" (Renold, 2013).

Zenani also notes in this passage that some of the jewellery the girls go out of their way to wear belongs to their mothers, with items such as pearl necklaces and expensive watches. Such affectations imply that girls partly learn adult female cultures - like heterosexual desirability - from their mothers - as Bhana (2016a) has previously documented. Girls' interests in make-up and accessories have previously been covered in academic studies by both Blaise (2005) and Martin (2011). In both studies, girls were observed using make-up primarily to signify and project 'adulthood'. By showing off their wearing make-up (with no regard to their parents' approval), they demonstrated their implicit recognition that children can easily be included within the heterosexual mores of adult culture, despite the socio-cultural taboo against it, and further signified their resistance to their patronized and limited social status.

As I have repeatedly shown so far, girls' investments in producing their own (and fellow girls') bodies as heterosexually desirable commodities satisfy their urge to claim and reassert heterosexual femininity. Thus, in the primary school environment, heterosexuality functions as a pervasive normative energy which mediates and regulates learners' classroom relations in ways that, at times, constrain them and, at others, empower. Either way, it remains the common language they use to articulate their gendered identities as boys and girls (Butler, 1990).

When they spoke about 'looking sexy', my studies participants almost always meant hetero-'sexiness'. To attain it, they used every opportunity to express their personal agency, whilst making constant claims to heterosexuality. Moreover, in addition to dressing up, using make-

up, investing in fancy hairstyles, and modifying their uniforms to suit the male gaze, Asanda alerts us as to how (and why) girls twerk:

> The boys look at girls so much. They whistle and clap their hands for the girls, especially when they see that they wear short dresses and skirts [modified uniforms]. The girls twerk a lot. They like to shake their bums. They show their bums. You can see their panties too. When we say anything, they say that this is their body not ours.

Twerking was thus one of the most prominent ways in which girls turned their own bodies into "heterosexually desirable commodities" (Paechter, 2007, p. 40). The explicit attention they received from boys (whistling and clapping) served only to further encourage their overt displays of embodied heterosexuality. Paechter (2007, p. 40) defines twerking simply as "erotically-charged movements," and thus the examples of it Asanda mentions, entailing shaking bums and showing panties, can be interpreted as the clearest manner in which the girls at Penguin expressed their sexual agency.

8.2.3. Sexual Talk and Practices

Epstein et al. (2001) show that primary schoolgirls in the United Kingdom continually construct heterosexual femininities through sexualized discussions and exchanges. They argue that when girls contradict discourses of childhood innocence, they often achieve a real, momentary sense of agency and power, which they then demonstrate whenever they articulate their sexual 'knowingness'. This conclusion resonates with the present study, as can be seen in this excerpt from an interview with Andiswa: "They meet upstairs and in corners by the library, haaaaa DK, deep kiss, deepest long kiss, it's like not lip on lip, DK is different . . . They don't talk they just kiss." Obvious in Andiswa's animated description of a particular deep kiss is the subject's strong investment in kissing. Though none of my participants disclosed that they had yet engaged in penetrative sex, kissing and explicit touching acts were often brought up as being key to their sexuality. As a regular practice, it was extremely pleasurable to them and, by now, normalized.

On the other side of the coin, Andiswa also illustrates how her friends' everyday constructions of sexuality become foregrounded through sexual talk:

> They [girls] talk about boys' private parts. They say how small it is and how big they are, and it's disgusting. There's this phrase they use, today I am going to drink milk and he's going to have my snowball. . . It means sex ma'am; haaaaa… One friend speaks about V positions, when having sex and stuff…. One of my other friends just speaks about sex and screams out aloud. Yesterday, she told me she was with him [her boyfriend] and OMG [oh my God] he gave it to her good.

Familiarity with sexual knowledge and practices was, of course, common amongst my participants, as is suggested by Andiswa's description of discussions concerning penis size, as well as her colloquial euphemisms like "drink milk" (have oral sex) and "snowball" (vagina), and her knowledge of sexual (V) positions. The predominant femininity that emerges from such accounts thus involves a variety of heterosexual standards: having a boyfriend, performing DK, expressing knowledge of the penis and vagina, and (ultimately) having sexual intercourse itself. Andiswa clearly recognizes here that sexual activities are supposedly adult activities and so, despite the explicit details she gives, she chooses to disassociate herself from the activities she describes by pinning them on a "friend."

It is through just such elisions that boundaries are created and age distinctions made amongst 'acceptable' femininities - in as much as sexuality is considered 'inappropriate' in relation to younger primary school learners and childhood sexuality is thought not to exist at all or else to be unapproachably taboo. Nonetheless, the girls' conspicuous knowledge of deep kissing, sexual terminology, sexual acts, and sexual styles punctures traditional notions of sexual innocence. The divide that persists amongst girls who directly demonstrate their sexual knowledge forms a very clear moral binary, so that girls who actually act on sexuality are castigated as the "bad girls" (Bhana, 2018) while those who don't can still preserve something of their alleged purity. However, Andiswa herself still projects a certain desirability and a marked heterosexual capital through the agency of heterosexual talk. Paechter (2007, p.108–109) credits it thusly: "These acts do go some way to challenge traditional stereotypes of girls as passive sexual beings and perhaps signals an emerging active female (sexual) gaze."

Altogether, complex and contradictory power relations are clearly embedded within the structure of boyfriend/girlfriend cultures in the classroom. Zena, for example, spoke about what she considered to be inappropriate femininity:

> The way they act. The way they dress. They scream aloud for boys and say 'I love you' and they say boys look gorgeous and handsome. . . I think they [girls] love sex . . . they always talk about sex. They say if you are talking to a boy . . . your boobs will stand out and he will get horny and his private will stand up. And I ask them where do they see all this? They say this when they are with their boyfriends and using bum shorts, crop tops, and lipstick, this happens; the boys private part stands straight.

The explicit sexual details Zena discloses here serve to emphasize the pull of heterosexuality within the formation of heteropatriarchal femininity. While the open expression of female desire at a younger age is often considered harmful and unhealthy, girls often find themselves compelled to navigate a tightrope of disclosure, whereby knowing about sex can compromise their "good girl" femininity status but knowing too little can leave them similarly ostracized. Conversely, girls who 'know too much' and act on their desires are, on the one hand, often regarded as cool and popular while, on the other, they may have to navigate communal expressions of disgust along with personal feelings of shame and internalized misogyny (Bhana, 2018). As such, my study concurs with many other papers concerning girls and sexualities (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Pincock, 2019) which assert that girls' own narratives and feelings of personal agency are very often contradictory in their production of different forms of femininity. Some girls perform their femininities by outwardly rejecting all overt expressions of sexuality, whilst others feel justified in expressing waves of passion and desire to all and sundry. Stacy's anecdote is a good example of the latter:

> On our school trip we were going to Phezulu [a safari park] in the buses. The teachers were sitting in front . . . they couldn't see what was happening in the back [and] one of the children brought 1818 [alcohol]. Then everyone was drinking…Boys from the front came to the back. I saw Thando [a girl] sitting on Parson's [a boy] lap and they were kissing. Then I saw Lusanda [a boy] kissing Sihle [a girl]."

A story like this, challenges the prevailing silence around girls' heterosexual desires by focusing on the sexual activities that occur just beyond the oversight of adult teachers - reminding us of how specific spaces "actively constitute the meanings of sexuality possible within them" (Allen, 2013, p. 58). Such spaces—in this case, the back of the bus—are recontextualized by the students themselves as spaces of sexual significance, within which sexual activities are first made possible. These practices include eroticized acts of kissing and bouts of intimate physical contact that defy the standard sexual conventions laid out for young girls through emphasized femininity. Stacy here also associates the enactment of heterosexual desire with the consumption of "1818" alcohol, which itself is illegal, given the drinkers' ages. Indeed, as has been noted by other scholars (see Gevers et al., 2013; Livingston et al., 2013), alcohol plays a crucial role in precocious sexuality and sexual risk as such, alternately generating and promoting "unsanctioned sexual behaviours" (Livingston et al., 2013, p. 20) which can also increase the possibility of sexual coercion, complacency about contraception, and girls' exposure to risky partners. However, it is of course important to note that the girls' consumption of alcohol, and their engagement in sexual activity at the back of the bus, can also be read as indicators of their sexual agency.

8.3. Conclusion

By focusing on South African schoolgirls' heterosexual expressions, this chapter has shed at least a little light on the various resources' girls employ in the expression of their femininities. Through analysing the ways my respondents spoke about having boyfriends, sexualizing their bodies, and engaging in sexualized talk, I have demonstrated how heterosexuality is a deeply significant influence and aspect of the performance of youthful femininity. However, the open expression of heterosexual femininity is not without its complications. Although restlessly challenging any assumed passivity or incapacity to claim inclusion within heterosexual discourses, my participants' expressions of femininity nonetheless remain deeply ambiguous. The girls themselves sought to regulate their expressions of sexuality, whereby they often constructed and subscribed to appropriate forms of girlhood (conventional femininities).

Kissing, being touched by boys, dressing up and eroticizing their bodies all served as key signifiers of how the girls' emergent heterosexuality operated in contradictory ways. On the one hand, girls often enacted their agency in pleasurable empowering ways, but on the other,

their agency always ultimately remained in the service of male power. As Allen (2013c, p. 56) puts it: "[G]irls' sexual agency is 'caught up' in practices of heteronormativity."

However, agency is also embedded in material, social, and cultural forces which constrain and enable different expressions of sexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2019). In this study, girls' preoccupation with boys, bodies, and dress both enabled their agency and channelled it in ways that too often re-enforced their subordinate status within heterosexual relations. In South Africa, girls often run the risk of early pregnancy, HIV-infection, and domestic abuse in relationships in which gender and cultural norms limit and compromise their agency (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). Since the very first formations of femininities are already nuanced and influenced by the culture at large, addressing gender as well as sexuality in the primary school is an essential topic of progressive research.

If anything, my study simply shows how vital it is to listen to and take seriously primary schoolgirls' own perspectives, and moreover to work on improving their access to objective sexual knowledge from a young age. The findings of this study affirm that it is only through high-quality sex education that the curriculum can be redeveloped and revitalized so as to simultaneously strengthen learners' physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual understandings of sexuality, as well as their expressions of desire and pleasure. All of these, in turn, will then come together to ensure their well-being. Girls need supportive environments (both at school and at home) in order for them to find the fortitude to address the contradictions in their experiences of heterosexuality. Only with support, mild guidance and an enhanced sense of agency will they be able to recognise what they find pleasurable, whilst simultaneously being able to consider and discard damaging views of sexuality.

This study views sexual agency as dynamic gendered behaviours through which both boys and girls emerge as active social actors capable of engaging in sexual cultures that are both advantageous and disadvantageous. Just as in Bay-Cheng's (2019) study, most explanations and examinations of girls' everyday lives in the school environment fail to address the many nuances within emergent sexuality, how girls themselves choose to subscribe to heterosexual cultures, and how all of this manifests in the classroom. Along with a new emphasis in mutual understanding and negotiation, teachers in primary schools need to be trained to teach their learners that gender and sexuality are the building blocks of their identities, and ones they needn't be ashamed of. Parents too need to be made aware of what their children are thinking,

feeling, and doing with regards to their emergent desires, even in primary school. As Bay-Cheng (2019, p. 463) notes:

> "Girls are prime candidates for interventions aiming to increase girls' sexual agency: programs to teach them how to refuse unsafe, unwanted, un-enjoyable sexual interactions, to protect themselves against coercion and exploitation, and to see their worth independent of sexual and relational validation from men".

Chapter 9

‘Because I’m a girl’: ‘Rape culture’ in the primary school context

9.1. Introduction

The broad normalisation of sexual violence is the signature cause and consequence of ‘rape culture’. As a phenomenon, this process manifests itself in a multitude of ways across various social settings. This chapter aims to present a critical examination of how a group of primary schoolgirls experience ‘rape culture’. Specifically, it demonstrates how and when girls enact their agency, and then relates these moments to their experiences of sexual violence and ‘rape culture’ within the primary school context. The form of agency the girls enacted in my study was never one-dimensional. Their experiences were consistently double-edged: as autonomous learners they simultaneously contested and were subordinated by the reinforcement of ‘rape culture’ in their school. Additionally, the girls shared how teachers played a critical part in enabling ‘rape culture’ by reinforcing highly gendered ideologies:

> Sylvia: They [the boys] hit the girls, and touch the girls’ private parts. The girls cry, and go to tell, ma’am. This stops a little but continues again. The boys get a parent[‘s] letter but their parents don’t even end up coming to school. So the boys are free and they [the boys] still look at girls in a sexual way and they just laugh, ma’am.

