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**From 12 to 15: Girls, Boys, Gender and Sexuality at a
High School in the North West Province**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the School of Education, College of Humanities, University of
KwaZulu-Natal

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December 2023

Supervisor's Statement

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

Signed:



Professor Deevia Bhana

Date:

11 December 2023

Declaration

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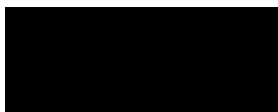
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Abstract

This study examines the construction of gender and sexuality amongst girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 15 at a private school in the North West province of South Africa. It seeks to understand how learners negotiate gender and sexuality at school, and how the school environment and beyond contributes to their construction of gender and sexuality. It also investigates the social processes that promote unequal power relations between boys and girls at school.

An ethnographic research method was used to conduct this study and the research instruments were observations, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Participants were selected using a mix of convenience and purposive sampling methods. Many of the participants were boarding learners, which provides a distinct insight into the ways in which the boarding space is a highly generative site for the production of gender and sexuality. A total of 101 learners participated in this study and 69 semi-structured interviews and 16 focus group discussions were conducted with learners across grades 7, 8 and 9. The data were analysed with the theory of social constructionism.

The findings show that boys and girls pursue pleasure and desire in a myriad of ways within the school context. They challenge sexual innocence by expressing the types of relationships they would like to enter into and show authority in navigating romantic relationships. They use social media for flirtation and engage in the consumption of pornography. Furthermore, the expansion of sexuality is demonstrated as learners choose to enter into queer relationships. However, this is mitigated by the performance of hegemonic masculinity which places girls in a subordinate position. Girls are slut-shamed for resisting traditional norms of femininity and also experience sexual harassment within the school space. Boys and girls both participate in risky behaviour and there is a culture of silence and complicity that is created around it. Bullying and substance abuse are wielded as opportunities to portray aggressive masculinities and femininities. Girls' bodies are policed by authority figures and by the boys which restricts their expression of gender and sexuality.

This study argues that gender and sexuality are perceived by learners through a binary lens, and that girls largely remain in a subordinate position whilst boys conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity. It is recommended that platforms need to be created to question these prevailing attitudes and to provide opportunities for boys and girls to explore and alter their traditional beliefs around gender and sexuality.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This study explores how young people between the ages of 12 and 15 negotiate gender and sexuality at a high school in the North West province of South Africa. Gender and sexuality are under-researched in the African continent and this study aims to expand on and contribute to the emergence of work in the field (Bhana, 2016a, 2018). Gender inequality is a major problem around the world, especially in the global South. Goal 5 of the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals states that in order for there to be a world that is united and prosperous, achieving the goals of gender equality needs to be brought to the fore (United Nations, 2023). However, progress is slow. It has been shown that schools are sites for the production of gender and sexuality and these are spaces that need to be examined in detail in order to mitigate the effects of gender violence and oppression (Turner et al., 2024). Furthermore, research shows how gender and sexuality are ordered through the heterosexual matrix where both girls and ‘other’ boys are disparaged (Neary et al., 2017). Essentialist notions of gender based on biological and religious definitions need to be disrupted and troubled in order to demonstrate that gender and sexuality are fluid and in constant flux (Connell, 2024; Hearn, 2024). My study argues that learners negotiate gender and sexuality through the pursuit of pleasure and desire, by investing in heterosexual and queer relationships, and by girls challenging sexual innocence. However, these are mitigated by misogynist teenage sexual cultures that promote homophobia and inequality and are regulated through constant surveillance and regulation of bodies within the school environment.

This study was conducted at Dinaledi Academy¹, which is a private school located in the North West province of South Africa. This is a co-educational school and is comprised of learners who are boarders and day scholars. This study focuses primarily on boarders, who are the main participants, but also includes the voices of day scholars. A total of 101 learners, from grades 7 to 9, participated in this study and this study aims to bring their voices to the fore. This study falls within the qualitative paradigm and the data are analysed with the theory of social

¹ Pseudonym

constructionism. The methods of data collection that were utilised were observations, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions.

My study found that learners are engaged in the pursuit of pleasure and desire in a number of ways including through flirting, social media and by engaging in open, casual relationships. Learners are also invested in queer relationships; however, more girls than boys are willing to participate in queer relationships as boys are stigmatised and bullied if they are perceived to be gay. Girls show an understanding of the fluid nature of sexuality and are willing to experiment in order to discover what kinds of relationships they would like to enter into. It was also found that girls are subjugated to the policing of their bodies and experience sexual harassment at school. Both boys and girls are involved in risky behaviour and there is a culture of silence that pervades the school on reporting issues such as bullying and risky behaviour. The construction of hegemonic masculinity is a major finding in this study and boys are actively involved in reproducing gender inequalities whilst some girls are also complicit in this. However, some learners show resistance towards these trends and assert their authority and agency.

In this chapter, I provide the research questions that will be answered through this study. A brief description of the context and research methodology of the study is provided. Thereafter, a background to the study is offered and then an outline of the rest of the chapters is given.

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. How do learners negotiate gender and sexuality at school?
2. How does the school environment contribute to the construction of gender and sexuality?
3. What factors promote unequal power relations amongst learners at school?

Context of the Study

Dinaleni Academy is a private school located in the North West province of South Africa and this was the research site of the study. This is a co-educational school and offers boarding facilities for learners from grades 8 to 12. The school is comprised of predominantly black learners with a minority of other racial groups. This school is different from other private and independent schools in South Africa as most private schools have a mainly white population (Badat & Sayed, 2014). The school under study was built specifically to provide privileged

education that caters to black learners and is rooted in African traditions and culture. The learners who attend the school come from within the North West province, Gauteng province and Lesotho as well as from Botswana. The boarding houses are predominantly made up of Batswana learners (from Botswana) with a minority of South Africans.

As this is a private school, the research site has a wealth of resources, and the learners who attend the school also come from affluent backgrounds that are diverse in nature. The school is well-equipped with the latest technology and aims to adopt best practice in relation to teaching methods. The learners at the school all have access to Wi-Fi, Chromebooks and cellphones. This allows them to have free access to social media and they are up to date with the latest news and trends across the globe. Therefore, this study will also endeavour to show how the learners' constructions of gender and sexuality are shaped by the internet and social media. Class sizes and staff to learner ratios are small and the school space is vast with a large expanse of grounds. The school is built with modern architecture and some of the notable facilities, to clarify the research context, include a swimming pool, netball courts, basketball courts, a soccer field, tennis courts, a school hall, an amphitheatre and an auditorium.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research study and is an ethnography. This means that I was immersed in the research context, as a teacher, for a long time and observed and was part of the culture at the school. The research instruments that were employed were observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. There were 101 learners from grades 7 to 9 who participated in this study, comprising 52 girls and 49 boys. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling methods, as this study focuses specifically on the construction of gender and sexuality of learners between the ages of 12 and 15.

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) Research Ethics Committee and permission was sought from the headmaster of Dinaledi Academy in order to conduct the study. Furthermore, the participants in the study were required to give assent whilst their parents were required to provide consent for their child to be a participant in the study. Participation was voluntary and all participants had the option to leave the study at any point in the research process. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms for the name of the school and the research participants, as well as for any other names that were referenced in the interviews and focus group discussions.

Open-ended questions were asked during the interviews and focus group discussions and notes were made of my observations. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and body language and gestures were taken into account when analysing the data. The data were coded using Clarke and Braun's (2017) six steps and then analysed using the theory of social constructionism (Thorne, 1997) and post-structuralist feminist theory (Numer & Gahagan, 2009) with a focus on power relations (Foucault, 1975) and masculinity (Connell, 2020).

Background to the Study

Gender inequality is a prevalent issue around the world and in South Africa, despite efforts to diminish these inequalities (Francis & Webster, 2019). Gender is learned through society, hence, a child born into the world is socialised into becoming male or female through being taught about behaviour that is acceptable and unacceptable for each sex. In many societies, the male child is taught to be dominant whilst the female is taught to be submissive. Hence, gender binaries are created, and the child grows up behaving according to these expectations (Connell, 1987). These binaries serve to create unequal societies where men hold power over women, which has many negative consequences.

In South Africa, there are countless reported cases of domestic violence, rape and murder where, in most cases, women are the victims and men the perpetrators (Jewkes et al., 2015a). These incidences call attention to the patriarchy that is prevalent in the country and serves to disempower women. Men use violence and aggression to assert their dominance and women are given subordinate roles in society which serves to widen the gender gap (Jewkes et al., 2015b). Gender binaries are inextricably linked to power and, historically, men have always had power in institutions, on the streets and at home (Connell, 1987). Connell (2020) also describes a hegemony of men, where men police each other's behaviours according to the norms of masculinity. If men do not subscribe to these prescribed rules of hegemony, they are subordinated. However, it is not always men who hold power. Power is fluid (Reddington, 2020) and can be accepted, rejected and contested. Hence, women have their own power and agency that they use to invert or balance gender roles.

Children are often categorised as being innocent and asexual (Bhana, 2017b); sexuality is typically associated with adulthood. However, on the contrary, research has shown that children are in fact sexual beings, do have feelings of desire and aspire to have meaningful relationships (Pattman & Bhana, 2017). The notion of children being innocent is problematic as this then leads to ignorance of factors that put teenagers into sexual risk which causes teenage

pregnancy and the spread of HIV (Haberland, 2015). It is important to understand the meanings children attach to gender and sexuality as these provide insights into how the intersectionality of gender, race, class, age, class and socio-economic factors shape young people's lives, thus determining the power structures in their relationships with each other (Connell, 1987; 2020). According to South African law, young people between the ages of 12 and 16 are permitted to have consensual sex on the condition that the age difference is no more than two years (Criminal Law Amendment Act No. 32 of 2007, 2007).