In this excerpt, Sylvia discusses how sexual violence is explicitly normalised at Penguin Primary School. As boys gradually assert their ‘rights’ to sexual power and pleasure, they acquire a nonchalant attitude towards the sexual harassment and abuse of girls that works to enable a ‘rape culture’ in their school environment. Though Sylvia’s account of sexual violence does express something of girls’ own active agency, it also makes clear how dominant gendered norms and beliefs persist in positioning girls as subordinated subjects (Paechter & Clark, 2016; Parkes, 2015). This chapter serves as an entry point into this culture of ‘tolerated’ sexual violence (‘rape culture’) - a phenomenon that first begins and becomes rampant within primary school contexts. Activists and feminist scholars have cautioned that the high rates of sexual violence in educational institutions can be linked to institutional cultures in which harmful dominant gender norms and ideologies are commonly reinforced, in turn maintaining a ‘rape culture’ (Gqola, 2015; Rentschler, 2014). First conceptualised in the 1970’s, Brownmiller defines the term in this way: “[R]ape culture here specifically refers to a social space in which

male sexual violence is normalised and victims are consequently blamed for their own assault" (1975, p. 11).

Although there is, in South Africa, an extensive and budding body of research on schoolgirls, sexuality, agency and sexual violence, its focus has largely been confined to the experiences of secondary-school girls (Bhana 2012a; Bhana & Pattman 2011; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Mayeza et al., 2021). There has been some focus on very young children, aged 7-9 (Bhana, 2008, 2013; Mayeza 2016), but schoolgirls aged 12–13 have been largely under-researched (Cf. exceptions: Bhana, 2016a, 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2016; Jewnarain, 2019). In the Global North too, Parkes (2015) and Hlavka (2014) - both UK scholars working with young children – have pointed out the dearth of research on the nature of sexual violence experienced in primary schooling. Following Parkes, further research is therefore required into "the nature of violence as enacted or experienced by children, the sources and effects of violence and how education can challenge inequalities" (2015, p. 1). Understanding how girls negotiate this context of 'rape culture' is critical to producing this knowledge.

This chapter thus provides a context-specific focus on how 'rape culture' manifests at the school and offers detailed accounts of how girls experience, contest and object to 'rape culture.' 'Rape culture', as such, is a matter of power sited principally within the discourse of contemporary masculinity (Gqola, 2015). As such, the girls in this research study often had to navigate a realm of heterosexual male power in which they regularly either experienced or witnessed the sexual harassment of girls by boys. However, through all the scenarios and examples they disclosed, each interviewee found and employed various means of expressing agency. Girls thus make it clear that they are not simply submissive victims in the machinations of rape culture. Caution is then applied throughout this chapter for fear of reproducing a one-dimensional view of the participants' forms of agency, as their negotiations of their primary school environment were uniformly multifaceted and complex. Girls' experiences are then presented here as a kind of double-bind: even though they contest and attempt to redress the sexual harassment they are faced with; they are still incessantly subordinated within a system of 'rape culture' whereby they continue to face ongoing discrimination due to various oppressive structural factors. On the other hand, girls do occasionally enact their agency and attempt to redress power imbalances through performances of explicit violence. This pattern of response is not linear, and, overall, it proves to be counterproductive in as much as it reproduces the same implicit code of violence that 'rape culture' itself is founded upon. These complex issues are discussed at length in the next section of this chapter.

9.2. Sexual harassment and abuse

9.2.1. Sexually degrading taunts and comments

At Penguin Primary School, boys regularly employed language as a powerful medium with which to deride, and exercise their power over, girls. Indeed, their primary mode of domination was the use of sexualised language. The girls disclosed how their male peers often verbally degrade and taunt them. The nature of these verbal taunts and comments varied. Sometimes girls were sworn at in English, at other times in IsiZulu, but a common thread running through all such incidents was found that these taunts and comments always carried sexual undertones.

Some of the girls were sworn at in English:

> Karuna: The boys always swear us and say our mothers' puss.
>
> Kerina: They [the boys] say you are like my cock.
>
> Aphiwe*:* In class Leon and Aqeer call us, 'hey you ugly puss'.

Girls were also sworn at in isiZulu:

> Ayanda: The boys called me 'um-Tondo and ingquza' (penis and vagina).
>
> Asanda: Parsons said my mother's vagina in Zulu - nquza ga ma (mother vagina).

These interviewees also related in detail how boys use discriminatory and sexually-degrading language to exert their power over girls in the classroom on a daily basis. Elsewhere in South Africa, Mncwango and Luvuno have documented how "instances of language discrimination are a daily experience" (2015, p. 246). Meanwhile, other scholars, such as Garrido and Prada (2018) and Neupane and Chesney-Lind (2014) have argued that the use of sexualised, vulgar language is inherently linked to dynamics of social power. Hence, when boys utilise profanities towards girls, they endorse and maintain the patriarchal power structure that bestows hegemonic masculinity equal social and cultural dominance. Other research studies (Bhana, 2016a; Conroy, 2013; Summit et al., 2016) have drawn attention to the connection between vulgar language and practical domination, stating that such expressions are indeed open performances through which boys assert their heterosexuality or indulge in misogyny, or both, so as to 'become men' in the eyes of their peers. Connell (1995) has argued that this process ultimately works to create and maintain a dominant gender order; and, in this way, 'rape culture' is perpetuated by verbally degrading girls with sexual taunts.

The girls in my study were, at first, hesitant to articulate their experiences of verbal sexual harassment from boys. Yet their eventual confessions and airing of their voices were also expressive of their fundamental agency. Whilst boys often seek power through sexuality (Bartholomaeus & Senkevics, 2015; Connell, 1995) and the use of derogatory language (Garrido & Prada, 2018), the same avenues of agency are not accessible to girls - hence the hesitation that the participants showed in disclosing the names they had been called. As this sexualised language was articulated in both English and isiZulu, a certain social consensus in the use of sexualised derogatory language is obvious, expressive of how boys create cultural overlaps whilst concocting a shared language to exert dominance and harass girls (Bhana et al., 2021; Haavind et al., 2015).

Renold (2005) reminds us that such instances of verbal abuse by boys frequently employ phallic imagery and that many pejoratives are aimed at girls' parents. For example, many of the boys in my data followed this script in both English and isiZulu: some shouted 'mother's puss' or 'nquza ga ma', while others shouted 'cock' or 'um-tondo'. As quoted by the girls, the term 'nquza ga ma' was utilised to explicitly denote their mother's vagina, whilst 'um-tondo' referred to the penis. These insults were made even more affecting by the fact that they violated local cultural norms, whereby even uttering the term 'sex' was often considered as insolent and unmentionable (Hunter, 2010). Embedded in the cultural norms prevalent in the KwaDukuza region are the principles of respect or 'ukuhlonipha', which stipulate that relating sex to any period of childhood is taboo (Delius & Glaser, 2002; Hunter, 2010). Beyond acquiring social and cultural capital through the use of sexualised, derogatory language, boys came across to the girls as being grossly disrespectful, as insulting mothers and using sexualised language that inherently dishonours women and girls. These findings on the nature of schoolboy misogyny in KwaZulu-Natal also resonate with findings from other developing regions too. For example, in the Caribbean context, Cobbett & Warrington (2013, p. 174) found that "sexualised and derogatory comments [were] widespread amongst boys and girls." In sub-Saharan Africa (Chikwiri & Lemmer, 2014; Parkes & Heslop, 2013), and in South Africa (Bhana, 2018), other studies conducted have also established that boys often use sexualised insults to degrade, and thus subordinate, girls.

Apart from sexualised language, boys also invented and wielded other degrading names for girls based on their physical appearance:

> Ansu: Boys do tease us and they call us ‘scwapas’ (girls with flat bums). What they mean is that we are too thin, we are flat, we don’t have nice boobs or a nice big butt. We feel hurt.

Ansu’s account here illustrates one such example of how girls are sexually harassed while their bodies are treated as objects. In this study, the girls’ bodies were, on the whole, sexualised, violated and regulated by boys. If a particular girl did not have a voluptuous body, they were ridiculed as a ‘scwapa’. Thus, even in the primary school environment, these girls were made to inculcate their own sexual objectification; for boys, this process of manipulation was normalised and expected. Ansu tells of the routinised objectification of girls through sexually degrading taunts and comments, as well as the profoundly sexualised nature of boy-girl interactions which involve the subordination of girls. In the UK too, Renold (2005) illustrates how primary school boys enact heterosexual masculinity at school, revealing how boys (very similarly) objectify and harass girls on a daily basis. Writing within the South African context, Bhana (2018) also shows how contemporary masculinity is still ‘produced’ through practices of sexual harassment, objectification, and the insistence of the gaze on girls’ bodies. Schoolgirls’ experiences of sexually degrading taunts and comments highlight the verbal sexual harassment that girls regularly experience, along with the hetero-patriarchal ideology that insists on identifying gender with biological sex, and differentially values gender on the basis of traditional power values. In this frame, “an idealised version of heterosexual femininity for boys is one in which girls are considered as ‘skinny’ and ‘pretty with big bums’” (Bhana, 2018, p.8).

According to Inhle and Annasatacia, it is apparently ‘normal’ in this environment for boys to have many girlfriends and to be conspicuously sexually active, but if girls act upon their own sexual desires, or ignore boys’ requests to engage in relationships, they are subjected to derogatory names:

> Inhle: The boys call girls who date a lot of boys and who say boys they love them and who goes and sleeps with boys. They call her isifebe. In English isifebe means a bitch.

> Annastacia: This one boy came to me and said he loves me and wants me to be his girlfriend. I said no, please leave me alone. He then turned around and said to the other boys around, I am an isifebe.

Here the ‘damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t’ discourse is employed by boys to regulate girls’ performances and degrade girls on both ends of the spectrum (i.e. both the girls who express their sexuality as well as those girls who reject boy’s sexual advances). In complement to the dominant construction of masculine sexuality as naturally aggressive, dominant and promiscuous (Connell, 1995) is the conception of feminine sexuality as submissive and innocent (Connell, 1987). ‘Compulsory heterosexuality’ then further puts into effect male domination, male sexual entitlement and female subordination (Butler, 1990; Rich, 1980). In the above excerpts, girls are openly policed by boys not only when they are perceived as transgressing normative feminine performances but also whenever they appear to threaten male sexual entitlement by rejecting boys’ sexual advances. In both cases, they are instantly labelled ‘isifebe’, or as a slut or a bitch. The process of labelling a girl “a slut” [slut-shaming] (Ringrose & Renold, 2012, p. 337), is a key means by which girls’ gendered performances and sexualities are monitored and persecuted from a very early age. The girls in my study, like Inhle and Annastacia, earnestly described the sexual harassment they routinely experienced and witnessed – though none of them spoke of reporting it in the moment. Unbalanced gender relations with regards to inequalities in power and speech establish a context in which women and girls’ subordination is seen as a foundational aspect of society. In this school context, girls remain perennially susceptible to degradation through verbal harassment and/or slut-shaming. And while Inhle may have personally declined becoming acquiescent to male power, and chose to express her active agency by refusing to engage in a relationship with a persistent boy, she still faced a broader subordination when the boy in question attempted to regain his power by publicly degrading and shaming her.

9.2.2. Unwanted sexual advances and touches.

Unwanted sexual advances and touches were lamentably common experiences for the girls at Penguin Primary School. A few Grade 7 girls, for example, reported on recent incidents they had witnessed:

> Inhle: This one boy, he tried to open the buttons of this one girl’s dress. This Grade 6 boy, Simakahle, he tried to touch Sihle and she tried to run away but the boy held her back.
>
> Ayabonga: Boys touch girls’ private parts [bums, thighs, and boobs]. They [the boys] even pull our bra straps. They tease us, they hit and swipe us on our bums

[demonstrating how a card might be swiped]. When we are walking around the school, they run and they spank us also.

From the fragment above, schoolgirls' experiences of sexual harassment and abuse come to light through their sincere accounts of sexual objectification, their noticing the male gaze upon their bodies, and the shock of being non-consensually fondled. For the boys' part, shameless heterosexuality is viewed as an integral part of hegemonic masculinity and is thus laden with symbolic power (Bhana, 2016a). In the primary school context, boys often seek to make early claims to masculinity through replicating and joining in on these behaviours; that is to say, harassing girls so as to see themselves as men. In South African society, boys learn early that to be viewed as real men, they need to dispel all potential self-ambiguity by constantly displaying their heterosexuality. Boys thus conspicuously affirm their hegemonic masculinity by touching and pestering girls, even (or especially) when the girls themselves object or disapprove. This unbidden touching of intimate body parts, pulling of bra straps and swiping of girls' skin are all observable practices indicative of the 'rape culture' girls are forced to navigate on school grounds.

In this regard, Le Mat's qualitative content analysis of 41 news articles garnered from the SA Media database similarly concludes that: "[S]exual violence remains tolerated in schools" (2016, p. 4). Likewise, such a normalisation of the heterosexual pestering of girls by boys invokes and re-affirms male power, male sexual privilege and girls' subordination. Dunne (2007), writing from the sub-Saharan context, also reports how girls, on the whole, remain subject to pervasive practices of sexual pestering in the form of unnecessary touching and pinching by boys. For the boys at Penguin, sexualising and dishonouring girls' bodies were clearly key behavioural markers of how they sought to enact hegemonic masculinity and ultimately reinforce 'rape culture' from the very first emergence of their sexuality.

9.2.3. Girls feeling fearful and uncomfortable

Some of the girls in the study reflected quite acutely on how they often felt fear and discomfort as a result of the routinised objectification and sexual harassment they were subjected to at Penguin Primary. Further to this, they also expressed their helplessness:

Siyethaba: When the boys hit girls on their bums, these girls will not say anything, because they are scared ma'am. We can't tell the teacher because the

> boys say that they will catch and hit us after school. Boys they speak to us so rudely, they look at us and then they come and touch us on our bums, breasts, and even on our faces. This makes us feel very scared and uncomfortable at school. So, we are scared, we stay quiet, even though we know it's wrong, who will help us?
>
> Ayanda: At school, a lot of sexual violence goes on. Boys, they like forcing girls to kiss them and they just hit us on our bums, and some of the boys even hold us and kiss us without permission. The teachers don't know what we go through, eish. As girls we are so scared, we don't go and report it.

The collective accounts from girls, like the ones above, point to the tangible fear and discomfort they experience due to the prevailing 'rape culture' of their classrooms. By complying with conventional ideals of femininity (Connell, 1987; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012), the girls were made more susceptible to sexual abuse and pestering. Girls' own fears, discomforts and failures to report transgressions also illustrate their subordination. No doubt, the inappropriate talk and touches they reported to me made every one of the girls feel fearful and tense, but only a few of them had actually found the courage to report such incidents or contest the boys directly. When girls did report incidents of sexual violence, boys were, more often than not, let off with benign sanctions (for reasons that the next theme in this chapter will uncover). The fear and discomfort that girls felt due to sexual violence held a major presence in their lives, as it functioned as the most obvious and effective internalised force maintaining their subordination. This resonates with Leach and Humphreys' (2007) work, which incorporates notions of fear into a refined definition of sexual violence. Similarly, Bhana's (2012) study discovered that the fear of violence is an everyday impediment upsetting girls' sense of autonomy in South Africa. The sexual violence that girls spoke about here manifested itself through daily instances of sexual abuse and harassment at the school itself. The girls also spoke of how they became victims of sexual objectification and harassment through the persistence of unwanted sexual advances and touches. The constant fear and discomfort they felt in relation to boys then illustrated their subordination. As the products of a stubbornly patriarchal society, boys will continue to make use of a prevailing 'rape culture' (Brownmiller, 1975) to assert and maintain their dominance over girls until they are held up to higher standards or

their environment is reformed (Connell, 1987; 1995). Through sexual abuse and harassment, boys try to keep girls in a constant state of fear.

Yet, girls still enact their agency while they disclose their experiences of sexual violence. When Siyethaba asks "[W]ho will help us?", this clearly suggests that girls are fully aware of what is happening to them; their attempts at speaking out demonstrate that girls know that these sexual violations are wrong and unjust, but they still lack adequate institutional support for their attempts to defeat the discriminatory practices and sexual violence that they experience and witness.

9.3. 'Rape culture': Normalised at an institutional level

The girls in this study shared too the ways in which teachers played a critical part in enabling 'rape culture' by reinforcing highly gendered ideologies. Dunne, Humphreys and Leach (2006) remind us that age and power relations between educators and learners serve as the fundamental structures of schooling which interact with and influence the institution's presiding gender regime. This section thus seeks to illustrate how 'rape culture' is normalised at an institutional level; first by showing the nature of the games learners were authorised to engage in, then by critiquing the existing disciplinary sanctions for boys perpetuating sexual violence, and lastly by exploring teachers' gendered ideologies as they manifested in Penguin Primary School.

9.3.1. Sexual violence and Kho-Kho

Kho-Kho is a modified version of tag, or 'catches', and involves the goal of chasing and touching a person. In 2018, the Department of Sport and Recreation made calls to schools to include indigenous games within the school sports programme. The aim here was to preserve and advance the rich heritage of such games for future generations. At Penguin Primary School, Kho-Kho was chosen from the list of indigenous games offered. A coach was sent to the school to coach learners for this specific code of indigenous sport. Some observations from my field notes journal at the time read as follows:

> Most of the sporting games at Penguin Primary School were gender-segregated. Netball was for girls only, soccer for boys and cricket for boys. Volleyball, chess and table tennis were for both boys and girls. In embracing togetherness, learners were subjected to a game, Kho-Kho, which was highly sexualised. Learners have a sporting period on Wednesdays. I was in charge of netball on the far end of the girls' ground, Kho-Kho was played at the opposite end of the

> same ground. I was curious about the new game at school. I observed over a few sport periods how the game transpired. A coach is sent to the school to train learners regarding how to play it. It is a running game. There are cones and everyone sits near cones and there's a person who passes through and if [they] pass through one way, they have to come back the same way. And if you are a runner, you have to catch the others only if you touch them, on their buttocks - that indicates they must run. If you touch them on their backs they must not move, only if touched on the buttocks, they are authorised to move and play. This game went on for weeks. At the beginning, many learners were enthusiastic to participate; as the weeks passed, I noticed the numbers reduce. I clearly remember during the third week one boy stating, "Yoh ma'am this game is nice. We get to touch the girls' bums for free, it's nice!" He laughed abruptly as he ran along. During the fifth week a girl had come up to me crying. When I asked her what had happened, she said, "ma'am we were playing and he swiped me, that's not how the game goes!"
>
> [Field notes. Date: 10 October 2018. Time: 13h30. Place: Girls' ground].

While Kho-Kho did somewhat serve to break down gender boundaries at Penguin Primary School, it was more often used by boys as a sanctioned avenue through which they could 'easily' violate girls' autonomy. Through just such games, 'rape culture' becomes normalised. Perennially overlooked by the authorities, such a game fuels gender inequality and perpetuates sexual risk for girls. However, it is not only tolerated but condoned and normalised via a local discourse which frames it as a playful and innocent game. This is one of the more explicit ways in which the common-sense concept of 'childhood innocence' negates/avoids the existence of childhood sexualities, and thus plays a determining role in the uncritical evaluation of a game that involves a form of sexualised touch. Kho-Kho implicitly involves the touching of learners' buttocks whilst they run around cones. Learners could not run unless they had been touched on their buttocks. Thus, a game that appears harmless (and is even authorized by the Department of Education and the school itself) can have major ramifications for young girls' lives due to its improper evaluation. For boys, this sexualised running and touching was enjoyable and pleasurable, but the girls uniformly did not share the same sentiments. Boys implacably used Kho-Kho as an opportunity to sexually objectify girls by touching their buttocks and harassing them sexually. This easily observable fact went officially unrecognised. This type of game and its subsequent violations are premised on shared preconceptions about the 'absence' of

childhood sexuality in the primary school environment and, more specifically, the language, attractions, behaviours and religious rituals of heterosexuality that emerge within it. Ryan's USA-based (2016) study at an elementary school found that peer interactions just like the ones I observed at Penguin are daily practices in the average co-ed primary school. Most of the time too, they escape adult notice (Paechter, 2017; Ryan, 2016).

9.3.2. Boys and benign sanctions

At Penguin Primary School, in addition to sexually harassing and abusing girls through taunts, touching and games, boys moreover got away with misogyny by receiving benign sanctions from their overseers, which further frustrated the girls:

> Siyethaba: How, ma'am, how can you come and just touch a girl anyhow you want but if it's you, you touch a boy on his private part, it's something big but if they do it, it's something like nothing.

Siyethaba here implicitly alerts us to how the teachers at Penguin Primary School also innocuously enable 'rape culture' by projecting attitudes that condone such behaviours. The teachers' own gendered ideologies sustain double standards of dress and conduct for boys and girls. Boys are often easily let off for sexually violating girls. It is, indeed, as though girls are expected to accept and normalise their experiences of sexual harassment and abuse as an inevitable part of the school day. This is further indication of the dominant positions of hetero-patriarchal power both the teachers and the boys hold in relation to girls.

Ayabonga, Amahle, Yolanda and Andiswa all tell us of such incidents that they have personally experienced or witnessed:

> Ayabonga: They hit the girls; they touch the girls' private parts. They cry, they tell ma'am, it stops a little but continues again. They get a parent's letter. Their parents don't end up coming school, they look at girls in a sexual way and they just laugh ma'am.
>
> Andiswa: I have seen girls are being touched by boys who sit next to them on their thighs and breasts and they don't usually react they keep quiet. I have seen that some girls, they usually tell the teacher. She talks to boys about not touching girls.

> Yolanda: I am not sure if they do it purposely when I was in class, I told ma'am, I can't see the board, so me and Amahle went to sit in the front, then Thabani's bag fell down, he said stop teasing me, then he went away and picked his bag then it fell again. Then Thabani said I don't care who dropped my bag, he held me below my boobs and took me out of his place, I cried cos he hurt me and then I told ma'am and he went to the HoD and he got a written warning.
>
> Amahle: The other day Simakahle was walking and he came and hit my bum. And then I cried that day and I went to tell the principal. The principal said he was going to talk to Simakalahle.

As such, according to girls, 'rape culture' was intensified at Penguin Primary School due to the mild sanction's, boys were given for their behaviour. Girls spoke, for example, of how teachers and the heads of department usually just gave the boys some kind of talk or issued a parent letter or written warning. Boys, however, felt no censure from such gestures and the existing disciplinary code never worked to deter their sexualised pestering of girls. The sexual violations girls experienced did not garner the interventions, interruptions and strong responses they required, and thus it appeared to the girls themselves almost as though 'rape culture' was an inscrutable, inexorable part of life and that teachers' own helplessness only further enabled it. Girls were expected to accept it, and tolerate it, and thus boys saw this established regime as a form of semi-official permission to go on with their illicit behaviours. It is clear to me that, whilst working in a professional capacity with children, a greater degree of acknowledgement and care is needed.

The girls in this study needed support from authority to deal with the sexual violence they endured. Furthermore, they needed someone to reassure them that such pervasive conduct was not an inevitable part of their daily lives. The general lack of safe, supportive spaces for girls was always palpable. It is perhaps understandable then why the girls in this study felt it was on them alone to defend themselves from everyday sexual harassment and abuse, given the minimal support from those in positions of authority. As Hlavka's (2014) study similarly concludes: "[…] [T]he lack of institutional support assumed by girls in this study should be deeply concerning for educators and policy makers" (p. 354). However, by treating primary school learners

as agents and decision-makers, there is still an opening for safe spaces to be created in which they can work together with adults to review and redress their encounters with sex, violence, power, compulsion, and consent that constantly reoccur in their daily lives at school. Girls, like the ones in this study, survive in a context of incessantly normalised (hetero)sexual violence (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). In my findings, their teachers were found culpable for enabling 'rape culture' by reinforcing highly gendered ideologies and condoning and normalising the sexual violence that the girls experienced.

9.3.3. Teachers: Slut-shaming, silencing and victim-blaming girls.

While teachers often overlooked boys' sexual violations (passing them off as 'boys being boys'), girls' sexualities were regularly policed and disciplined.

In one focus-group discussion, the girls discussed how, even in primary school, girls learn to carefully navigate sexuality, sex and sexual violence:

> Priscilla: There was a girl who used to sleep with big men for money. And another girl who fell pregnant. Once I heard ma'am say, this girl asked for it and ma'am once said this girl was a wild girl. This one girl kept on going to the man and said she needs money to raise the child but that man said no I don't know you. I never slept with you. He just denied her but he really did it with her.
>
> Andiswa: Oh this same girl got pregnant and then took an abortion. She's doing 8th grade now.
>
> Sbahle: They used to go with boys in the beach and from the beach they don't go back to their house then the next day when they come from school, they tell some other girls they are pregnant. One girl did an abortion, she did an abortion a few times now the boys are out of school and much older than her, they work in some of the shops in the mall. Girls like big boys because they need the money.
>
> [Focus Group 2 Discussion, 21/11/18].

The primary school, as I have hopefully shown throughout this thesis, is still predominantly thought of as an asexual arena of human life (Bhana, 2007) and children are denied acknowledgement of their sexuality by force of cultural taboo (Bhana, 2007). The discourse of

childhood innocence this creates often causes discussions of childhood sexuality to get bogged down in uneasiness, scepticism, nervousness and 'concern' stemming from parents/guardians, teachers and other adults (Allen & Ingram, 2015). Invoking any mention of children's 'sexual knowingness' often gets problematised as being an appalling, unsuitable and immoral act of speech (Allen & Ingram, 2015). But as this research study has shown, listening to girls' own accounts of sex and sexuality both displays their inherent sexual agency and exposes their vulnerability to incidences of sexual violence; neither category should be overlooked or judged as counting against them. This conclusion points again to the importance of teachers' attitudes and actions in their position of authority in the classroom, noting how their impact on the educational structures of the classroom and their reluctance to censure boys for their abuses further perpetuate girls' subordination.