The school is a critical space where gender is learned: in the classroom, in the playground, through interactions between teachers and learners, as well as in interactions between learners. These interactions influence children's perceptions of gender and, more often than not, reinforce gender inequalities (Dunne et al., 2006). There are increasing reports of gender violence as well as discrimination in schools, the underlying cause of which is the imbalance of power amongst learners (DePalma & Francis, 2014b). These negative understandings also increase the chances of children engaging in risky behaviours such as violence and sexual coercion, where boys become dominant and girls, passive. Homophobic attitudes are also developed where heterosexuality is the norm. This immediately subordinates other forms of sexuality leading to violence and discrimination. Understanding children's perceptions of gender and sexuality is vital in order to assess whether gender equality is being achieved or not. It highlights the importance of gender education and provides the opportunity for stakeholders to implement strategies that would encourage learners into changing their attitudes around gender as a means to promoting a fair and equal society.

Heterosexuality is the norm in many societies and South Africa is no different (Le Mat, 2017). Young people learn to be heterosexual and, as in many cultures, queer sexuality is a taboo (Sigamoney & Epprecht, 2013). The hidden curriculum advocates heterosexuality through the examples teachers use in the classroom and through the ways in which learners are paired, as well as through social events such as school dances and proms where it is compulsory to have a member of the opposite sex as an accompanying partner (Best, 2013). These gender regimes become ingrained into the fabric of the school culture such that learners accept them without question. Hence, there are very few conversations around queer sexuality and instead a stigma is created around these issues. Bhana's (2017a) study shows how young children express their heterosexual desires through love letters and by playing games that require boys and girls to kiss each other. However, this study also shows that boys cultivate their sense of power by

vehemently avoiding playing with girls in order not to be seen as effeminate. This puts girls in a subordinate position and leads to unequal power relations between girls and boys.

Boys and girls both police each other's behaviours in different ways. Achieving hegemonic masculinity is what many boys aspire to and those with hegemonic status ridicule boys who do not achieve hegemony (Rosen & Nofziger, 2019). Common traits of hegemonic masculinity include being assertive, being able to defend oneself through violence when provoked, being heterosexual and dressing and behaving in ways that would not be associated with the female sex. Boys who do not conform to this code are ridiculed and not considered to be "real" boys. Similarly, girls also police each other in such a way that makes them subordinate. This can be done through slut-shaming, moralising and passing judgement on girls' appearances (Pickel & Gentry, 2017). Virginity is also highly valued by both girls and boys. The subordination by girls and boys of those who do not conform to the norms is termed "othering" (Stahl, 2017).

Teenage sexuality is guided by a variety of factors that serve to enhance and mitigate the ways in which learners navigate gender and sexuality. One of the ways this is mitigated is through unequal power relations between boys and girls. This is achieved through the predominance of hegemonic masculinity in which boys are socialised into behaviours that subordinate girls (Jewkes et al., 2015b). This can be through having multiple sexual partners, bragging about one's sexual conquests and engaging in sexual harassment. These and other behaviours position girls as inferior and as vulnerable. However, girls are not passive victims as they are able to resist unwanted sexual advances and make choices to engage in healthy relationships that promote equality (Bhana, 2017a). A minority of boys also choose to engage in healthier behaviour that places girls on an even level with themselves (Kelly-Ware, 2016).

The school environment plays a major role in the shaping of gender and sexuality. The spaces which learners occupy allow for them to experiment with their sexuality especially within the school. Bathrooms are highly gendered spaces that do not allow for fluidity of gender and sexuality (Slater et al., 2018). A study by Porta et al., (2017) shows that gender-neutral bathrooms allow for learners who identify as gender fluid to feel much more comfortable in the school environment as they feel accepted by their peers and that it is a safe space that allows them to be themselves. The gender regimes at schools are regimented and controlled and much of the school space is divided according to gender. For example, assemblies require that male

and female learners line up separately and some gendered school uniforms also dictate how learners should behave and showcase how boys and girls have different gender roles.

Culture plays a role in boys' and girls' gender relations. Within many parts of Africa, virginity in girls is seen as desirable and linked to morality (Behrens, 2014). A girl who is not a virgin is perceived as less desirable and trustworthy than one who is. However, the same does not apply to boys, which points to the double standards that exist between boys and girls. In addition, cultural norms dictate that girls take on traditional roles as women and therefore they carry the moral burden of the entire family. Boys want to be perceived as sexually virile and thus engage in sex with multiple partners without protection, which further places girls in a vulnerable position (Hunter, 2015). Therefore, this evidence posits that cultural norms need to be disrupted and take gender into account in order to ensure that girls are empowered and enjoy similar freedoms to boys.

The private and elite school space is unique in that it aims to create learners who are well-rounded and have access to multiple opportunities that distinguish them from learners who graduate from public schools. Boarding schools especially have a focus on cultivating specific types of masculinity and femininity (Allan & Charles, 2014; Kenway & Koh, 2015). A boy who graduates from a private school must be athletic, clever and masculine so that they are able to operate within the corporate world. According to Morrell (1993), boys' boarding schools in South Africa reproduce hegemonic forms of masculinity as there is a "bro code" that is prevalent within the system. Boys are expected to participate in aggressive sports such as rugby and are trained to form a united front against those who they play against. Furthermore, they are taught to be loyal to their schools and to make connections that can last a lifetime, granting them privileges beyond what public schools can offer.

Similarly, elite girls' schools aim to cultivate "classy" forms of femininity. Therefore, all girls who attend elite private schools have to conform to a specific group identity regardless of their backgrounds (Kenway et al., 2015). Classy femininity is placed in opposition to "trashy" femininity, which is viewed as undesirable. Thus, elite schools specifically aim to get rid of this so that learners are viewed as classy and achieve hegemony. Girls are expected to wear uniforms that are highly feminine and behave in a manner that is associated with those in the upper class. Undesirable behaviours such as talking loudly, using foul language and engaging in substance abuse are seen as trashy and young girls are taught that it is not desirable to behave in such a manner if they want to be successful. Similar to elite boys' schools, girls are expected

to be all-rounders by participating in sports and other extra-curricular activities. By engaging in these activities, it allows them to reach the upper echelons of society and deepens class differences.

The study of gender and sexuality of South African children is a burgeoning area of research as discourses of childhood innocence still prevail. Bhana (2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) has conducted extensive research on childhood gender and sexuality in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal area which has shown that children develop their gendered identities from a young age and are sexual beings. There has also been much research done in the Western Cape with youth, exploring gender, violence and sexuality (Shefer et al., 2015). However, on the whole, there is very little research on South African children and how they construct gendered and sexual identities. Thus, this study makes a particular contribution to research on gender and sexualities as it is based at a private school in the North West province. The context is unique as there has been limited research on children's negotiation of gender and sexuality conducted in schools in this province. Furthermore, studies on children's constructions of gender and sexuality in private and boarding schools in South Africa are limited as most studies have been conducted in public, low-income schools (Bhana, 2022). Therefore, my study aims to fill this gap to provide a more nuanced view of children's constructions of gender and sexuality within a different context in South Africa.

Rationale

As a former teacher, I have witnessed damaging behaviour from learners who have been involved in altercations due to gender discrimination. Learners have also expressed opinions on gender which promote inequalities rather than curb them. This is concerning as it reveals that society, learners and schools are promoting unequal gender relations. The power relations that exist between learners are of interest as they define how much agency a particular person has to make decisions within that relationship. The attitudes that learners have towards romantic relationships are particularly fascinating because they reveal the expectations young people have of each other which, in many instances, are unbalanced and male dominant. This study seeks to understand better how learners aged 12 to 15 years construct their gendered identities by examining their interactions with each other as well as by finding out how they view themselves in relation to each other. As gender is learned, it can also be unlearned. This study would be valuable in helping parents and teachers devise strategies to promote gender equality in schools.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study by discussing the background and the rationale. It also includes the research questions and an outline of the thesis. It gives a summary of the research context as well as the research methodology.

Chapter 2 examines the theoretical framework within which this study was conducted. The theory of social constructionism was used to understand and analyse the data. This also includes Connell's (1987), post-structural feminist theory (Numer & Gahagan, 2009), the theory of gender relations as well as Foucault's (1975) theory of power.

Chapter 3 provides the literature review as it pertains to this study. It delves into existing research on gender and sexuality as it applies to schools. It also discusses the literature that relates to the boarding context and private schools.

Chapter 4 expands on the methodology that was used in order to conduct this study. It provides details on the school context as well as the research tools that were employed to conduct this study. It details how ethical considerations were observed and the ways in which the data were interpreted.

Chapter 5 is the first analysis chapter that provides the findings of the study. It discusses the ways in which girls in particular challenge sexual innocence and how both boys and girls negotiate heterosexual relationships. It explores flirting, relationships, hypersexuality, online encounters, the influence and uses of the school space, and how the learners' agency is exercised and mitigated.

Chapter 6 is the second analysis chapter and focuses on the ways in which learners expand their sexuality through engaging in queer sexuality. It explores learners' understandings of and attitudes towards queer sexuality, how learners navigate their queer identities, and how the expansion of sexuality is mitigated by homophobic attitudes and behaviours.

Chapter 7 explores the ways in which hegemonic masculinity are manifested at school. It argues that girls are continuously subordinated at school and experience sexual harassment as well as cheating in relationships. Girls and boys also enter into unequal relationships and hegemonic masculinity is fostered through the sharing of nude sexual images and the objectification of bodies.

Chapter 8 is the final analysis chapter and discusses how girls and their bodies are regulated at school. It shows how the school uniform is used as a means to subordinate learners and how it operates as a way for boys to control girls' sexuality. It also explores the culture around risk taking that is prevalent around the school and how this enhances particular forms of masculinity and femininity.

Chapter 9 forms the conclusion of the study. It provides a summary of the findings of the study and gives recommendations for how some of the issues that have been highlighted can be mitigated. This chapter also includes some recommendations for further research.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the aims and objectives of this study. It has defined the research questions and provided a brief context of the study. The research methodology has been shown as well as the rationale for the study. Finally, an overview of the chapters has been outlined. The next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework that was used for this study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a brief background and the aims of this research along with an outline of the structure of this thesis. This chapter will elaborate on the theoretical framework within which this study is situated. It will discuss social constructionism, post-structural feminist theory, theories of gender and power, and the performative theory of gender, all of which have been used in this study to analyse the findings. According to Kivunja (2018) a theoretical framework can be defined as the lens through which data is analysed and interpreted. It allows the researcher to make sense of the data within the study by relying on research that has been conducted previously in the field. Social constructionism refers to understanding the world through the ways in which humans interact, while post-structural feminist theory focuses on power relations and how this may lead to gender inequalities. Connell's (1987) gender relational theory is concerned with the ways in which gender regimes in different institutions allow for inequality to prevail, whilst the performative theory of gender posits that gender is a performance and is coded through certain behaviours and actions.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionist theory refers to the idea that humans' understanding of the world is informed by their experiences and interactions (Sheppard & Mayo, 2013; Thorne, 1997). Behaviours and attitudes are learned and not determined biologically, as predicated in the theory of essentialism. Social constructionism posits that individual identities are fundamentally a multitude of identities that individuals have interacted with. Hence, thought, ideas, knowledge, facts and language are also socially constructed. The theory suggests that human beings are social creatures whose dependence and interdependence on each other and their environment contributes to their own development of character and sense of self. Humans do not exist in isolation. The experiences of humans are also ordered such that these experiences are perceived as being an objective reality and independent of one's own perception (Burr, 2015). However, there is no true or single reality, but humans are constantly involved in socially creating their own realities.

An attribute of social constructionism is that the realities of life are shared and similar amongst many people. Language is used to communicate these experiences and through this form of social interaction a reality is formed. These shared realities can then become institutionalised

and habitative such that they become ingrained in society and thus new norms are created (Galbin, 2014). In the case of gender the predominant view has been that a man holds a dominant position in society whilst a woman is submissive and inferior. This shared reality has remained institutionalised although women have questioned these norms. In pre-colonial Africa, women held high positions in society and were contributors to the economy (Moagi & Mtombeni, 2020). Their roles complemented the duties that men performed and they were influential in politics, religion and economics, to name a few. However, colonisers' influence on African society was such that men were prioritised and women were neglected and thus relegated to the domestic sphere.

One of the elements of the social constructionist theory is that the world is made sense of by using language (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Language is critical for the communication and socialisation of human beings. Thus, the meaning that is attached to words has an impact on behaviour as well. The concept of gender, viewed through a social constructionist lens, is that it is a socially constructed phenomenon (Lorber, 2018). The concepts of sex and gender are often interchangeably used without the realisation that sex is innately a biological concept which commonly determines whether a person is male or female through their genitalia. Conversely, gender is a concept that refers to the actions, behaviours, mannerisms and attire of a person so that s/he can be classified into the binaries of man/woman or boy/girl.

According to Richardson (2015) binaries are a way in which language can be used to manipulate, influence and oppress. The word "man" and "woman" give meaning to each other as each definition is understood in relation to the other. Hence, the word "woman" is defined in relation to "man" which gives status and prestige to men. Gender is highly influenced by social factors and is so innate that it can easily be mistaken as inherent. Hence, from birth, children are pushed into fitting into one of these binary categories through constantly being told and taught how to behave. Girls being encouraged to play with dolls and boys with trucks inadvertently transmits the message that the primary responsibility of a woman is child-rearing and domesticity while boys are channelled towards subscribing to dominant forms of masculinity. These types of influences serve to strengthen the classifications of "man" and "woman" so tightly that these become norms, and straying from these norms may result in negative consequences (Risman et al., 2018).

Furthermore, evolutionary and essentialist theories maintain that sexuality is predetermined and biologically inherited. In contrast, social interactionism argues that sexuality is socially

determined, although it is acknowledged that sexuality is established through biological urges and this provides the stimulus upon which action is taken (Saguy et al., 2021). However, biology has no influence on how a person participates in sexual behaviour. Instead, sexuality is defined by culture and can have different meanings across different contexts. Each culture has its own ideas on what behaviours are deemed to be sexual and these become commonly learnt and accepted in various groups and subgroups. According to Foucault (1976), every societal group and subgroup has an ongoing dialogue about sex. For instance, in many Eastern cultures, it is unacceptable for a woman to engage in premarital sex, whilst in many Western cultures this is considered a norm and even expected behaviour.

Mating preferences and the concepts of attraction, desire and love are all a result of social interaction. Partners may be chosen based on a variety of factors such as physical attractiveness, education and intelligence. However, these factors may have cultural variations. In some cultures, voluptuous women are considered to be attractive as this can be a symbol of fertility, whilst in other groups lean, athletic women are desired (Van Amsterdam, 2013). In many cultures, factors such as youth and virginity are deemed to be important qualities when choosing sexual partners. The expression of sexual desire, from a social constructionist point of view, is controlled and guided by the shared experiences, memories and understandings of the cultural group. In this way, people are able to decide on which partners may be appropriate or dangerous.

In terms of sexual orientation, essentialists hold the view that heterosexuality and queer sexuality are predetermined traits which a person is born with and this form of sexuality remains with them for the rest of their lives (Sánchez & Pankey, 2017). In contrast, social constructionists maintain that queer sexuality and heterosexuality vary across cultures and are a matter of preference. Queer sexuality is a term that is used to describe all forms of sexuality that do not fit in with heterosexual norms. This includes those who identify as gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual and intersex (Giesecking, 2008). Heterosexuality is defined as romantic and sexual relationships that include a male partner and a female partner. Cultural codes determine what is queer and heterosexual behaviour. In some cultures, queer sexuality is banned to the extent where there are prohibitive laws in place, whilst in other spaces it is accepted and there may even be an understanding that sexuality is fluid. These all reflect the value systems of specific cultures. Hence, people may change their sexual orientations depending on intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

It is acknowledged that social constructionist theory prioritise the human and neglects the more-than-human elements that influence one's perceptions and constructions of gender and sexuality (Janak & Bhana, 2023). However, in terms of my study, the social constructionist theory is useful as schools are human and social spaces where the interactions between all humans within the space allows for the formation of learners' identities and influences their perspectives. This means that the ways in which sexuality is constructed and negotiated is dependent on multiple factors and is influenced by learners' peer groups, their cultural backgrounds, as well as their exposure to social media. These factors coalesce to continuously shift and adapt the ways in which they negotiate gender and sexuality.

Post-structural Feminist Theory

Post-structural feminist theory is concerned with the power relations of people's interactions (Numer & Gahagan, 2009). In terms of gender, societal norms dictate that men hold much more power than women in the home, school and the workplace. However, this does not imply that women are powerless in every situation. Interactions between members of the same sex, as well as with the opposite sex, have elements of power to them and this can be held equally by both sides, or there can be an imbalance. The aim of post-structural feminist theory is to create a balance in the power relations between men and women (Fullagar et al., 2018). In addition to power, post-structural feminist theory also considers factors such as gender, race, age, class and sexual orientation. The interplay of these factors plays a huge role in the shaping of individuals and their identities.

The power that is given to certain human relationships serves to disempower "other" types of relationships. In modern society, heterosexual relationships are the norm as they are embedded in religious scriptures and folk-lore. The coming together of a man and woman is viewed as "natural" and a relationship that all "normal" human beings should aspire to have. Hence, heterosexual couples enjoy the approval of society and the benefits that accrue from this. Consequently, heterosexuality disempowers queer sexuality, which is viewed as an abnormality, and queer sexuality and queer behaviour are then subjected to discrimination and prejudice. This is referred to as "othering" by Renold (2007).

According to Foucault (1975), power is not owned by any entity but instead exercised. Thus, gender and sexuality create and transfer power but also allow for the resistance of power. Butler (1990) refers to the heterosexual matrix which means that heterosexuality is the norm and that all other forms of gender and sexuality exist in relation to it. Within this matrix, heterosexuality

is perceived as superior and all other forms of sexuality are seen as inferior. Butler (1990) further refers to the performativity of gender which means that gender is assigned and enacted through performance rather than having any biological basis. For example, a person playing with a doll is presumed to be performing as a girl whilst one who is playing with a car is presumed to be performing as a boy. These ideas become intertwined with sex and thus result in binary understandings of gender. However, as these concepts are socially constructed, these ideas also have the potential to be disrupted.

School structures feed into binary understandings of gender and sexuality as learners are classified as girls and boys, uniforms are gendered, and spaces such as bathrooms, and activities such as sports are demarcated for specific genders (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017). Foucault's (1975) concept of disciplinary power refers to when behaviour is constantly surveilled and reinforced so that it becomes the norm. This applies to schools, as well as the expectations of behaviours that are assigned to girls and boys becomes normalised such that even though these are not formally regulated, they become difficult to resist. Thus, gender norms become internalised and allow for inequality and subordination to continue.

MacNaughton (2005) posits that power is a fluid concept which can be accepted, rejected, enacted or negotiated. In the schooling context, power is clearly held by the adults and children are required to submit. This imbalance of power is sometimes taken advantage of by teachers, as reflected in reports about sexual abuse and violence against children. There are also imbalances of power amongst children, as made evident by observing their interactions. Bullying, fighting and incidences of abuse occur between children because of contests for power.

Within this study, the power dynamics between learners as well as other people in the school environment is constantly shifting which influences how they construct their identities. The power dynamics between boys and girls also differs which typically positions boys as superior to girls and allows for gender inequality and double standards to prevail. However, girls are not powerless and resist these norms in different ways, thus demonstrating their agency. The way in which the school is structured and the power that is held by adults is especially pertinent within the boarding houses as it influences how learners are able to express and explore their gendered identities.

Gender Relational Theory

Connell's (1987) gender relational theory, especially in relation to power, will be used in this study as a frame for analysis. Her work emphasises the fact that gender regimes are prevalent at every institution and these regimes exist due to the imbalance of power. The school is an example of a place where gender regimes are particularly dominant and practised daily, especially through the hidden curriculum. Classroom procedures that require girls and boys to do different chores, different subject choices for boys and girls, and different ways of punishing boys and girls are examples of how learners are taught that they are unequal from each other.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity are important when it comes to analysing gender. Masculinity is a fluid concept and its definitions differ depending on class, race, sexuality and geography (Connell., 2020) It is also a concept that is deeply embedded in social structures and institutions. Qualities such as having a deep voice, a muscular body, being aggressive and competitive are all associated with hegemonic forms of masculinity. The more these qualities are pronounced in a man the more he is considered to be masculine and a “real man”. The rigidity of this definition poses a problem as it is stereotypical and subjugates men who are not considered to have these qualities in such a pronounced manner. As a result, they are viewed as outcasts. Masculinity is also affected by race, class and culture. In her theory of masculinities, Connell (2020) describes four categories of masculinity that are prevalent in different societies: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginal.