For instance, the Penguin girls' experiences of pregnancy and abortion were fundamentally traumatic, yet their supervising teachers uniformly saw fit to bypass any kind of official understanding, support and care, and instead chose to victim-blame the girls themselves for their sexual precocity. This judgement situates girls in a position of helplessness that often leads them to blame themselves for their predicaments. Instead, teachers should, as Payne reminds us, be cognisant of how girls live and create meanings beyond the pedagogical categories of risk and vulnerability to which they are so habitually confined (2012, p. 408). Girls often autonomously enter into age-disparate relationships for financial reasons, as well as in pursuit of their own desires and pleasures, but, nonetheless, the sexual risks they place themselves in should not be overlooked. For example, Bay-Cheng's (2019) study in the Chinese context documents how schoolgirls often work hard to secure their instantaneous needs, such as their physical wellbeing and their forthcoming goals in education, by employing their sexualities. In the process, they attempt to control their experiences by allowing such exploitative relationships to only affect them 'in the moment', knowing they're doing so for the cause of safe-guarding their long-term life prospects. Beyond this, there are also many other ways in which girls assert their autonomy in every facet of their lives, as the next section explores.

9.4. Non-fearing femininity - Demanding respect and asserting power by using violent performances

The agency enacted by the girls in this study was never one-dimensional, and as such, I have so far presented their experiences as a double-edged sword whereby they consistently

demonstrated both their subordination and contestation of 'rape culture' at school. Thus, beyond the ways in which 'rape culture' was enabled and reinforced at Penguin Primary School, girls also inevitably contested it:

> Karuna: Boys sometimes touch girls anyhow. From behind they look at the girls' bums, and they say 'hmmmm' and then they go and touch the girls' bums and spank it. Some girls they don't do anything, Other girls push the boys away and say, 'Go away! Don't touch me!' 'I will fuck you up!' But still, this is something that continues to take place at school.

This interview excerpt validates how even though girls experience and negotiate 'rape culture', and are for the most part subordinated by it, there are still various instances where girls are able to contest it. Within the South African context as well, Bhana and Mayeza (2019) have shown that schoolgirls (as a group and individually) cannot simply be reduced or homogenised into a passive, frail femininity deemed appropriate by dominant narratives. Girls can and do often deviate from conventional femininity (Connell, 1987) in order to assert themselves and gain some sense of power. Karuna here challenges "the wall of patriarchy" (Gilligan 1990, p. 503), and by her account above we can deduce that there is a marked fluidity in the femininities present in her classroom. Whilst some girls still acquiesce (Connell, 1987) to sexual harassment and abuse, Karuna explains how other girls retain their ability to assert themselves and demand respect (see Jewkes & Morrell, 2012).

Inhle too tells us about an incident she witnessed between Zenani, a black African girl, and a boy her age. Zenani notably deviated from the dominant narrative of the passive schoolgirl:

> Inhle: Once when she [Zenani] was absent, Lusanda was talking about her. He said she is an isi*febe*. Zenani found out this and went to him, she swore at him. They say things like: msoonu inja [dog's backside], masimba [faeces], hlama [stupid]. Zenani even took off her shoe and hit Lusanda. He ran out the window. Then Zenani came out the door and went after him, she hit him even more.

According to Annastasia, Zenani is a girl widely regarded as fearless, self-assertive and demanding of respect. Zenani confirms this here by refusing to be a passive recipient of sexual violence in any form. Instead, her actions as reported challenge gender essentialism, as well as most pre-determined scripts about African girlhood. Zenani unabashedly used verbal and physical violence to redress the sexual abuse and harassment inflicted upon her. Such responses

emphasise how girls can, and do, strategise against rape culture under certain conditions of oppression. A non-fearing femininity, and a direct demand for respect, are key principles of their agency (Bhana and Mayeza, 2019; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). Yet, doing reactive violence in response to structural violence draws girls further into a violently gendered sphere which gives rise to unhealthy variations in their constructions of femininity (Bhana, 2008). In girls' attempts to secure their own safety, they rupture the dominant descriptions of typical schoolgirl femininities - such as being 'sensible', 'noble', 'dutiful', and 'compliant' (Porter, 2015). Girls themselves confirm that femininity is far more multifaceted than a merely linear understanding of power allows. As the girls went about enacting their agency and attempting to redress their losses of power from boys after facing sexual harassment or abuse, the vengeful violence they employed served to reinforce the culture of violence that lies at the root of their grievances. This is not to say that girls should not use self-defence when facing such a perpetrator, but rather that, in the educational context in which boys sexually harass girls, their plight could be adequately dealt with and addressed in a peaceful and non-violent manner if only teachers would appropriately mediate their struggles and support the wholesale dismantling of 'rape culture'.

9.5. Conclusion

If this chapter demonstrates anything, it's that 'rape culture' exists and persists even within primary school contexts. Girls' experiences of 'rape culture' were connected (by the girls themselves) to unequal gender power relations which chiefly arose from binary notions of gender and heterosexual norms. This chapter also shed some light onto how girls navigate their daily lives at school and presented their experiences of sexual harassment as a double-edged sword of simultaneous subordination and contestation of 'rape culture'. Additionally, the girls were extensively quoted sharing how teachers too played a critical part in enabling 'rape culture' by reinforcing highly gendered ideologies. Schools are thus the regrettable settings of control for the emerging social and sexual lives of boys and girls. Penguin Primary School here provided both a setting as well as a space for girl's contestation of power, wherein mostly heterosexual scripts were enacted, contested and rewritten. 'Rape culture' is thus, in overview, a complex ideological system that finally generates power inequalities through sexual violence. This chapter powerfully evidenced and called out the changing face and intensification of 'rape culture' through the experiences that girls themselves brought to light. It is primarily through education though, as many feminist scholars have stated, that stark gender ideologies can be

disrupted and change can eventually be brought (Bhana et al., 2021; Francis, 2017). Following Bhana et al (2021, p. 6), I note too how: "[S]tructures and knowledge can come together and work towards sustaining gender equality by pointing to the double bind and contradictory nature of educational establishments as sites for gender inequalities and violence, but also as potentially nurturing of new alternatives, new imaginations and new possibilities."

Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1. Introduction

I begin this last chapter by reminding the reader of this study's key research questions. Thereafter, I highlight my major research findings and discuss how they build on the existing research concerning young primary schoolgirls, femininities, violence and agency in the context of teaching young children. Finally, I outline the implications of these research findings - particularly in relation to the development of suitable interventions to ameliorate the traumatic experiences of girls in schools due to gender inequality, misogyny and violence.

This ethnographic case study conducted at Penguin Primary School has primarily explored 12-13-year-old primary schoolgirls' experiences of gender, sexuality and violence. The process of constructing femininities, as played out by a test-group of 12-13-year-old schoolgirls in their final year of primary schooling, was complex and contradictory. On one side, dominant gender norms were consistently reproduced, but on the other, equally conspicuous resistance to these norms was observed. The sophisticated manner by which primary schoolgirls articulated the meanings of their feminised positions within gender relations was also clear, as well as the authenticity of how they expressed sexuality in the construction and negotiation of their femininities whilst living in a society dominated by rape culture.

Thus, in this conclusion, I offer another outline of the research study, I explain its main findings and I elaborate on how these findings contribute to the existing body of research on young schoolgirls, gender, sexuality, agency and violence within the primary school environment. In the end, I outline the implications of these research findings and propose recommendations for establishing effective future interventions to address rape culture in primary schools.

10.2. Key Research Questions

In this thesis (entitled: 'Gender, Sexuality and Violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13-year-old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal'), I have investigated the different ways in which gender, sexuality and violence featured in, and played out through, the lives of various 12-13-year-old schoolgirls. The main aim of this research study was to explore the sophistication with which primary schoolgirls, between 12-13 years of age, were able to articulate the meanings of their feminised position within gender relations, and how

they still managed to express sexuality in the construction and negotiation of their femininities. I found that the schoolgirls were able to articulate their feminine positions within gendered relations through the act of navigating a complex nexus between the reproduction of dominant gendered norms and enacting active agency within a context of normalised rape culture.

I used the following key research questions to achieve my study's aims:

- How do primary schoolgirls, aged between 12-13 years, articulate the meanings of their feminine positionality within gender relations?
- How do schoolgirls express heterosexuality in the construction and negotiation of their femininity in the primary school environment?
- How do primary schoolgirls experience, negotiate and challenge the manifestations of rape culture in their primary schools?

10.3. Main Findings

Throughout the study, I employed post-structuralist feminist theory as a tool to pinpoint some of the multifaceted ways in which primary schoolgirls construct their feminine identities. My aim in this was to help broaden the common understanding of young 12-13-year-old primary schoolgirls, along with their experiences of gender, sexuality and violence. Their articulations of various expressions of femininity and sexuality were very much reflective of their fundamentally active agency. Analysing how primary schoolgirls navigated their spaces has thus allowed me some first-hand insights into different versions of femininity, and how indigent counter-feminist ideals of femininity can be constructed, reproduced and maintained. Unequal gender power relations surfaced most strongly for me whenever the respondents drew most heavily on conventional constructions of femininities (emphasised femininity) that permitted an underlying system of patriarchy to be maintained – that is to say, a system that subordinates both women and men who deviate from normative constructions of gender or sexuality (Connell, 1987, 1995).

Below, I summarise and schematise my main findings according to a few key themes:

10.3.1. Sexual Knowingness: Knowledge and Practices

My participants expressed how they constructed their heterosexual femininities through sexualised discussions and exchanges. As girls, they contradicted the current discourse of childhood innocence, and often achieved a real, momentary feeling of agency, as well as power,

through demonstrating and articulating their sexual 'knowingness'. Though none of my schoolgirl participants disclosed that they had yet engaged in penetrative acts of sex, 'deep kissing' and overt acts of touching were often brought up as key activities to their emerging sexualities. As regular practices, these were extremely pleasurable to them and, already, normalised.

Familiarity with sexual knowledge and practices too were, of course, pretty common amongst my participants. The schoolgirls reported regularly asserting themselves and performing their heterosexuality through games such as 'spin the bottle', 'love dice' and 'hide-and-go-seek'. They also freely engaged in discussions concerning penis size and often employed colloquial euphemisms like "drinking milk" (oral sex) and "snowball" (vagina). Sexual knowledge of ('V') positions was evident enough too. The predominant femininity that emerged from such accounts thus entailed a variety of heterosexual standards: having a boyfriend, performing deep kissing, uttering knowledge of the private parts (penis and vagina), and (ultimately) having and affirming sexual intercourse itself. But the girls still recognised that these sexual activities were supposedly an adult pursuit and so, despite the explicit details they gave, they discreetly chose to disassociate themselves from all such practices.

Nonetheless, the girls' conspicuous knowledge and awareness of deep kisses, sexualised terminology, sexual physiology, and sexually erotised styles punctured traditional ideologies of sexual innocence. The division that then persisted amongst the girls who directly demonstrated their sexual knowledge evidenced a very clear moral binary, so that girls who indeed acted on their sexuality were censured as the "bad girls" (Bhana, 2018; Bhana et al., 2021), while those who didn't still attempted to preserve something of their alleged purity. The former girls always projected a certain quality of desirability and a marked heterosexual capital through the agency of heterosexual talk (Paechter, 2007).

10.3.2. Girls as Active Sexual Agents

The explicit sexual details the girls did disclose serve to emphasise the gravitational pull of heterosexuality within the construction of heteropatriarchal femininity. Despite this, the open expression of female desire at such a young age is habitually considered damaging and unhealthy, and girls often feel compelled to navigate a tightrope of disclosure, whereby knowledge about sex can compromise their "good girl" femininity status whilst, simultaneously, knowing too little will leave them similarly ostracised. Conversely, those girls

who were found to know more than they should or acted upon their desires too hastily were, contrarily, classified as cool and popular, or they were forced to navigate communal expressions of loathing in addition to personal feelings of humiliation or internalised misogyny (Bhana, 2018).

This particular finding directly challenges the prevailing silence around girls' emergent heterosexual desires by illustrating the erotic activities that transpire just beyond the view of teachers, reminding us of how specific spaces "actively constitute the meanings of sexuality possible within them" (Allen, 2013a, p. 58). Such spaces - in this instance, the back-end of the school bus - are recontextualised by the girls themselves as sexually significant spaces, within which erotic activities manifest initially. These practices sometimes include eroticised acts of kissing and bouts of intimate physical contact that defy the typical sexual parameters set out for young girls within the confines of emphasised femininity. Girls also connected the performance of heterosexual desires with their consumption of '1818' vodka. Indeed, as previously distinguished by other researchers (see Gevers et al., 2013; Livingston et al., 2013), alcohol played a critical role in the girls' precocious sexual relations: activities, sexuality and risks as such, alternately engendering and promoting "unsanctioned sexual behaviours" (Livingston et al., 2013, p. 20) which consequently increased the likelihood of sexual compulsion, complacency about contraception, and girls' acquaintance with perilous partners. It is vital though to recognise that the girls' drinking of alcohol, and their investments into sexual encounters (at the back of the bus), could also be read as indicators of their emergent sexual agency. It is infinitely clear that there is so much regarding gender and sexual diversity that teachers overlook. These matters are critical to schoolgirls' personal and social well-being, as well as the task of creating a safe school environment where gender fluidity and sexual diversity are acknowledged and girls are provided with all necessary guidance.