The first category is referred to as hegemonic masculinity. This is the most common type of masculinity that many men aspire to. It is the most dominant form of masculinity and men are expected to have certain qualities in order to fit into the dominant culture. This type of man has power and authority over women and other men around him who may not be similar to him. The hegemonic male may also be violent and aggressive (Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). They are also associated with racism and homophobia. Hegemonic men are always heterosexual and despise those who lean towards queer sexuality or possess queer characteristics.

When placed in the schooling context, the characteristics of hegemonic males may vary across different contexts. In academic terms, boys who get good grades are the ones who are revered and hold hegemonic positions. If they continue on this path, they are also the men who are likely to attend prestigious universities and hold top professional positions in the future. Athletic, strong and competitive boys may also hold dominant positions in spaces which are sports oriented. Within schools situated in contexts which experience a high level of socio-economic adversity, boys who are engaged in risky behaviours may hold an exalted status

(Rosen & Nofziger, 2019). However, it is possible for more than one group to hold hegemonic status for different attributes.

Subordinate masculinity is constructed in relation to the hegemonic state. This type of masculinity is considered to have characteristics that are opposite to the hegemonic group and are treated as such. One of the main subordinated groups are those who identify as queer as they are contrary to the ideals and practices of the hegemonic group (Bartholomaeus & Tarrant, 2016). As a result, they are discriminated against, abused and oppressed. Laws are put in place to ban queer sexuality as it is deemed to threaten the nuclear family structure which is viewed as normative. Queer individuals are shunned by the hegemonic group, reinforcing the patriarchy which is therefore protected. Behaviour that is considered to be queer is also shunned. Sensitivity, gentleness and kindness are viewed as effeminate traits by the hegemonic group. Hence, men who have these qualities are treated as severely by the dominant men.

In schools, boys who are not academically inclined may be subjected to bullying by high achievers. Or, boys who are high-achievers may be mocked by those who are sports orientated. Name-calling is used often in order to garner power over those who are subordinated. For instance, “gay”, “stupid”, “dumb”, “nerd” and “swot” are words that are used in schools as mechanisms to prove dominance. Boys whose physical appearances do not match that of the hegemonic group also face mockery; for instance, boys who are overweight or have feminine features (Swain, 2014). Teachers are also guilty of subordinating certain boys when they express their ideas on how boys should look and behave. Thus, the power of the hegemonic group is cemented.

Complicit masculinity refers to boys who are not part of the hegemonic group but who enjoy the benefits of being associated with it. They are active supporters of the actions of the dominant boys and do not do anything to stop the subordination of those who do not fit in (Mackenzie et al., 2017). The complicit group does not necessarily embody all the characteristics of the hegemonic group and may hold women in higher regard. However, they are not in conflict with the hegemonic group and many aspire to be a part of the hegemony. An example of complicit masculinity in the school context would be boys who are spectators of the bullying that is enacted by the hegemonic group.

Marginalised masculinity is similar to hegemonic masculinity but comprises men who are part of socio-economic classes considered to be inferior to the hegemonic group. Men who are marginalised do not enjoy any status (Haywood & Johansson, 2017). Instead, they are the

minority, being, for example, from a different race or culture. At school level, if white boys form the hegemonic group, then black or Chinese boys would not be a part of that as they are viewed as different.

Many discourses on childhood sexuality refer to childhood innocence when it comes to sexuality (Robinson, 2013). Sexual innocence assumes that children are unable to have sexual feelings, desires or pleasures. Thus, when the topic of childhood sexuality comes up, adults shy away from this and attempt to regulate the knowledge that is passed on to children such that they may maintain their innocence.

Analysing gender inequalities requires examining the factors that contribute to unequal relationships between men and women. This may be in terms of expectations of sexuality, masculinity and femininity. A central feature of post-structural feminist theory is that aspects of gender and sexuality are involved in the analyses. The oppression of women is challenged, while the liberation of women is championed (Frost & Elichaooff, 2014). Within the school context, boys and girls are involved in the process of creating gender inequalities through their interactions with their peers, adults and society. Hence, this study analyses how children forge their gendered identities through these interactions. This would provide insight as to how stakeholders can influence interactions such that there is a sense of equality.

The intersection of race, class and gender is crucial in understanding gender inequalities because historical processes, the political landscape and social structures reflect the power that men and women have within these contexts (Levon, 2015). South Africa's political history has brought race and class issues to the forefront of every debate and has contributed vastly to the inequalities experienced today. For instance, poor black women have a higher chance of being discriminated against as compared to white males, because history has granted white men privileges, status and opportunities that black women have never received due to discrimination against their skin colour (Ortner, 2022). Hence, this trend becomes generational.

Another aspect that is analysed in post-structural feminist theory is the physical body and the ways in which it is used to create inequalities (Pillow, 2018). The expectations of the female body are particularly relevant as it is subjected to the dominance of men in many spheres of society. Its actions are controlled and governed by societal laws and norms. The covering and displaying of the female body are topics of contention around the world. These arguments can be used as a tool to legitimise rape and other violent acts against women which puts power in the hands of men. Examining how girls and women view their bodies is crucial in feminist

research as it is regarded as a powerful symbol of femininity. Many schools require girls and boys to wear different uniforms which serve to accentuate differences between boys and girls and restrict girls' freedom to move their bodies freely. Hence, these regulations place girls under constant scrutiny from the school authorities (Happel, 2013).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework of this study. The theory of social constructionism (Thorne, 1997) was used to analyse the findings of this study together with post-structural feminist theory (Numer & Gahagan, 2009), Foucault's (1975) theory of power and Connell's (2020) theory of masculinities. The next chapter will review the literature as it pertains to this study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework of this study. This chapter will review the relevant literature as it pertains to this study. It will cover early childhood sexuality, the influence of teachers on gender and sexuality, gender at play, understandings of gender and sexuality, the influence of the school curriculum, gender disparities, teenage sexuality, the influence of the school environment, social media and pornography, and review the literature on boarding schools and their influence on the construction of gender and sexuality.

The construction of gender and sexuality begins before children are born. For instance, in countries such as China and India, it is common practice for parents to find out the sex of a child before it is born in order to determine whether they will keep the child or not. Often, male children are preferred over females and female foetuses are aborted before they are born, a practice that is called *gendercide* (Purewal & Eklund, 2023). Once babies are born, they are assigned their sex and are then socialised into behaving as either boys or girls based on social constructions of gender (Skrlac Lo & Wiseman, 2022). Once born, boys and girls have different kinds of toys and clothes which have different meanings attached to them. For example, boys are given toy trucks to play with which can be interpreted as having the expectation for boys to be outdoors and adventurous. Conversely, girls are given dolls and playhouses which implies that their role in society is to be a homemaker and to be predominantly concerned with domestic affairs. The nuclear family structure, as well as the roles that mothers and fathers play in the home, also transmits messages about gender roles to their children (Govender & Bhana, 2023a). Conversations amongst adults help to solidify these expectations and norms amongst children (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Heterosexual relationships are promoted due to the prevalence of nuclear families which typically comprise a female in the role of a mother and a male in the role of a father.

Schools are spaces where perceptions of gender and sexuality are constantly being constructed and reconstructed (Gansen, 2017). Children's interactions with the environment, teachers and peers shape their beliefs and behaviours about gender and sexuality from a very young age. The intertwining of age, race and class also plays a role in shaping children's understandings of masculinity and femininity. The hidden curriculum and the school's systems and structures have a profound impact on the way children view and negotiate gender and sexuality

(Hernández et al., 2013). Furthermore, the community and its customs, beliefs and traditions permeate through to the school and have a huge impact on school culture (Josephs, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that the school is a reflection of the community in which it is situated.

Early Childhood Sexuality

Research has shown that when children are in early childhood education centres, they are already engaging in constructing gender and sexuality (Kelly-Ware, 2016). For example, when it is play-time, girls gravitate towards playing with dolls whilst boys play with toy cars. Girls also play make-believe games like running a home or being a wife to a husband, whilst boys imagine themselves as being firefighters and policemen (Gansen, 2017). These distinctions cement the binaries that exist between men and women. In one study with 6 and 7 year olds in the United States, it was found that when girls play house games, they are usually the ones who allocate traditional roles to the boys who are also playing the game, which implies that they are complicit in the way they frame masculinity and femininity (Skrlac Lo & Wiseman, 2022). Within this study, boys chose to play the strong, masculine roles and even went to the extent of refusing to play the game if they were not given a dominant role for fear of being ridiculed by other boys. This implies that boys and girls are fully aware of the binaries that exist in society and quickly learn that they will be ostracised if they do not conform. These ideas continue to strengthen and manifest themselves later on in their lives. This, however, does not mean that these ideologies cannot be changed as time goes on or as children are exposed to a different kind of environment or mindset. Hence, gender and sexuality are fluid concepts of which the definitions are constantly shifting and changing as children grow older and are exposed to different kinds of environments and ideologies (Kelly-Ware, 2016; Morojele, 2013).

Many adults believe in the narrative that children are asexual beings who do not understand or engage in the construction of sexuality, and that they are innocent (Bhana, 2013; Gansen, 2017; Matswetu & Bhana, 2023; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Tsaliki, 2016). This is a mistaken belief as research with young children proves that children begin to shape their understanding of sexuality from a young age. Children are involved in kissing games and also tease each other about who they are attracted to (Gansen, 2017; Thorne & Luria, 1986). They begin to develop a desire for the opposite sex and have boyfriends or girlfriends, although these relationships are not always the same as adult relationships. One study conducted in Canada interviewed girls who discussed their affections for particular boys in their classrooms and described how

they liked them for their humour and kindness, however, there was no mention of queer relationships (Moffatt & Norton, 2008). The type of boys they were attracted to suggested that boys who embody traditionally masculine traits are much more desirable than boys who may be considered to be feminine or “geeky”. Boys with feminine attributes are usually outcast as they are not viewed as real boys (Paechter, 2017). Boys also find feminine girls desirable and note that females who act too much like “tomboys” are not considered desirable (Holland & Harpin, 2015). It is therefore inferred that the negotiation of gender and sexuality needs to be examined through the lens of the child rather than that of an adult. This is a crucial step in eradicating gender inequality and discrimination.