10.3.3. Heterosexual Relationships in the Primary School Environment

The majority of the schoolgirls subscribed to heterosexual femininity through desiring (and engaging in) heterosexual relationships. The 'compulsory' nature of heterosexual relations featured strongly at Penguin Primary School, but the girls advocated and pursued behaviours that served to destabilise conventional sexual relations. They attained a degree of power, as well as popularity, from engaging in heterosexual relationships and by mobilising heterosexual power. They used boyfriend-girlfriend relations in enjoyable and deeply powerful ways. However, the emphasised femininity they followed was founded in heterosexuality - which, as

Butler (1990) claims, has been naturalised to such an extent that heterosexual desire has now surfaced as a universal compulsion. The schoolgirls carefully utilised the hidden spaces on the school's grounds to covertly express their heterosexual femininity and surreptitiously realise their desires. Explicit expressions of heterosexuality - such as "hugging, kissing, and touching" - were undoubtedly critical features of the primary school experience for learners (Paechter, 2007, 2017; Renold, 2005). In support of this, an emergent corpus of research has illustrated the ubiquity of low-key sexual activity throughout the course of formal education, noting how primary schoolgirls and boys regularly engage in boyfriend–girlfriend cultures (Bhana et al., 2021); participate in heterosexual games (Huuki & Renold, 2016); kiss, fondle, (Bhana, 2018); and otherwise commit themselves to heterosexuality long before most adults ever become aware of the situation (Paechter, 2017).

In the South African primary school environment, the prevailing discourse of 'childhood sexual innocence' codifies the student's body itself as being, in every sense, taboo and off-limits. Education is assumed to be a purely academic process whereby the operations of a learner's mind can be nurtured and refined without any further engagement or distraction (Paechter, 2007). By openly negotiating the dominant gender norms that structured this space, the girls re-aligned their bodies from being sites of compliance and vulnerability or risk to being sites of power through resistance - as well as making them the primary means of asserting heterosexual power. The girls showed how the body and its chosen clothing can become the crucial means to achieving, what Paechter (2007) refers to as, "social and sexual capital". It must be noted here though that majority of the girls in this study performed their heterosexuality within the context of unfathomable socio-structural inequalities and generational poverty. As such, their special focus on dress, bodily performance and sexuality can be interpreted as a diversified method of mediating the stings and consequences of surviving poverty and asserting their agency.

The schoolgirl participants in this study emphasised how the use of eroticised pieces of clothing - for example: body-suits, bum-shorts, and bright coloured bras - productively augmented their sexual desirability. They wanted so much to be desired in this way that they regularly came to school dressed in such pieces of clothing, regardless of the risk of flouting school rules. Displaying cleavage, thrusting their buttocks, and exposing their breasts were their tactics for publicising their sexual desirability and laying claim to the standards and status of heterosexual femininity. Through these techniques, the girls sought to settle the male gaze upon their own

bodies, and their peers' bodies, so as to affirm themselves as authentically sexualised objects. The body and its dress can thus function as tools by which primary schoolgirls make claims to heterosexuality; both to convince themselves of their desirability and for the sake of impressing others. The girls' enthusiastic contributions in heterosexual practices - through both their bodies and pieces of clothing - offered them opportunities to personify a gendered normativity that allowed a specific, disciplined version of sexuality to materialise. Dressing up serves well to express heterosexuality; moreover, in a context of perpetual need, dressing up also provides a means of asserting personal dignity and confirming earned status. The girls achieved a momentary sense of economic freedom through dressing to impress (Bhana, 2018), but in the process they may have paradoxically lost or sullied their reputations by flouting standard constructions of femininity.

The schoolgirls recognised at a very early stage that they could gain power and express agency through showing off their bodies and dressing provocatively. In addition to dressing up, they used make-up, invested in flashy hairstyles, and modified their uniforms to suit the male gaze. Girls' everyday investments in their appearance also fed into a broader culture of wielding eroticised make-up. Similarly, the restyling of school uniforms may be interpreted as a form of creatively internalising the sexualised male gaze (Paechter, 2013). It cannot be doubted from the observations of this study that the male gaze was omnipresent in girls' minds as they constantly confirmed and re-confirmed their heterosexual desirability as they continually tailored their appearance to achieve a superficial ideal with the aid of make-up and jewellery. In short, from a very young age, they chose to use material agents to look appealing, to conform, and to certify that they were indeed recognised as "real girls" (Renold, 2013).

'Twerking' was also one of the most prominent ways in which the girls, as Paechter has noted, "turned their own bodies and dress, into heterosexually desirable commodities" (2007, p. 40). The blatant recognition they garnered from the boys (through whistling, clapping and ogling) aided only in encouraging their unconcealed demonstrations of personified heterosexuality. Paechter explains twerking in this regard simply as "erotically-charged movements" (2007, p.40) and thus it entails shaking bums and showing panties. This can then clearly be interpreted as the most obvious manner by which the girls at Penguin regularly expressed their sexual agency.

10.3.4. Girls and Conformity

Within the sociocultural context my study's respondents found themselves in, gender was primarily constructed through the ideals of an emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987). The domains of the family, culture and the community at large all reinforced an emphasised version of femininity which then filtered down into the context of formal education. This context-specific analysis of gender and sexuality has shown how such particular constructions either promoted or hindered the development of gender-equitable relations for girls. The potent, ideologically conservative messages circulated by the respondents' families were seen to have shaped girls' fundamental behaviours; sometimes harming them, but at other times somewhat benefitting the process of constructing their identities. While some girls contested, deviated from, and even ruptured, dominant norms, most acquiesced and (re)produced an emphasised femininity. The overall influences of both family and culture on the schoolgirls' identity constructions were immense. They spoke of how they felt they had to behave like 'a proper girl' at all times, and that this meant dressing, behaving and speaking in a strict, typically respectful manner. The set distribution of household chores, gender-specific behaviours and fixed power dynamics was uniformly prevalent within my participants' accounts – all of which were based on patriarchal beliefs and thus were reflective of gender inequalities.

10.3.5. Culture, virginity and virtue

The girls' potential attainment of 'respectable status' often centred on virginity as the paramount value for an ideal hegemonic femininity, compelling them to perform a conspicuous asexuality. Every PSG at Penguin Primary School recognised the importance of maintaining a chaste status, and could easily perceive the connection between chastity and prospective economic value through a potentially increased payment of *ilobolo* (bride wealth) as well as gifts during *umemulo* (a ritual celebrating virginity). Identifying respectable femininities thus rested on the paranoid enforcement of sexual abstinence and/or chaste purity (Bhana, 2016b).

Throughout my participants' accounts of sexual behaviours and mores, a pervasive double-standard was clearly identifiable. Boys were almost always permitted to engage in sexual activity (even with multiple partners) whilst girls were intensely regulated through gender and cultural norms and were always obliged to be complicit in their own subordination. They more often than not complied with cultural norms, and thus helped regulate hegemonic femininity and exacerbate gendered inequalities (Rudwick & Posel, 2015).

10.3.6. Girls and Resistance

10.3.6.1. Tomboys

There were, of course, some girls who identified more with masculine behaviours. These interviewees openly rejected the stereotypical virtues of girls as studious, docile, and passive victims of social and cultural processes. Instead, they chose to enact their agency by dressing up in pants and engaging in physical brawls. These 'tomboy' qualities helped them reconstruct their identities in ways that often-threatened other girls and boys. "Assertive behaviours" such as these are often perceived as the trademarks of individuals who reject the interdependent relationship of femininity and masculinity (Jackson & Lyons, 2013, p. 238). By transgressing the expectations placed on normative femininity, they also projected qualities associated with the "pariah" femininities conceptualised by Schippers (2007, p. 95), which are deemed subordinate because they "are considered socially undesirable" and inherently "contaminating to social life". While a conventional form of femininity can be said to be hegemonic in as much as it displays the qualities aligned with 'proper girl' femininity in a specific context, 'pariah femininities' (as depicted in my schoolgirl participants' accounts) comprise the deviant forms of femininity that inevitably become stigmatised for challenging the prevailing order of masculine hegemony.

10.3.6.2. Lesbian relationships

Homosexual relationships between girls at Penguin Primary School were thus obviously viewed as being characteristic of such pariah femininities. Nonetheless, girls who "exhibit[ed] sexual desire for other women" and showed "aggressive behaviour[s]" in rejecting compliance with hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007, p. 95) were altogether conspicuous. A small number of schoolgirls identified themselves to me as homosexual, but I found that for fear of victimisation they simply remained publicly silent about identifying as a lesbian. The school was a fundamentally heterosexist environment and the revelation of their authentic identity risked immediate ostracisation. The girls used their discreet sense of agency about when to engage in homosexual relationships, but remained silent on the topic for the most part.

10.3.6.3. Girls and Sexual Violence

At Penguin Primary School, the girls constantly expressed their frustration at how they were treated by the boys. The boys often tried to exert their dominance through the use, among other methods, of sexualised language. The girls were thus verbally degraded and taunted on a daily basis, and though the insults often varied - sometimes in English, sometimes isiZulu - they

always carried sexual undertones. The use of sexualised vulgar language is usually related to flaunting social power (Garrido & Prada, 2018; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014), and thus when the boys verbally harassed the girls, they attained a form of patriarchal power which accorded hegemonic masculinity socio-cultural prestige, as they affirmed their heterosexuality or their misogyny, or both. My participants' hesitation in disclosing their encounters with verbal sexual harassment from boys was expressive of their subordination; and yet, as they were ultimately able to air their voices, their confessions also showcased their profound agency. Whilst boys gained their power from patriarchal sexuality (Bartholomaeus & Senkevics, 2015; Connell, 1995) and the use of derogatory language (Bhana, 2016b, Bhana, 2012; Conroy, 2013; Garrido & Prada, 2018; Haavind et al., 2015; Summit et al., 2016), the same privileges were not bestowed onto girls.

Apart from sexualised language, the boys also allotted degrading names for girls based on their physical appearance. Girls were regularly sexually harassed, with their bodies treated as objects. Schoolgirls' bodies were sexualised, violated and broadly regulated by boys. If girls did not have voluptuous bodies, they were deemed 'scwapas'. Thus, even in primary school, the girls were confronted with their sexual objectification and boys learnt to accept the status quo as normalised and expected. Through such acts of verbal domination, boys were able to enact hegemonic masculinity through sexually objectifying, harassing and enforcing the gaze upon schoolgirls' bodies (Bhana, 2018; Renold, 2005). The ideal version of heterosexual femininity for boys portrayed girls as being slender, with cleavage (big breasts and bums) (Bhana, 2018).

a) Bitches, sluts and isifebe's

There were also instances in my study where girls, in the process of mobilising their heterosexual desire, suffered the consequences of their freedom of appearance. Whereas these girls ruptured normalising structures of female compliance through the adapted manners in which they utilised their clothing and acted out, they often found themselves immediately at risk of being sexually harassed, mocked, and or being called "bitches," "sluts" or "*isifebe*". This is not to presume their naivete in pursuing their self-expression, however. The girls were fully conscious of their capital in the heterosexual marketplace, and by complying with the prescriptions of heteronormativity, they employed their bodies as a kind of merchandise of exchange to barter for new-found power (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015).

In other instances, it was commented upon as normal for boys in this age-group to have many girlfriends and to be sexually active, but if their peers, the girls, acted upon their sexual desires, or if they ignored boys' requests to engage in relationships, they were freely subjected to derogatory names. Girls who exercised their sexual confidence, as well as those girls who openly rejected boys' sexual advances, were uniformly insulted. Consequent to the dominant construction of masculine sexuality as naturally aggressive, dominant and promiscuous, is the widespread conception of feminine sexuality as being submissive and innocent (Connell, 1987). Compulsory heterosexuality thus bolsters masculine domination, masculine sexual prerogative and female subordination (Butler, 1990; Rich, 1980). The girls at Penguin were policed by boys not only when they transgressed normative feminine performances but also when they threatened male sexual entitlement by rejecting boys' sexual advances. They were instantly labelled an 'isifebe' - a slut or a bitch. The act of labelling a girl as a slut - or slut-shaming - is a key means through which girls' gender performances and sexualities were policed and rape culture enabled (Bhana, 2016a, b). Girls' fundamental agency, however, always came through; for example, some girls refused to acquiesce to male power by declining certain heterosexual relationships with boys. Nonetheless, the girls still faced subordination when the boys attempted to regain their power by publicly degrading and shaming them.

b) Coercive advances and touches

My schoolgirl participants spoke of their regular sexual objectification, the intrusive gaze upon their bodies and private parts, and the consistency with which they were non-consensually fondled. For boys, conspicuous heterosexuality was an integral part of the hegemonic masculinity they subscribed to and, as such, was laden with power (Bhana, 2016a). In the primary school environment, boys asserted their masculinity through these behaviours. To achieve this, they made sexual advances towards girls. Having been raised in South African society, the boys learnt early that to be viewed as real men, they needed to constantly display their heterosexuality, which they blatantly affirmed through unsolicited touching and pestering of girls. This touching of intimate body parts, pulling of bra straps and swiping of girls' persons, were all behaviours indicative of the 'rape culture' that girls found themselves embedded in. This normalisation of heterosexual pestering of girls by boys invoked male power, male sexual privilege and girls' subordination (Dunne, 2007; Le Mat, 2016). For boys, sexualising and dishonouring girls' bodies was a key marker for enacting hegemonic masculinity and reinforcing 'rape culture' in the classroom.

c) Sexual harassment, discomfort and fear

The girls felt fearful and uncomfortable with the routinised objectification and sexual harassment they were subjected to. Their narratives expressed their feelings of helplessness. In seeking to comply with conventional ideals of femininity (Connell, 1987; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012), girls' susceptibility to sexual abuse and pestering was intensified. Girls' fear, discomfort and consistent failure to report such incidents were illustrative of their subordination. Only a few girls found the courage to report abuses or contest the boys on their behaviour. When girls did report incidents of sexual violence, boys were merely given benign sanctions. The fear and discomfort that girls felt due to sexual violence played a critical part in the girls' lives as these worked towards maintaining their subordination and fear of reactive violence represented a regular struggle that tainted girls' sense of freedom at school (Bhana, 2012). Through regular sexual abuse and harassment, boys were able to keep girls in a constant state of fear. But, by speaking out to me about their experiences of rape culture, they also expressed their active agency. One participant even asked: "Who will help us?" This suggests the fact that schoolgirls are completely aware of what is happening to them, and that their muted attempts at speaking out demonstrate that they know that these sexual violations are wrong and unjust whilst they do not receive adequate support in their attempts to combat the discriminatory practices and sexual violence they experience and witness.

d) Sexually inappropriate games

While the game of 'Kho-Kho' sometimes served to break down gender boundaries at Penguin Primary School, it was more often used by boys as an avenue through which they could 'easily' sexually violate girls. It is through just such games that 'rape culture' becomes normalised. Overlooked by the school authorities, such a game fuels gender inequality and perpetuates sexual risks for girls; nonetheless, it was still tolerated, condoned and normalised via a playful and innocent discourse of 'it's only a game'. Herein, it can be claimed that the conceptualisation of childhood innocence (which negates the obvious existence of childhood sexualities) played an influential role in the uncritical evaluation of a game that involved a form of touch that is often heavily sexualised. Kho-Kho involved touching learners' buttocks and running around cones. Learners could not run unless they had been touched on their buttocks. A game that appeared harmless – was even authorised by the Department of Education and the school itself - could have had major ramifications for not being evaluated properly. For boys, this sexualised activity was uniformly enjoyable and pleasurable (as I noted in my fieldwork); but, needless to say, girls did not hold the same sentiments. The boys, consciously or not, used

Kho-Kho to sexually objectify girls by touching their buttocks, and it thus provided them with a sanctioned opportunity to easily harass them sexually. This went unrecognised by the authorities present. This type of game, and its consequential violations, are pursued on a foundation of socio-cultural knowledge, as well as presumptions pertaining to sexuality in the primary school and, moreover, the linguistic charms, behaviours and religious formalities of heterosexuality. Exchanges such as these are day-to-day practices in this primary school context and beyond and, more often than not, escape adult notice (Ryan, 2016; Paechter, 2017). This pattern of sexual violation could have been easily and carefully dispatched had the school management team ever critically discussed the game.

10.3.7. Gender Binaries and the lack of attention given to girls' experiences of violence

Teachers' attitudes, biases and futile response mechanisms towards the boys in their charge meant that such behaviours were condoned across the board. The teachers' gendered ideologies also helped sustain double standards based on dress and conduct for boys and girls. Boys were easily let off for sexually violating girls; it was as though girls were expected to accept and normalise their experiences of sexual harassment and abuse as a normal part of the school day. This further indicated how the dominant authority positions teachers and schoolboys held, concerning the girls, cemented their attachment to heteropatriarchy.

The schoolgirls brought to my attention how 'rape culture' was intensified at Penguin Primary School thanks to the benign sanctions that boys were given for their transgressions. For instance, girls articulated how teachers and the heads of department at school usually only gave the boys either a talk, a parent letter or a written warning. Boys, however, felt nothing about these 'punishments' and they didn't deter their sexualised pestering towards girls at all. The sexual violations girls experienced never received the interventions, interruptions and responses they needed, and therefore it appeared almost as though 'rape culture' was the underlying law and that the teachers themselves were its enablers. In some ways, the girls were expected to normalise and tolerate it, while boys saw this consensus as official permission to go on with their inappropriate behaviours. In working in a professional capacity with children, a far greater degree of acknowledgement and care was clearly required (as such, studies of this nature and of this age cohort are especially critical). The schoolgirls needed true support to deal with the sexual violence they frequently endured and to be assured that such conduct was not an inevitable part of their daily lives. The general lack of safe, supportive spaces for schoolgirls was always palpable.

The teachers' responses to the signs of girls' sexual activity were unbecoming of their profession. They lacked either a sense of understanding or a foundation of moral support. Teachers overlooked boys' sexual activities as 'boys being boys' while girls' behaviours were policed and judged based on extremely prudish guidelines. The manner through which girls navigated sexuality, sex and sexual violence in the primary school was generally considered inappropriate, and many teachers turned a blind eye against it. The primary school environment is still predominantly thought of as an asexual arena (Bhana, 2007) and children are denied any vestige of emergent sexuality (ibid.). The prevailing discourse of childhood innocence often resulted in discussions pertaining to children as sexualised subjects habitually raising grumbles of uneasiness, scepticism, nervousness and concern amongst parents, guardians, teachers, school personnel and other grown-ups alike (Allen & Ingram, 2015). Children expressing any form of 'sexual knowingness' were habitually problematised as showing appalling, unsuitable and immoral conduct (Allen & Ingram, 2015). The teachers' gendered attitudes then also surfaced in this study, contributing greatly to the rape culture prevalent within the school. Indeed, though girls' experiences of sex and sexuality were inherently expressive of their own sexual agency, their consistent experiences of sexual violence should not be overlooked or in any way judged as a result. These conclusions point to the importance of teachers' attitudes and actions; namely, how they impact on the school structures in place and how their reluctance to broach the subject of emergent sexualities further perpetuates girls' subordination. Girls need more support when it comes to sexual & reproductive health and well-being. Teenage pregnancy, age-disparate and transactional relationships, HIV and AIDS, and rape are ever-present social ills which still inordinately affect women and girls at large. Schoolgirls enter into age-disparate relationships for financial reasons, for desire's sake, and for personal pleasure, but the sexual risks they place themselves in should also not be overlooked or pre-emptively judged in this complex transaction.

10.4. Implications of Findings

Throughout my fieldwork I found that my participants often contradicted themselves as they spoke and acted, but that their agency always remained in the vanguard. Emphasised femininity was produced through essential philosophies of female subservience and male domination. Given, however, that this study focused on young girls and femininities, it should now be said there is a serious need for interventions to disrupt the seemingly credulous acceptance of

harmful dominant gendered norms and roles. My respondents were often confident in expressing their agency, whilst still reproducing gendered binaries and subsequently colluding with unequal relations of power at home, within cultures and at school. There was clear evidence that they were interested in altering the dominant gender norms they found themselves in, which they felt were too restrictive, harmful and primitive, and which clearly fuelled South Africa's rape culture as a whole. The expression of gender and sexuality through the everyday actions, ideals and practices of our current teaching system, and the kind of femininity it consequently produced, are highly objectionable, especially given South Africa's constitutional pursuit for gender equality in schools. With the intention of stimulating transformation within the context of primary education, there needs to be a thoughtful re-evaluation regarding emphasised femininity and girls. Indeed, it is vital that such interventions focus on preventing the blind reproduction of emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity through both the overt and covert practices of our society, families and culture at large, as well the pedagogical regimes of teachers, unions, SMT and learners themselves. In this regard, it is more important than ever for girls to become aware of how they (the girls themselves) and all these aforementioned parties position girls inside of gendered discourses, and to be more conscious of their gendered positions in addition to the impact their actions have on power relations that touch not only themselves, but the messages they give out to society at large (MacNaughton, 2000).

The challenge now is to work with all the stakeholders involved in the lives of young children so as to address and transcend ideological positions based on harmful dominant gender norms which devalue women and girls and fail to acknowledge their active agency in their own lives. Indeed, the ideas held by many of my respondents often amounted to calls for women and girls to adopt alternative, more gender-equitable forms of femininity (Bhana, 2018; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). If all the stakeholders involved in the lives of girls could listen and similarly aspire to more gender-equitable constructions of femininity, and be more accepting of, and receptive towards, non-normative sexualities, this would do nearly everything to lessen gendered and sexual disparities. It is crucial for policy makers to thus recognise how conventional ideals of femininity are not always advantageous to girls, and that they need to deconstruct and disrupt conventional notions and propose alternative viewpoints so as to proactively empower girls and stretch the boundaries of current harmful fantasies of ideal femininity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschidmt, 2005; Schippers, 2007). There is also a need here to acknowledge variations

in femininities and sexualities within schooling institutions, which altogether work to override rigid notions of appropriate gender and sexual performances, and implicitly tackle current social challenges, such as sexual violence, reproductive health and gender transformation. Strategically planned interventions are essential in order to promote greater awareness, acceptance and tolerance, as well as to challenge gendered divisions by promoting healthier, more caring and more gender-equitable versions of femininities. Such initiatives should then involve all stakeholders in young schoolgirls' lives, in order to effectively address transformation within the gendered and sexualised contours of their lives.

Below, I present an outline of initiatives that could be undertaken in South Africa by all such stakeholders to address the rigid contemporary gendered and sexual ideologies that impact on the progress of children. I also detail initiatives that could contribute towards deconstructing harmful gendered and sexual constructs of girls and femininities, and thus make calls to reshuffle harmful norms to encourage greater awareness, acceptance and tolerance of gender and sexual diversity in a bid to reduce misogyny within the school environment and to acknowledge girls' active agency.

10.4.1. Compulsory gender-sensitive communal meetings in different societal contexts addressing parents, traditional leaders, police authorities, counsellors, healthcare workers and all other relevant members of society

South African society, as this study has shown, appears, on the whole, to be reproducing harmful dominant gendered norms, with families and local cultures as their primary vehicles. Such families and cultures remain heavily invested in reinforcing male power and dominance within South African society, thereby creating a broader ideological space that normalises rape culture. Stark gender binaries, gendered ideologies and normative sexuality permeate society. Thus, society at large urgently needs to be more cognisant of gender and sexual diversity, and work to help young girls and boys foster gender awareness and embrace equality. For this purpose, South African cultures must converge to foster greater consciousness of the several forms of gendered and sexual variations, and how heterosexual violence emerges in the most elementary social spaces. By learning how to identify such variations and manifestations of rape culture, communities themselves can directly aid in developing strategies to protect their children. Such local movements would draw on the authority of traditional leaders, counsellors, healthcare workers and parents so as to promote positive change and achieve greater acceptance and sustainability over the long term.

Within our society, there is a need to deconstruct how relative roles for males and women and girls are understood. Specific cultural and religious beliefs that shore up constructions of men as financial providers or breadwinners alongside women as caregivers to children need to be addressed and reformed at a grander societal level. Traditional and religious leaders who are serious about gender equality initiatives in South Africa need to encourage their followers, and South African society more generally, to adopt more gender-equitable expectations for community responsibilities towards children. Formulating community-based networks of change by working with all relevant adults could help identify and eradicate harmful sociocultural views and practices that might subsidise the promotion of rape culture and strengthen dominant gendered norms that further entrench inequalities. In addition, gender activists in South Africa should be drawn into chairing gender-sensitivity conferences within communities so as to help guide them into adopting healthier and more gender- and sexuality-equitable practices and programmes of tolerance and mutual respect.

10.4.2. Compulsory gender sensitivity workshops for in-service teachers and all stakeholders involved in the lives of learners at South African primary school institutions

In-service teachers and school management teams have the most important task of all in this regard, as this study discloses. They need to become fully cognisant of the fact that schoolgirls, even at 12-13-years of age, live and make meaning beyond the behavioural categories of risk and vulnerability (Payne, 2012). In this study, it was found that a lack of institutional support for girls enabled a culture of rape to persist within this primary school context. By treating primary school learners as agents and decision-makers instead, safe spaces could potentially be created for them to work together with adults to review the experiences of sex, violence, power, compulsion, and consent so prevalent in their daily school lives.