Teachers

Teachers also play a huge role in the ways in which boys and girls negotiate gender and sexuality. Their beliefs and practices are directly transferred to the students due to the ways in which they react to situations that occur in the classroom. For example, one study conducted in the United States by Gansen (2017) found that a teacher actively dissuaded learners in a preschool from talking about queer equality as she believed that this was a conversation that they should not be having as they were too young. However, when girls and girls discussed and participated in heterosexual relationships, she encouraged it. To the learners, this means that queer sexuality is taboo and needs to be silenced, whilst heterosexuality is the norm and should be accepted. Another teacher in the same study (Gansen, 2017), did not allow girls and boys to speak about who they were attracted to at all, and this transmits the message that young people cannot and should not be engaged in these discussions. This, therefore, makes it a taboo topic in the eyes of the children and of society, whereas children are actually active agents in the construction and negotiation of gender and sexuality and should be heard rather than being silenced, which allows homophobic attitudes to prevail.

Teachers are also much harsher to girls than boys when it comes to shame and so-called “misbehaviour” in the classroom. Gansen's (2017) study showed that when a girl lifted her dress too high, exposing her underwear, she was admonished harshly to the point where the parents were called in to discipline the child. The teacher believed that as a girl, she should be modest and not display her body so brazenly and outwardly in front of the boys. Rather, she should act demurely and modestly so as to not draw too much attention to herself. A boy in the same class engaged in similar behaviour; however, he was told that he should not do it again. This difference in reaction on the part of the teacher clearly indicates to children the different

ways in which boys and girls are expected to behave. It signals to the girls that they need to be ashamed of their body and police it for fear of boys looking at it, and subtly signals to the boys that it is the girls' responsibility to ensure that they are not mistreated by boys and that they themselves have much more freedom and agency when it comes to doing whatever they want with their bodies (Gansen, 2017). This clearly gives boys more power and control whilst girls have to constantly be wary and alert.

The way in which teachers teach about sexuality in the earlier phases is quite controversial. Many teachers ignore or deny that children are sexual beings and are learning to negotiate gender and sexuality as they interact with others at school (Robinson, 2013). Teachers bring their own biases into the classroom and this is transmitted to the learners. Children are warned not to engage in or talk about sexual practices as they are deemed too young to do so and there are consequences attached to displaying this kind of behaviour. Rather than engaging in discourse with learners about matters that children are naturally curious about, teachers warn about the dangers of engaging in these kinds of behaviour (Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013). To learners, this kind of messaging makes the topic of sex and sexuality unmentionable, leaving them more susceptible to engaging in sexually risky and experimental behaviour without having adequate knowledge about what they are involved in. In addition, teachers and parents are concerned that if boys play with dolls, cry or regularly exhibit any behaviour that is associated with girls, then they will become gay (Bucher, 2014). This kind of mindset hinders progress in terms of understanding the fluidity of gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, the South African schooling system rigidly maintains that the school is not a space in which sexuality is openly discussed or displayed. The strict manner in which misbehaviour is handled deters learners from asking questions and exploring their sexuality (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). The relationships learners have with their teachers are fraught with tensions as teachers feel that it is not their place to teach about such topics. Many teachers themselves are homophobic and this is made evident in the derogatory language they use to describe and disapprove of any behaviour that may be construed as queer. Teachers encourage learners to "like" those of the opposite sex and deter learners of the same sex from getting too close to each other. In early childhood, the teacher is a pivotal force in shaping how learners think and behave and therefore, learners naturally believe what the teacher says without questioning it further.

The perception that children are innocent and asexual (Robinson, 2013) is also linked to the fear that if a child does mention anything that links to sex and sexuality, then the child may have been sexually abused. These suspicions are problematic as adults become overly cautious which does not leave any room for the child to learn anything about sex or explore their sexuality. A child is construed as being deviant if they are knowledgeable about sexual matters (Piper, 2018). Ngabaza and Shefer (2019) posit that children, their behaviour and their ideologies need to be studied without taking the position of an authoritative adult. They can only be properly understood if adults are willing to listen to children's perspectives without interference. Additionally, respect needs to be given to children in order for significant adults and researchers to earn their trust and hear the truth about their beliefs and the ways in which they construct their worlds.

Studies of elementary classrooms show that teachers' biases permeate into the roles they allocate to their learners (Gansen, 2017; Hernández et al., 2013). Girls are usually given more responsibilities in the classroom such as collecting papers and notebooks or being class monitors, as they are viewed as more responsible than the boys. Boys are viewed as irresponsible and are thus given fewer and easier chores to manage. Learners naturally tend to play up to these expectations so boys begin to understand that they need not be responsible for the running of the classroom. This is similar to the ways in which homes are run where women are responsible for looking after the home whilst men go out to work. Girls are also expected to be much more studious than boys which gives boys the freedom to do as they please without any repercussions. The unequal ways in which children are treated in the classroom forms part of the hidden curriculum which reinforces inequalities rather than remove them (Hernández et al., 2013).

Gender at Play

The playground is another space in which gender is negotiated. Grugeon's (2014) study in England shows that boys tend to dominate the centre of the playground as they play games such as soccer and wrestling, whilst the girls are on the periphery, playing games such as hopscotch and clapping. These differences suggest to the children that the outdoors is actually a space that is created for boys to dominate. The types of games that boys and girls play is telling of the way they view themselves. Boys prefer violent games like wrestling which allow them to showcase their physical prowess and impress their male friends as well as girls. The girls play clapping games and are much more reserved compared to the boys. In addition,

different areas of the playground are marked as spaces in which children can experiment with sexual activity away from the adult gaze. Renold's (2004) research with year 5 and year 6 learners in the United Kingdom (UK) showed that learners would hide behind trees and bushes to kiss or to engage in romantic relationships. Janak and Bhana's (2023) South African research describes girls playing hide and seek and using the game as an excuse to engage in hugging, kissing, and touching. These observations suggest that children are hyper-aware that they are forbidden from engaging in such activities and that adults will disapprove of them, therefore they try to create private spaces within the public playground in order to do so without any prying adult eyes.

In South African schools, children are actively engaged in reinforcing gender stereotypes from a very young age. Play areas are subconsciously demarcated by learners based on gender in primary school playgrounds (Bhana, 2016a). Within Bhana's (2016a) study, boys and girls understood the nature of romantic relationships, for example, girls and boys exchanged flowers and clearly understood the romantic meanings associated with this exchange. Bullying and teasing took place amongst boys to police each other to ensure that they did not deviate from the masculine norms. When playing pretend games in which they imagined being families, most of the fictional relationships were heterosexual in nature. Furthermore, girls preferred being friends with boys who had money as wealth indicates that one will be looked after and granted privileges.

In addition, another study conducted with 6 to 8 year olds showed that girls and boys were involved in kissing games, writing love letters to each other and expressing romantic feelings towards each other (Bhana, 2013). They were engaged in predominantly heterosexual relationships and their discussions were based on heterosexual relationships. Boys tried to deny that they liked or played with girls in an effort to assert their masculinity. This suggests that any feminine associations are perceived as them being placed in a subordinate role, which is undesirable on the journey of becoming a "real" man. Girls also tended to impress boys so that they could garner their attention. They did this by placing themselves in subordinate and vulnerable positions. This case study highlights how girls and boys play up to gender stereotypes in order to achieve what they desire.

Conversely, a study by Blaise (2010) in an Australian preschool showed that the learners believed that kissing was an activity reserved for grown-ups and was associated with sex and romance. Furthermore, children were much more accepting of boys who did not live up to the

hegemonic masculine ideal. By not reacting a boy who was painting rainbows and expressing his love for them, the learners indicated that they did not mind that the boy was engaged in an activity that is typically associated with girls. Therefore, this scenario shows that girls and boys at young ages can be and are willing to accept those who may not fulfil traditional norms.

Gender Talk

Girls and boys have been made to feel very uncomfortable when talking about gender and sexuality. Antunes and Butler (2023) used art supplies to get girls and boys in the United States to talk about their genitalia and it was found that boys and girls are quite familiar with their genitalia, and boys especially were quite proud of them. The comfort and freedom they felt from this activity show that there needs to be more discussion and conversations about gender, sex and sexuality with learners from a young age so that they can begin to form different understandings of gender and sexuality. Similarly, a study in Finland showed that boys and girls aged 3 to 6 years also knew the names of their genitals but could not answer questions about how babies were born (Cacciatore et al., 2023). They felt uncomfortable speaking about this topic and quickly changed the subject when probed further. They knew very little about adult sexual behaviour but they were aware of the heterosexual norms that were dominant in society.

Children learn about sexuality through the religious and moral practices presented to them at home and at school (Antunes & Butler, 2023). Many religions advocate for the nuclear family and, in Christianity, the story of Adam and Eve is widely narrated to children. This demonstrates to young children that heterosexual relationships are the only ways in which reproduction occurs, and are therefore the correct kind of sexuality. The religious tales are also infused with fear as many religions preach against queer sexuality. When a child is raised in a household in which these beliefs are strictly held, it automatically tells the child which behaviours and ideologies are acceptable and which are not. Children go into school spreading these ideas which are then affirmed by peers and teachers.

Blaise (2009) researched 5 year olds in an early childhood classroom in Australia and found that they knew very clearly what types of relationships they would like to get into when they were older. Through their associations with the learners around them, they were quick to state their preference for heterosexual relationships, therefore playing an active role in constructing gender and sexuality binaries from a young age. They demonstrated their agency in choosing the types of relationships they would like to have and also who they were attracted to. This

suggests that significant adults can still engage in appropriate discourse with learners in which they are open-minded about issues of gender and sexuality.

The media that children are exposed to also have an impact on the way children perceive romantic relationships and gender roles. Many learners watch television shows that promote heterosexuality and read books that do the same. For instance, playing with Barbie dolls or watching Barbie television shows promote hyperfemininity (Holland & Harpin, 2015). However, Collins et al., (2012) argue that children do experiment with alternate forms of femininity through the use of the Barbie doll and that this is not necessarily hyperfeminine in nature. In their American study with girls aged 8-13, it was found that girls play with Barbie dolls in a variety of ways by recreating the doll to embody different careers and personalities. Moreover, the books that children read, such as those about Disney princesses, suggest to girls that they need to be meek and submissive and that in this way someone masculine and strong will come to save them (England et al., 2011). Similarly, boys learn that by being authoritative, confident and dominant, they have control over girls and learn that their roles are those of the saviour and the protector (Duby et al., 2021; Kelly-Ware, 2016). These types of narratives can be damaging as they promote unequal power relations. It is important for critical discourse to take place between adults and children about how gender is portrayed in literature and the possibility of this being portrayed differently. Through this discourse, children learn alternative forms of doing gender and become more tolerant of those who do not conform to stereotypical norms and expectations of society.

Family members have an impact on the way in which boys and girls view masculinity and femininity (Govender & Bhana, 2023a). Depending on how they are raised, some boys will lean on traditional masculinity to exert their power over woman whilst others try to deviate from these norms to be more accommodating and create equal gender relations. Due to many males being providers in the family, hegemonic masculinity is linked to economic prowess (Bhana et al., 2011). Earning and providing for the family gives a man a higher status and thus enables him to demand respect. Men also become sexually entitled as they wield more negotiating power in a relationship. Both girls and boys who grow up around these dynamics begin to shape their understandings of gender and sexuality through these lenses, which become problematic if they are not addressed or disrupted. Women undertake the role of the caregiver and this usually places them in a submissive position, thereby reinforcing gender binaries for boys and girls.

Moffatt and Norton (2008) conducted a study of children in primary schools in Canada and used Archie comics to discuss masculinity and femininity with the learners. The narratives in these comics pitted girls against each other as rivals to compete for the attention of boys. Participants in the study resonated with the girls in the comics as they felt that if girls did not portray themselves as feminine enough then they would not attract any boys. They also asserted that if a girl portrayed herself as too independent then boys would not want to be associated with her. These responses highlight how patriarchal girls' mindsets are from a young age and that male attention can only be sought if a female positions herself as subordinate to him. Boys reacted to the comic by stating that that it was important to them that girls were attractive. It was found that the majority of male participants looked at the physical attributes of a girl before deciding whether they were attracted to her and also sought some kind of vulnerability within girls. On the other hand, girls looked for qualities such as kindness, friendliness and a sense of humour when selecting a male partner. The gender binaries are clearly highlighted within these preferences as girls attempted to look beyond the physical. However, in this study, sexual diversity was not a factor in the discussions held. Girls and boys stuck to speaking about heterosexual relationships, which implies that they were not familiar with any other types of relationships, thus making heterosexuality the norm.

A study by Kelly-Ware (2016) in New Zealand shows how boys and girls at the age of 3 and 4 are constantly negotiating and renegotiating their understandings of gender and sexuality. For example, a female teacher took a group of boys to a race track to observe cars racing. The boys then returned with the understanding that racing was a male sport as the teacher had chosen to take only boys to the race track, implying that it was for boys only. However, when the teacher got into the sandpit with the boys after the trip and played with their toy cars with them, they changed their minds about racing being a boys' sport and conceded that girls could also be active participants in the sport. This example demonstrates how children are constantly reshaping their understanding of their relations with each other based on what they see. It especially highlights the fluidity of gender. Davies (2014) argues that children are beings and becomings, reinforcing the fact that their ideologies are constantly shifting.

The School Curriculum

The school curriculum also contributes to reinforcing gender binaries as it has been designed in that manner (Hamilton & Roberts, 2017). The curriculum for younger students has been designed according to what is deemed age appropriate but also along moral grounds.

Researchers have tracked the school curriculum in Australia since the 1950s and found that the curriculum to date still largely ignores children's understandings of sexuality (Ezer et al., 2018; Robinson & Davies, 2008). It was found that much of the curriculum was designed based on conservative ideologies and therefore restricts the amount of information on sexuality available to students at various stages of schooling. It is widely understood that puberty is the time when children should be educated about sexuality and childhood sexuality is largely ignored and dismissed. However, Robinson and Davies (2008) argue that with children's increasing access to social media and the internet, there is a need for the curriculum to include discussions around sexuality so that children make informed decisions.

Moreover, in the UK's curriculum, while it is mentioned that children need to learn about marriage and family, the curriculum guidelines are framed with heterosexual relationships in mind and barely any mention is given to different types of families. This permeates into the classwork that is given. Epstein (1997) cites an example of a teacher who gave the class an activity in which learners were expected to draw the kinds of careers they would like to work in. Boys drew pictures of themselves doing actual jobs, whilst most girls drew themselves as brides or mothers. The teacher did not engage in debate or discussion about the issue but rather praised them for their choices which reinforced traditional roles of masculinity and femininity.

In the South African context, sexuality education is incorporated into a subject called Life Orientation which is compulsory for all learners. However, there is a big focus on heterosexuality which is portrayed as the norm by teachers. Francis and Kuhl (2022) call for a more inclusive curriculum delivery that is inclusive of the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, it has been found that teachers are moralistic in the way that sexuality education is taught and that some teachers will refuse to teach about sexuality as they may be uncomfortable with the topic or have religious views (DePalma & Francis, 2014a). In addition, there is also disagreement amongst parents and teachers regarding when and how sexuality education should be taught. These tensions often mean the topic is neglected and not given much attention.

School textbooks are also spaces in which gender bias is prevalent and influences the gender disparities at school. An investigation by Zhang et al., (2022) of China's English textbooks found that stereotypical roles were assigned to men and women; women were given the role of caregiving and family responsibilities whilst men were assigned more physically demanding activities. Similarly, Parise (2021) studied high school Mathematics textbooks and found that

gender and sexuality were represented in binary ways, gender roles were assigned according to traditional stereotypes, and that most relationships were presented as heterosexual. This is problematic as it encourages heteronormativity, marginalises queer sexualities, and reinforces stereotypical gender roles.

Gender Disparities

Renold (2019) argues that there is a difference between the way boys and girls are treated in terms of their sexuality. Whilst girls are heavily protected and told what they can and cannot speak about or do in terms of their behaviour and their bodies, boys are left to their own devices. This means that boys are allowed to express their desires freely in terms of how they would like to treat girls and can make sexist and homophobic remarks without any consequence. They are also allowed to get away with treating girls in a disrespectful manner without being held accountable. It is then assumed that this is how boys are and this is how they will always behave. Girls are then told to cover up their bodies or behave in a demure manner if they do not want to receive male attention. This gives boys sense of superiority and reinforces the power they have over girls. Boys' sexuality is only given attention when there are issues of sexual abuse or if a boy is suspected of being queer as this is viewed as a major deviation from traditional forms of masculinity.

Furthermore, there is a perceived difference between how quickly girls grow up compared to boys. Due to the policing of bodies, when girls begin to show signs of puberty they are seen as growing up very quickly and are expected to behave like adults in terms of how they carry their bodies (Mazzarella, 2019). On the other hand, boys are seen as children for much longer because their development might not be as visible. This creates a gap between what girls learn about their bodies and sexualities and what boys learn about the same topics as it might not be deemed as a pressing issue to discuss. This increases the chance of these discussions being put to one side and forgotten about until much later.

It is common to see women as teachers in the early years of schooling and it is rare for men to choose to teach younger children. This subconscious choice is based on the predominant idea that looking after young children is primarily a woman's job (Moosa & Bhana, 2023). Children are not as demanding in terms of personal care required in the middle and high school spaces, therefore male teachers opt to teach older children so that they may focus on subject teaching rather than looking after children. As young children are mainly exposed to female teachers in the early years, they are also forming the opinion that looking after children is for females only

(Gansen, 2017). This, in many cases, mirrors the parenting structures at home. Therefore, women are seen as caregivers rather than figures of authority (Bhana et al., 2022). Male teachers are also ridiculed for choosing to teach younger children as they are perceived as queer. They become targets for bullying both by fellow teachers and by learners. They have to exhibit hypermasculine behaviour in order to disprove this theory, which is then emulated by the boys. In addition, teachers who are openly gay or queer are seen as threats by the parent body and teachers as they think that the learners will also become queer, which is not desired (Duke & McCarthy, 2009). The lack of male role models at school in the early years is problematic as children, and especially boys, are not exposed to alternative forms of masculinity.

Bullying and teasing is normalised and accepted as part of growing up and bullying and teasing on the basis of gender and sexuality is no exception (Meyer, 2015). It has been found that boys and girls continuously tease each other in the early years of school in order to police undesirable behaviour. When boys act in ways considered to be too feminine, for example, playing with girls or painting nails, they are called names by other boys to shame them into not exhibiting such behaviour. However, when girls emulate the behaviour of boys then they are called “tomboys” and are seen and accepted by the boys, although other girls who behave in typically feminine ways, might ostracise the ‘tomboys’ for behaving in a masculine manner (Kostas, 2022).

Girls become obsessed with fashion and make-up trends from young age and often visualise and recreate how they would like to look when they get older (Francis et al., 2017). This is linked to hyperfemininity as much of this is done whilst keeping in mind what boys prefer. This creates a double standard where girls are freely expressing themselves on the basis of their sexuality but they are also subject to the male gaze. They also become aware of boys’ size and shape and those who are not slender are usually openly made fun of by both boys and girls. Many girls bully each other about body size based on the male gaze as they feel that someone who is overweight surely cannot be attractive to boys. Therefore, girls are just as complicit in promoting unequal power relations as boys. The types of clothes that girls choose to wear is also directly linked to the preferences of boys as those girls who wear “girly” clothes are seen as attracting male attention whilst those girls who wear “boyish” clothes are seen as wanting to be part of the boys’ group or as lesbian. Therefore, girls position themselves as objects of heterosexual desire (Blanchard-Emmerson, 2022).