South African teachers and school management teams, as this study has shown, appear, on the whole, to be ill-equipped to deconstruct harmful dominant gendered norms and performances in the classroom. Instead, they possess and pursue their own gendered ideologies that often reproduce male and female binaries at school in gender-inequitable ways. In response to this, the South African Department of Education, as well as more higher education institutions, need to begin offering compulsory gender-sensitive training and workshops to all student teachers, as well as all in-service teachers who are already involved in young learners' lives. This training should be cautiously considered, using these subsequent points, in order to guarantee that future teachers, current in-service teachers, and school management teams are uniformly well-

prepared to respond to contemporary gender- and sexuality-related issues facing South African primary schools through adopting gender- and sexuality-sensitive approaches to teaching and learning:

- Teachers and school management teams need to strictly follow the national protocols and etiquette and reassert their roles as caretakers of learners' rights.
- Gender-sensitive training must be facilitated by gender experts who possess excellent teaching skills and a sound knowledge of cultural and contextual factors in South Africa (as well as their impact on gender relations in the country at large).
- More specifically, as demonstrated within this study, dominant gender norms in our culture appear to strongly regulate and devalue femininities. As such, I argue that there needs to be a special, renewed commitment to educate future teachers, in-service teachers, and school management teams regarding the cultural specificities that operate in clandestine fashion to create obstacles for girls' free expression, while venerating boys identities.
- Gender should not be considered in isolation: facilitators should adopt a post-structuralist feminist approach to teaching gender and sexuality in an intersectional manner that accommodates the diverse identities of all South Africans. This is especially significant in a country like ours, where equality issues are continually produced and reproduced at the busy intersection of race, class, culture and gender.
- Training for pre-service teachers, professional teachers, and school organisation teams should provide a foundational understanding of gender constructs and encourage teachers to critically reflect upon their own lives as gendered beings. A safe arena must be created in which all the stakeholders directly involved in the lives of young learners can freely express themselves and share with others their individual gendered stories so as to question and negotiate how gender impacts their lives.
- Educational resources and strategies employed during gender-sensitivity training sessions must be meaningful and effective. There needs to be a carefully considered process of integration between contemporary gender issues facing South Africa and the manner in which such resources and strategies are designed.
- Conforming to emphasised feminine ideals and their concomitant behaviours appears to be linked to societal harms. For example, hegemonic constructions of men as being more powerful, assertive and dominant, contrasted with constructions of women as being passive, subordinate and docile, serve to perpetuate a system of patriarchy

through which men assume roles associated with dominance and power, in comparison to women and girls, who assume roles associated with subordination. Wholesale deconstruction of these gendered ideologies will inevitably facilitate women being better represented in society and school.

- Gendered concerns about female sexuality, risks and dangers must also be similarly reviewed throughout gender-sensitivity training, with pre-service teachers, professional teachers, and school organisation teams, since confining women within structures that obscure or deny women's sexual agency does next to nothing to inspire them to participate in more liberal forms of femininity.
- Additionally, an over-emphasis on the view that all girls should take on an empathised femininity within their educational and societal structures needs to be addressed and deconstructed. This can enable improved relations amongst men and women, and boys and girls, more generally in South Africa.
- Basing the requirements of 'normality' on good girls, normative sexuality and emphasised feminine ideals undoubtedly offsets the process of achieving gender equality. My study has demonstrated the particular, urgent need to deconstruct harmful gender norms and beliefs that oblige girls to exhibit docility and passivity. More awareness must be created around the need to deconstruct expectations that women and girls should perform their gender in a manner that accommodates emphasised ways of being a girl, as these serve to reinforce gender inequalities and further entrench harmful gendered performances in our society.

10.4.3. Compulsory gender-sensitivity measures for South African primary school institutions and primary school learners

South African schooling institutions are primarily heterosexist environments, which leave little to no room for gender and sexual diversity. The productive roles that teachers, educational administrators and schools themselves can take on for primary school children in South Africa are profoundly important. I found that primary school teachers' constructions of girls were more or less solely founded upon emphasised or conventional feminine ideals and hegemonic masculine ideals for boys. Heterosexuality was the norm, even though female learners in primary school were themselves classified as asexual. Schoolgirls who were in any way transgressive or assertive were considered abnormal, with the former being more prevalent than the latter. Other variations in femininity and sexuality were hardly acknowledged. Dominant

gender norms were clearly harmful, and yet part and parcel of the school day. Primary school learners therefore need to receive the following in order to foster agentic femininities:

- Stakeholders at schools should promote a more supportive school environment by hosting programmes based on the themes of gender, sexuality and violence, as these constitute the tangible experiences of most schools.
- A zero-tolerance policy should be implemented to sexual violations. Learners must be reminded to abstain from teasing, provoking, insulting, patronizing and bullying other learners.
- School officials or other trusted adults should be allocated the task of being the school's mandated guidance counsellors.
- Schools need to strongly co-operate with the child safety systems, healthcare and police services to aid boys and girls who experience sexual violence.
- Mediums ought to be established for learners to articulate their voices and to 'take the plunge': for example, forums such as learner representative councils, children's committees, clubs, and support groups.
- Parent-teacher-learner associations should be founded and nurtured to report learners' anxieties, and advocate on their behalf, in addition to promoting peer education.
- Codes of appropriate behaviours need to be enforced effectively for learners, teachers and school personnel alike.

10.5. Moving towards gender-sensitive teaching and learning: Initiatives by the Department of Education in South Africa

It is critical that the South African Department of Education should work in conjunction with primary schools to reinforce the gender-sensitive training of in-service teachers so as to capitalise on the goal of achieving gender- and sexuality-sensitive teaching and learning procedures in South African primary schools. In order for such a goal to actually materialise, the following steps need to be undertaken post-haste by the Department of Education:

- The South African Department of Education needs to develop and offer follow-ups to ongoing gender-equality and gender and sexual diversity education workshops for in-service teachers. These workshops should be designed in ways that support teachers by allowing them to put into practice the sensitivity training attained during their teaching qualification. An intensified focus and commitment on the part of the South African Department of Education will help ensure that in-service teachers implement gender-

and sexuality-sensitive approaches to teaching. Moreover, if standard memoranda are designed and issued to all South African primary schools, this will ensure uniformity of approach and offer solid directives to all schools in the country, hence officially and effectively promoting gender and sexual diversity and equality in South Africa.

- The South African Department of Education should take a firm stance towards reforming all teaching resources, such as textbooks and departmental workbooks. It has been found in various studies that various textbooks still reinforce gender and sexual stereotypes. The screening of textbooks may be a tedious process, but duplication and purchase can serve as an initiative with a particularly great potential to encourage publishers of educational resources to produce more gender- and sexuality-sensitive, unbiased material for children.
- The South African Department of Basic Education should also offer separate workshops for departmental heads of schools which focus on how to manage schools, teachers and children in more gender- and sexuality-equitable ways. This can help deconstruct harmful dominant gendered norms and expectations for the roles and responsibilities of male and female teachers, as well as for learners at school. The department heads of the schools are in positions of power over teachers and learners, and so they more than most can aid in transmitting new gender- and sexuality-equitable pedagogies.

10.6. Supporting young primary schoolgirls through Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

In South Africa, young schoolgirls frequently run the risk of teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS infection, or gendered acts of violence in relations where gendered and cultural standards fundamentally confine their agency (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). Addressing aspects of gender and sexuality in the primary school, along with the nuanced ways that girls construct femininities, is crucial. CSE in South African schools can provide context-specific guidance for addressing girls' gendered inequalities and sexual biases, and the risks to which girls can and do subject themselves. CSE is a gender- and rights-based perspective of sexuality education that aims to prepare young learners with the necessary skills to develop positive approaches to sexuality. UNESCO (2018) suggests that CSE is one crucial means of ensuring sexual health and gender equality at a local and national level. By taking seriously what girls have to say about their own experiences of sexuality, this study has shown that girls

do openly challenge outdated, moralistic judgments regarding childhood sexuality while pointing out the need for improved sexuality education based on the ideals of developing skills and values to ensure positive and healthy relationships that foreground their own enjoyment and wellbeing (UNESCO, 2018). It is now especially vital to heed, and take seriously, primary schoolgirls' own viewpoints if we are to augment the sexual knowledge they obtain and encourage appropriate gender-sensitive behaviours given such knowledge. Most research into primary schoolgirls' day-to-day lives fails to address the nuances of gender, sexuality, how girls devote themselves to heterosexual or homosexual cultures, rape cultures and how all of these manifest in the school environment. The prerequisite here is for teachers to be trained to recognise that gender and sexuality are uniquely significant to primary school identity constructions. Moreover, parents and guardians need to be cognisant of what their child/ward thinks, knows, feels, and does, even within the primary school context. Through age-suitable topics, CSE can address girls' investments in sexuality while simultaneously building an encouraging and inclusive approach to sexuality that embraces gender and sexual diversity beyond the heterosexual norm.

10.7. Recommendations for further research – The Way Forward

This study has highlighted how dominant gender roles within the domestic realm impact significantly on primary schoolgirls' constructions of femininity, whilst acknowledging that girls always remain agentic beings. Such acts of agency, however, always represent a double-edged sword. On one side, the reproduction of dominant gender norms persists, while on the other, resistance to these norms, no matter how covert, is inevitable. I therefore now propose that future research should encompass an even more integrated investigation of the expectations and lived experiences of young schoolgirls. The representation of girls within the ideals of an emphasised femininity is just that — an unrealistic ideal that does not on the whole reflect or accommodate reality, and is, moreover, deeply problematic for girls who are trying to forge contemporary, agentic identities. There is a pressing need in our society for a more nuanced understanding of how gendered pedagogies in the home, the culture at large and the classroom in particular are intricately interconnected. Detailed accounts of how girls accommodate, reproduce, contest, rupture and negotiate dominant gender norms could provide greater insights into the gendered expectations and experiences of women and girls in our society.

An investigation into the exact motivations for, performances of, and benefits gained by, young schoolgirls themselves, is also crucial to determining exactly how girls mediate between their gendered and sexual identities and their put-upon roles as young girls. Detailed interviews and observations of how young schoolgirls go about their lives in contemporary society would be particularly beneficial in ascertaining how diverse femininities are constructed and how girls exercise agency, pleasure, desire, and otherwise navigate the dangers, risks, and challenges they may encounter whilst attempting to safeguard themselves.

All school stakeholders, such as school parental bodies, parents, school principals, school district managers, teachers and children, need to be included in active dialogues pertaining to the need for gender and sexual diversity, tolerance and freedom. This is particularly vital, as all school stakeholders are intricately connected in this endeavour, with each one impacting on and influencing each other. Future research must therefore focus on conducting individual investigations into the views of each stakeholder. Lastly, an investigation into the reasons why young schoolgirls opt to engage in the specific practices they do, would provide useful insights into how girls can modify emphasised expectations by venturing into alternate versions of femininities. A further investigation into how and why these girls embrace alternate or emphasised versions of femininities willingly is also important in order to ascertain the extent to which dominant gendered norms are being rejected, accommodated or reinforced by girls themselves.

10.8. Conclusion

This study, I assert, contributes towards a greater understanding of how primary schoolgirls construct schoolgirl femininities; not as victims per se but as agents in the construction and negotiation of their own gendered identities. This thesis has provided insights into how the ideal of an emphasised femininity is just that — an unrealistic ideal that does not on the whole reflect or accommodate reality, and is, rather, deeply problematic for girls trying to forge contemporary, agentic identities. This thesis has shown conclusively that the reproduction of dominant gender norms is indeed holistically disadvantageous to young girls. Addressing equitable variations in femininity premised on the principle of female agency is vital in South Africa; especially in primary education, where the movement to alter gender and sexuality biases and deepen gender and sexuality awareness and equality has barely made in-roads. Working towards increasing gender and sexual diversity and tolerance within the school environment can help facilitate a general transformation in the conventional binaries' learners

are obliged to internalise. All avenues to help broaden and spread knowledge on the topics of gender, sexuality, femininity and their relationships to rape culture can serve to empower women and girls and make small but substantial changes in addressing gender inequalities in any given social setting. There is not only the need for a wave of gender and sexual diversity awareness in South African primary schools; we have to facilitate the construction of alternate, gender-equitable forms of femininity and sexuality in a country riddled with toxic versions and visions of hegemonic masculinity. These movements, as Bhana et al. (2021) point out, could ideally lead to a new reckoning of the gender order that could influence peaceful social developments on a global scale.

This research study has moreover proven that listening to, understanding and supporting primary school learners can help secure safer and more gender-equitable schooling experiences for all learners. It is critical for schools and other educational institutions to apply effective strategies to prevent and respond to 'rape culture' at an early stage. Here, within the primary school setting, school management teams, teachers, learners and CSE in the school curriculum can each play key roles in bringing about wholesale change. This communal momentum can help unlock the potential of schools as sites for the empowerment of learners and the early detection and prevention of 'rape culture'. School management teams can play a critical role too by actively promoting a respectful, gender-equal, peaceful culture, with greater gender and sexual awareness shared amongst learners, teachers and other school staff. There is potential for young people to take on the role of active agents of transformation (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bhana et al., 2021) and as these scholars note, affords one of the highest hopes for accomplishing the social transformation that is now required to end 'rape culture'. This can only be unravelled through good, gender-inclusive and sensitive education. Schools can work on better policies promoting greater educational awareness with regards to these factors: what constitutes consent, healthy relationships/sexuality, sexual harassment, sexual assault, anonymous reporting; as well as avoiding sending mixed messages through tolerating, condoning and normalising forms of sexual violence at school, and thus declaring a zero-tolerance policy against sexual violence by establishing and enforcing strong, efficient sanctions for acts of sexual violence on the school grounds and in the classroom.