Teenage Sexuality

Adolescents and teenagers are at the stage where they begin to experiment, explore and discover their sexuality (Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Fonseca et al., 2018; Gilchrist & Sullivan, 2006; Muhanguzi, 2011). They are both vulnerable and have agency in the decisions they make regarding their gender and sexuality. They are heavily influenced by their peers, the media and significant adults in their lives. The socialisation process helps them to form their identities and their beliefs which are constantly shifting and changing depending on their exposure. Therefore, it is critical to examine how teenagers' experiences have an impact on their negotiation of gender and sexuality.

Teenagers are actively involved in the policing and regulation of male and female sexuality. Studies show that even though girls are much more accepting of queer identities they are still complicit in promoting hegemonic masculinity and maintaining the status quo (Brännström et al., 2020; Dobson, 2014). Miller (2017) writes about how "slut-shaming" is a popular way to bully girls at schools as it shames them into engaging in morally acceptable behaviour. This behaviour mirrors that of the boys who also called girls the same names if they believed the girls had been intimate with too many boys. These girls are considered immoral. This double standard shows that femininity is heavily policed by both boys and girls and leads to the bullying of and discrimination against girls.

Furthermore, while boys create a culture of misogyny as they gang up to tease girls, they also tease other boys who they believe might be too feminine and thus assume to be queer (Rosen & Nofziger, 2019). The behaviours boys pick on include the way other boys sit, the way they dress, their mannerisms and their friendships they have. Boys who have close friendships with girls are suspected and if they show typically feminine tendencies then they are ridiculed in order to correct them. This creates a homophobic culture within the school environment which is detrimental to those students who display alternative forms of masculinity.

Boys also tend to place the responsibility of pregnancy, contraception and the denial of sexual advances on girls (Bhana, 2017a). Hence, girls feel the burden of responsibility and have to take extra measures and precautions in order to ensure they are educated about these issues. This careless attitude by the boys demonstrates that clear gender binaries exist and places girls in subordinate positions. Furthermore, the issues that they need to be educated on are seen as girls' issues and this further widens the gap between boys and girls. Boys do not get their knowledge on sex from their parents or teachers but rather rely on their friends for knowledge

about sexual practices which could be misleading (Kelly et al., 2010). Girls, on the other hand, feel as though they can speak openly about sexual matters with significant adults. Parents of boys rarely speak to them about sex whilst girls are educated about their bodies and sexual activity from a young age. This further enhances the boundaries between girls' and boys' sex education because society sees it as the girl's responsibility to shield herself from the boys' advances whilst boys receive the message that they are not responsible for their actions (Waratworawan et al., 2021).

Girls rely heavily on media such as magazines to give them advice on relationships and are much more willing to talk about these issues with their friends (Chambers et al., 2004). However, boys are bored by talking about these issues and would rather focus on sport and other topics viewed as more masculine. Speaking about relationships is viewed as a feminine thing to do and when boys do converse about girls, they do it in a misogynistic manner where they are discussing their bodies and calling them names. This kind of culture is problematic because it creates a platform for toxic masculinity. Within Chambers et al.'s (2004) study in England, it was found that boys were not paying attention and were mostly laughing at the content that was presented in sex education classes. This was done to the point where girls found their behaviour immature and expressed that they would rather have sex education in separate groups of boys and girls so that they could internalise the messages that were conveyed.

In the South African context many girls enter into relationships with boys and realise that the boys are abusive. However, the majority of girls choose to stay in these relationships regardless because they claim to have formed emotional attachments with the boys. This narrative of love and romance is prevalent among teenage girls as they believe that having an emotional connection is important in order to have a successful relationship (Willan et al., 2019). They accept that boys will be abusive and claim to hold their own when needed. Notions of romance are not as prevalent for boys as they place more importance on the sexual aspects of the relationship. Girls feel pressured to consent to sex otherwise they feel that they have not satisfied their partners. This despite the fact that culturally they are told not to partake in sexual activity due to shame and fear.

Female virginity is another factor that is highly valued in some sectors in South Africa. Research amongst isiZulu speaking learners in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa has shown that boys prefer and value girls who are virgins as this is an indicator of their

morality and social status (Bhana, 2016b). Similarly, girls also value virginity as it is seen as something that needs to be cherished and prized. However, there is a double standard in place. Boys are rarely, if ever, asked if they are virgins and are not expected to be so. In fact, it is expected that a man should have as much sexual experience as possible as it suggests that he is sexually virile and boosts his masculinity. Men expect women to have been sexually chaste before the commencement of the relationship otherwise it sows seeds of distrust in the new relationship.

Black Zulu men, it was found, prefer to have virgins as sexual partners and older women will go to the extent of testing young women in order to find out if they are virgins before allowing them to marry the sons in their families (Behrens, 2014). This demonstrates how women are complicit in the submissiveness of women. Women who are tested also find it to be a good practice as they consider it a testament of their morality. The practice of *umhlanga* is common in KwaZulu-Natal; this is an annual tradition where young virgin women perform a reed dance in front of the king in order to for him to choose a new bride. Men prefer that women participate in this ritual as they see it as a respectable thing to do for their reputations. However, this places women in inferior positions as subjects of men's sexual desires.

In addition, a large majority of men state that they feel pressured by other men to have sex with as many women as possible as it lifts their status amongst men (Hunter, 2015). However, there is a small percentage of men who choose to remain virgins until they get married for religious reasons; they are teased and subject to homophobic slurs (Mfeka-Nkabinde et al., 2022). Some women choose to go down this route for religious reasons as well, but many also choose to do so because of societal expectations. This places men in a dilemma of having multiple partnerships, which define what a man is, and marital monogamy, which is a safer but less popular choice. However, this demonstration of alternative masculinity is a window into the options men have when it comes to their sexuality.

The use of condoms is a highly contested issue and both boys and girls have different viewpoints of its usefulness in South Africa. Boys prefer not to use condoms as they feel dissatisfied with the sexual experience and request that they be removed at the time of ejaculation (Dubey et al., 2021). They feel that the sexual experience is inauthentic if the condom is on. Girls reluctantly agree to remove the condom as they feel that their partner will not love them anymore if they do not comply. This is based on their need for love and intimacy. In addition, when women ask men to wear condoms, men see this as an issue of trust. They imply

that the women are having affairs or that they have HIV and are suspicious of the women's motivations for needing to use a condom. Also, they feel that they themselves are being accused of cheating if they are asked to wear a condom. This places girls in a vulnerable position and they are much more likely to become pregnant or contract HIV.

However, girls are not always victims or vulnerable. They are capable of asserting themselves and showing authority in a relationship. A study conducted by Graham and Mphaphuli (2018) in South Africa found that some girls insisted that boys wear condoms during sex and even took the boys to a garage to buy some if they did not have any. They refused to have sex with the boys if the boys refused to wear condoms. Furthermore, girls also expressed that they did not always practise monogamy and if they found that another boy could have better sex with them then they chose to have multiple partners depending on what each person could provide for them. They stated that they enjoyed sex and sought pleasure without any attachments when necessary. This is a different mindset and an empowered form of femininity where women exercise their freedom and agency to choose who they are intimate with and the terms of their relationships.

In addition, social media campaigns have shown girls that there are ways in which they can empower themselves within their relationships. The 50/50 campaign is one where women and men are encouraged to be equals in their romantic relationships. This means contributing equal income into the relationship as well as ensuring that both do an equal amount of the household chores. This outlook implies that they are in a partnership as well as a relationship. Men also expressed that they do chores in the home so as to balance the responsibilities. This means that traditional gender roles are no longer at play and rather the relationship is much more fluid and equal.

Despite this kind of idealistic thought, socio-economic issues prevent girls from forming a relationship of equals (Bhana, 2017a). Girls from poverty-stricken and rural contexts are usually dependant on men and boys to provide for them which causes unequal power relations. As a result, the girls have to comply with boys' demands to ensure economic stability. Boys also feel much more empowered and in control when they have an income, as they feel that they are able to command the attention and respect of women. This leads to economic and gender disparities as girls are disempowered and cannot be assertive when it comes to making decisions in the relationship. They continuously feel that they need to comply with the demands of the boys or else they will lose both love and economic stability.

In the African context, studies find that girls' attitudes towards sex differ from those of boys and are grounded in moral values (Bhana, 2016b; Mathe, 2013). When girls are questioned about sex, they usually state that it is a sacred act and done mainly for purposes of procreation. Therefore, it must be done within the sanctity of marriage. This kind of thought process is also linked to Christianity where female promiscuity is frowned upon and marriage is revered as the ultimate goal for women to experience sex (Harrison, 2008). Women's sexuality has always been repressed by different religions and the threat of ending up in hell is used as an excuse for women not to engage in sex before marriage. Hence, girls are careful not to talk openly about having sex for fear of being judged by others in the community. When boys are questioned about why they have sex, they state it is for them to fulfil their desires and for their enjoyment. This difference in attitude highlights the fact that women's sexuality is something that needs to be preserved and suppressed whilst males are given the opportunity to succumb to their desires without any judgement.

In addition, when discussing sex, girls like to speak about these matters in private in hushed tones. Usually, these conversations entail girls seeking advice from peers about how they can deal with boyfriends demanding to have sex with them or how to negotiate the issue of sex in their (hetero)sexual relationships (Kelly et al., 2010). On the other hand, boys openly boast about their sexual experiences within their peer groups. In fact, they are pressured to do so, otherwise they are viewed as rebelling against the ideals of traditional masculinity. In these conversations, boys boast about how many girls they have been with and describe their sexual experiences in graphic detail. These conversations are light-hearted and full of frivolity when compared to those of the girls. In addition, these experiences are used to create humour and jokes. This in itself is problematic as humour is used by boys as a tool to objectify the girls whilst positioning themselves as superior.