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Appendix A- UKZN Ethical Clearance Certificate

11 July 2018

Ms Naresa Govender (208516654)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Govender,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0589/018D (Linked to HSS/1197/013)
Project Title: Gender, sexuality and violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13 year old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 05 June 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

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 discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

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

Yours faithfully

[redacted]
.....
Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Deevia Bhana and Dr Shaaista Moosa
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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Appendix B- DoE Ethical Clearance Certificate

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma Tel: 033 392 1063 Ref.:2/4/8/1517

Miss N. Govender

P.O Box
Stanger
4450

Dear Miss Govender

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "**'GENDER, SEXUALITY AND VIOLENCE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF 12-13 YEAR OLD SCHOOL GIRL FEMININITIES AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWAZULU-NATAL**", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 17 May 2018 to 09 July 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

[redacted]

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 17 May 2018

Appendix C- Informed Consent – The School Principal

The Principal

[redacted]

Dear [redacted] May 2018

Re: Permission to conduct a research study in the school.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct a study of 12-13 year old schoolgirls (grade 7). The title of my study is: **Gender, sexuality and violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13 year old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal.**

I intend to investigate the ways in which 12-13 year old schoolgirls construct femininities and how their constructions of femininity are produced through sexuality. Young schoolgirls experience and express their sexuality in diverse ways; they are constantly negotiating and contesting their gender and sexuality. By articulating their gendered and sexual identities young schoolgirls are in a constant flux of power and powerlessness. As a result of these power struggles and pressures, schoolgirls are always trying to get their gender and sexuality right and at times they become subject to some type of gendered violence.

I want to contribute to the knowledge about young femininities, sexualities and gender violence in and out of schools in addition to building on the existing body of literature. Even though girls do act, they are in the main the victims in South Africa of gender and sexual violence. Girls are also vulnerable to HIV and early pregnancy thus a study with girls, femininities and sexualities is profound. Girls do not merely live violence, in the same way

that they do not merely live as victims, they are autonomous beings and they grasp agency. A diverse perspective is on the rise. Schoolgirls are creating their own identities concerning their gender and sexuality. They have thoughts, ideas, feelings and sexual desires in favour of sexuality.

My study envisages empowering femininities and is therefore profound in trying to ensure that young girls within contemporary South African society are able to exercise agency from an early age. I would like to investigate the lives of young schoolgirls as they negotiate gender and sexuality in their final year of primary schooling. I would like to delve into how they desire boys and work in a heterosexual matrix while at the same time facing oppressive gender relations of power. Girls are not simply victims, they are agents and they are also a part of the system as agents who reject, are complicit in and mediate gender and sexuality in specifically heterosexuality.

Additionally my study falls under the project "Learning from learners". This project aims to examine how learners give meaning to learning about gender and the ways in which boys and girls relate to one another. The project will involve interviews with 12-13 year old grade 7 schoolgirls only. The participants in the school and the name of school will be anonymized. In the various publications that will result from this study I will not use participants' real names or the name of the school. They are also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty. Whilst every precaution will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in every group, there will be limits of confidentiality. Participants will be informed that should there be disclosure/s which indicates that their well-being/other learners' is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely

[redacted]

You may also contact the Research Office through:

[redacted]

PRINCIPAL'S INFORMED CONSENT REPLY SLIP

I _____ (full names of principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I grant permission to the learners participating in the research project, and I grant permission to the learners participating in the research project and give permission for the school to be used as a research site.

The times and dates of the research will be at the sole discretion of the principal.

I understand that both the learners and the school are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time.

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL_____ DATE _____

Appendix D – Informed Consent to Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian May 2018

Re: Request for permission for your child/ward to participate in a research study.

I, [redacted] (Student Number: [redacted]), I am a PhD (Gender Education) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the requirements of the degree, I am required to complete a research dissertation.

I am writing to request your permission to allow your child/ward to participate in a study that examines the ways in which boys and girls learn gender in and out of the classroom. This current study 'Learning from the Learners' seeks to explore how boys and girls across school sites in high schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape learn about and 'perform' gender. The main question that this study asks is: What do boys and girls learn through their formal and informal networks and cultures as they participate in institutional activities and interactions with other learners and teachers in the school? Such research is particularly relevant in South Africa given the important given to gender equality as well as increasing signs that boys and girls are learning to reproduce unequal relations of power. Recent reports of school violence and sexual harassment in the classroom, as well as gender discrimination amongst learners is a cause for concern.

The title of my study is:

Gender, sexuality and violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13 year old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal.

All participants in the schools and the names of schools will be anonymized. In the various publications that will result from this study I will not use participants' real names or the names of their school. They are also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty. Whilst every precaution will be taken to maintain the

confidentiality of the participants in every group, there will be limits of confidentiality. Participants will be informed that should there be a disclosure/s which indicates that their well-being/other learners' is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

Your daughters' identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and in the various publications we will produce from it (we will not use their real name or the name of their school). In addition, her participation in the study is voluntary and she may decide not to participate without any penalty. She is also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty.

Kindly discuss your daughters' participation with them, and if you both agree and you give their permission, fill the form below and return to me.

If you would like further details pertaining to the validity of the study then you are most welcome to contact Professor [redacted]

You may also contact the Research Office through:

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

PARENT'S INFORMED CONSENT REPLY SLIP

I, ……., in the capacity of parent/guardian of ……..., hereby consent voluntarily to allow my child to participate in the above-mentioned study.

…….. ……

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN DATE

Additional consent, where applicable:

I hereby provide consent to:	Please tick	
Audio-record my child/ward's interview	YES	
	NO	

Appendix E- Informed Assent of Participants (The schoolgirls)

Dear Participant May 2018

Re: Request for permission to participate in a research study.

I, [redacted] (Student Number: [redacted]), I am a PhD (Gender Education) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct a study of 12-13 year old schoolgirls (grade 7). The title of my study is: **Gender, sexuality and violence: An ethnographic case study of 12-13 year old schoolgirl femininities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal.**

My study is about empowering young schoolgirls and is therefore profound in trying to ensure that young schoolgirls within contemporary South African society are able to exercise agency from an early age. I would like to investigate the lives of young schoolgirls as they negotiate gender and sexuality in their final year of primary schooling. I would like to investigate how they work in a heterosexual matrix while at the same time facing oppressive gender relations of power. Girls are not simply victims, they are agents and they are also a part of the system as agents who reject, are complicit in and mediate gender and sexuality in specifically heterosexuality. Additionally my study falls under the project "Learning from learners". This project aims to examine how learners give meaning to learning about gender and the ways in which boys and girls relate to one another.

I will require you to participate in a focus group which will take approximately one hour, and an individual interview which will take approximately one hour also. The interviews will be audio-taped with your permission. They will then be transcribed and made available to you to ensure that the correct information has been captured. The data collected will be kept in a secure

location, and destroyed after a period of five years. I will be careful to use the information that you supply in a manner that will ensure your anonymity. In order to protect your identity, I will use a pseudonym in my transcripts and my research report. If you are uncomfortable at any time you are at liberty to stop the interview and withdraw from the study. Universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect will direct my research.

If you would like further details pertaining to the validity of the study then you are most welcome to contact [redacted]

You may also contact the Research Office through:

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT REPLY SLIP

I ……. (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project and I assent to my participating in the research project.

I understand that I am liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I desire.

DATE: _____

Additional consent, where applicable:

I hereby provide assent to:	Please tick	
Audio-record my interview	YES	
	NO	

Appendix F-Semi-structured individual interview questions

1. What do you like most about being a girl?
2. What did your mum and dad teach you about being a girl?
3. At school and home are there different rules for boys and girls? Explain?
4. Do you think that there should be different rules for boys and girls?
5. What are some of the things a girl should and should not do? Do all girls follow these rules? Explain
6. What are some of the good things about being a girl?
7. What are some of the bad things about being a girl?
8. What makes you happy, sad, angry and jealous as a girl?
9. And boys, what should boys be like?
10. Are you friends with the boys? Why/ why not?
11. What can you tell me about the boys in your school/ community?
12. Are they all the same? Explain.
13. What do boys do that you like/don't like? Explain.
14. Where do you live? What can you tell me about the area you live in.
15. Are there any dangerous incidents occurring in your area?
16. What culture do you follow?
17. What does your culture teach you about being a girl?
18. How do you come to school?
19. Do you feel safe travelling this way? Why?
20. Do you like school? Why?
21. Who do you play with?
22. What do you do during breaks?
23. What games do girls play?
24. What games do boys play?
25. What happens on the playground, in classrooms, in toilets, near the taps, below the library and in corners?
26. What does the word violence mean to you? (physical, emotional, verbal and sexual)
27. Who is more violent at school? What have you noticed? Explain incidents of girl on girl violence, boy on boy violence, girl on boy violence or vice versa.
28. Can you tell me about a recent fight you saw?
29. Is there any bullying going in school? Who bullies who? Why?

30. Do you have many friends? Who do you play with? Why? Who do you not play with? Why?
31. Are all girls the same? Explain.
32. D they dress the same? Explain
33. Do they behave the same? Explain?
34. What do you know about boyfriend and girlfriend relationships?
35. What are some factors that makes girls want to date?
36. Is it important for a girl to have a boyfriend? Explain?
37. Do you have a boyfriend? Have you ever had a boyfriend?
38. Can you describe your relationship with your boyfriend? How did you meet etc
39. What kind of boys do you think girls like to date?
40. Do you know girls that have a boyfriend? Explain.
41. Can you tell me about any interesting thing that happened between a couple in your school?
42. Can you describe some of the different boys/men that girls like to be with? Why do you think they chose such boys/ men? Are these girls treated well in their relationships?
43. Do you know of girls who have relationships with other girls? How are they treated? Are they accepted or are they treated badly? How are they accepted or treated badly (who treats them badly and why?) How do you feel about girls being in relationships with other girls? Are there a lot of poor girls in your school? What happens to them?
44. What would happen if a girl was in a relationship with another girl at your school or in your community?

Appendix G – Focus Group Discussion Interview Schedule questions

1. Which area/community do you'll come from? Tell me a little bit about the area that you'll live in.
2. Do you'll like school? Explain.
3. Do you'll have many friends at school? Explain
4. Do you'll think it is important to have many friends and be popular?
5. What makes girls popular? What do girls do to become popular? Are you'll popular girls? If yes explain and if no, also explain.
6. What type of girls are you all then?
7. Why do you think some girls think it is very important to be popular?
8. What are some of the reasons that girl date at this age?
9. If you had to date, would you'll date a boy or a girl? Explain.
10. What are some of the qualities that you'll look for in a boy?
11. Do you'll have boyfriends'? Tell me about this.
12. If yes, where and how did you'll meet?
13. What are some of the things that you'll like about your boyfriend?
14. What do you'll and you'lls boyfriends' do for fun?
15. Do you'll love you'lls boyfriend? Why do you'll say this?
16. How many boyfriends have you had?
17. Have you'll ever had more than one boyfriend at a time? Explain.
18. Is it okay for your boyfriends to date other girls? Talk about this.
19. What about other girls? Do they date also date? Do they date more than one boy at a time?
20. In your school or community, is it okay for girls to date more than one boy at a time? Is this acceptable? Explain
21. How are girls expected to behave in your school or community?
22. Do you know if your friends have sexual relationships with their partners? What about you'll?
23. Can you tell me about the girls who are forward? What have you noticed about their behaviour?
24. How are they different from the other girls?
25. Why do you think they behave this way?
26. Are some girls really poor? What happens to them?

27. Have you witnessed or experienced any ‘sugar daddy’ incidents?
28. Not all girls are the same; please tell me how the grade 7 girls are different? What makes them different? Explain in detail please.

Appendix H – Certificate of Proof of Editing

PROOF OF PROOFING

Cameron Luke Peters / www.academic-proofreading.co.uk / cameron@cybertek.co.za

09/12/2021

To Whom it May Concern,

This is just a short covering letter to confirm that every chapter of Ms. Naresa Govender's Dissertation, submitted to achieve the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD, in the School of Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, was doubly and thoroughly proofed and edited by me (as a product of my accredited Academic Proofreading service) over the space of three months in the latter half of 2021.

Besides merely superficial adjustments and rewordings, the work is entirely the product of the collaboration between doctoral candidate and supervisor.

Sincerely,

Cameron Luke Peters, MSt (Oxford).

[redacted]

Apt. 202, 7 St James Street, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 8001

ACADEMIC PROOFREADING

Appendix I – Turnitin Originality Report

Turnitin Originality Report

- Processed on: 12-December-2021 05:10 PM CAT
- Id: 28275409
- Word Count: 80855
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Doctor of Philosophy Full Dissertation by Naresa Govender

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