Furthermore, girls are fearful to speak openly about their sexual experiences for fear of being judged by other girls. Girls uphold the ideologies of men when they call each other "sluts" and "whores" for having sex or being with multiple men (Hunehäll Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2021). These kinds of activities are considered to be moral transgressions and this prevents girls from acting upon their desires. Girls are the ones most gossiped about and this is done in a derogatory manner. This gossip takes away their agency and freedom and holds them to account for their decisions. Boys are not talked about as much and therefore are not held accountable for their actions. Rather, it is expected and accepted by both sexes that boys will pursue girls for sex and that they have an uncontrollable sexual appetite and thus they are doing

what they are naturally wired to do. This mentality places extra responsibility on girls as they are expected to uphold their moral integrity whilst boys are not taught any better.

A study in Uganda by Muhanguzi (2011) further showed that when girls make sexual advances towards boys they are called names, bullied and laughed at for being sexually promiscuous. It is maintained by both boys and girls that boys are the ones who are responsible for asking girls to be their girlfriends or have a sexual relationship with them. Further, a double standard is created when girls reject these advances as they are mocked for being uptight or too passive, and if they immediately accept these advances then they are seen as being cheap or loose. In either case, boys are placed in a dominant position whilst girls have to negotiate the ways in which they will accept or reject the sexual invitations. They have to be not only cognisant of what the boys will think of them, but also of what the girls will think of them too, which places them in a powerless and vulnerable position.

Additionally, girls report that they are continuously sexually harassed by both boys and educators (Muhanguzi, 2011). Boys tease them by touching them inappropriately or making comments about their bodies. A great number of reports state that many teachers are involved in the harassment of girls as well. They abuse their power in authoritarian positions and in many cases, girls have no choice but to submit as there are too many factors at stake, such as their grades. Girls at many times choose to reject boys' advances by choosing to focus on their studies as they are aware of the unfair ways in which boys treat their sexual partners and the pressures they place upon them. However, even though they are asserting themselves, this in itself is a form of subjugation as they are complying with the stereotype of femininity that is upheld in society, which is that girls are studious and career-oriented whilst boys are playful and spontaneous.

When girls report these issues to teachers they are laughed off and told that this is how boys usually behave. In some research conducted by Gillander Gådin and Stein (2019) in Sweden, it was found that headmasters would protect teachers from being disciplined because they chose to dismiss the voices of the girls as hearsay and lies. When boys' behaviour is protected by institutions this sends the direct message that it is acceptable to behave in such a manner. Girls' voices are silenced in the process and they lose their self-confidence and self-esteem (Gillander Gådin & Stein, 2019). In addition, they may also choose to drop out of school because of the stigma that is created around issues of assault. Otherwise, there is also truancy where girls choose not come to school because both parents and teachers fail to protect them. This leads to

a rise in sexual assault as boys are implicitly told they have the power to act upon their sexual desires even if they are explicitly rejected by those whom they abuse. Girls become much more guarded about their femininity which leads to their power in relationships with men being eroded.

Furthermore, sexuality education in schools is focused on prevention rather than acknowledging that teenagers do have sexual feelings and desires and how to deal with this in a safe manner (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). In sex education classes sex is usually associated with danger and disease. Teenagers interviewed by Matswetu and Bhana (2023) in Zimbabwe stated that they would like to talk about sex more openly in class and touch on intimate matters like different sexual positions and how to achieve pleasure during sex. If this was implemented, the issue of sex would no longer be taboo and both boys and girls would be empowered to make decisions about sex from an educated and knowledgeable standpoint instead of listening to information that may be false and based on hearsay. In addition, sex education would become something that teenagers were much more interested in and thus the messages around safe sex and healthy relationships could be passed on and acted upon.

The intersection of race and sexuality plays out differently in schools. A study of queer high school boys in the Free State province by Francis (2021) reveals that homophobic comments made by peers are taken much less seriously by teachers than racist remarks. The silence is indicative of how homophobia is not viewed as being as much of an injustice as racism, despite both being enshrined in the constitution. Further, participation in school activities is also based along the lines of race, sexuality and gender. Soccer is associated with heterosexual black males whilst activities such as debating are considered to be for gay boys. A white teacher also assumed that the parents of a black queer child would not be accepting of his queer identity, thereby assuming that being queer was un-African. However, the parents of the child were fully aware of his sexual orientation and were accepting of it. By positioning herself as superior and understanding, the white teacher stereotyped and discriminated against black people.

It is not only black queer learners who feel that they are discriminated against by the school system as well as society. White learners report that their parents are not willing to accept that they are queer because they want to portray the image of a normal, wholesome family with traditional values (Pollitt et al., 2021). This implies that queer sexuality is abnormal and is valueless which places children in a contradictory position. In addition, white children face similar circumstances to black children in terms of queer identities because both realise that

heterosexuality is the norm and anything outside of this norm is not tolerated. Both race and sexuality are social constructs but race is given much more attention due to South Africa's tumultuous history with apartheid.

A study by Pattman and Bhana (2009) with black girls in differently resourced schools showed how black girls find Indian girls to be racist towards them and that they picked on their hair. This positioned the black girls as inferior based on Eurocentric beauty standards that were also entrenched by the apartheid regime. However, black girls cited Indian boys as also being racist but, at the same time, vied for their attention. They desired to be in relationships with Indian boys as it would give them status in terms of their beauty and empower them. Many black girls felt less attractive than the Indian girls and therefore felt that the idea of asking Indian boys to be their partners was absurd and rather hoped and waited for the boys to ask them out. It was also found that black girls were quite envious of the relationships that white and Indian girls had with their parents as they could easily talk to them about sex and sexuality. The black girls felt that they were forced to have clandestine relationships because these were topics that were not discussed within their culture. However, when these topics were broached, they were accused of being "coconuts" for abandoning their cultural norms. This kind of resistance by the black girls suggests that they are aware of the ways in which race divides them culturally and in terms of sexuality but seek to make changes that allow for more open communication about these matters such that they experience sexual freedom as associated with their white counterparts.

Transactional sex is a common occurrence in South Africa due to vast economic inequalities that are prevalent in society. A study by Ragnarsson et al. (2008) showed how teenage girls aged between 12 and 14 in rural parts of the Limpopo province thought that it was far more preferable to submit and accept the sexual advances of older men instead of being sexually assaulted and raped. They felt a lot of pressure to have sex at a time when they were not ready and these sexual invitations were made even more desirable by the offering of money and gifts. Due to the economic inequalities they faced at home, the girls felt that these invitations and gifts should be accepted as it set them up for a better life. Boys between the ages of 12 and 14 felt threatened by the fact that girls were enticed by older men because they themselves were not in a position to gain the attention of girls through material goods. As a result, they felt that their masculinity was threatened and blamed the girls for being "gold-diggers" and only interested in money.

Furthermore, it was shown in this study that boys felt that circumcision was important as a part of growing up (Ragnarsson et al., 2008). This is good news as circumcision is encouraged as it helps in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and diseases and HIV. In addition to being aware of the health benefits of circumcision, the boys also mentioned that being circumcised ensured a more pleasurable sexual experience. However, the boys preferred that they have the circumcision done within rural areas with the rest of the men as they are also taught how to become “real men”. This implies that the tribal ritual promotes hegemonic masculinity which serves to disempower women. In addition, boys also mentioned that they could have sex earlier due to circumcision which leads to unhealthy sexual behaviour.

Parental control has a huge influence on the ways in which children perceive sex and sexuality. A study by Waratworawan et al. (2021) in Thailand demonstrated how Thai mothers monitor their daughters closely to ensure that they do not get into close relationships with boys. Girls were banned from going out with boys or having boyfriends and if it did happen then the parent would act as a chaperone to ensure that there was no intimacy. This was said to be done to prevent pregnancy in the girls but also to avoid gossip from community members about the girls. Schools in Thailand also control the education that children receive about sex and sexuality because it is thought that being more educated on these matters will promote sexual activities. This was also to uphold the reputation of the school so that the community feels that their values are respected. In addition, male and female students are not allowed to sit side by side for fear romantic relationships developing.

The ways in which boys and girls interact within their friendship groups are quite different from each other. Boys prefer not to touch each other in an affectionate manner and rather demonstrate their affection through punching, poking and shoving and by engaging in group acts such as rule-breaking or playing sport wherein their physical contact is much more aggressive (Thorne, 1986). However, girls show their emotional connection through hugging, combing each other’s hair, gossiping and sharing secrets (Thorne & Luria, 1986). They also do not swear as much as the boys as it is viewed as unfeminine and uncouth. This segregation in the dynamics of friendship groups entrenches the norms for masculinity and femininity. Those that do not conform to these standards are often outcast and bullied, especially boys, as they have to live up to the masculine ideal for fear of being described as feminine.

Girls are especially pressured into having boyfriends from a young age because their friends are doing so (Kreager et al., 2016). This forces them to subscribe to patriarchal norms because

the perception is that girls who do not have boyfriends are strange and do not fit in. By being forced to be in relationships due to social pressure, they often have to overlook the flaws in these relationships and the poor treatment they may receive from their boyfriends which escalates their level of vulnerability to sexual abuse. This suggests that the identity of a girl is associated with her desirability by boys. The girls often compete for the attention of boys which leads them to devaluing themselves as well as their friendships by placing the male on a pedestal. They are dominated by their emotions which can often lead to conflict and violence.

When girls are sexually assaulted by boys, especially their boyfriends, girls have to internalise it as part of the dynamic of their relationships and as an expectation of what boys usually do (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). Thus, they subscribe to the hypermasculine norms in which boys learn to exert their power over women in order to prove their masculinity. Girls are conditioned to view the male sexual appetite as natural whilst female desire is suppressed. Boys are aware of this and use it to their advantage which reinforces the gender inequalities within their relationships. Furthermore, boys are sometimes defended for their behaviour by the girls which perpetuates the idea that girls are responsible for male behaviour. This gives boys full control and authority over the relationships which can escalate the level of abuse that girls have to endure.

In male friendships it is important for boys to have knowledge about sex, masturbation and pornography no matter where this information is derived from. Bragging about sexual conquests allows a boy to assimilate easily into the peer group, although the stories may be highly exaggerated (Aho & Peltola, 2023). However, boys' size and shape also matter as boys are increasingly under pressure to have a particular physique which connotes that they are big, strong, fit and attractive, not to be confused with being overweight and unattractive. These boys are then placed at the top of the pecking order where they are admired by other boys and lusted after by girls. This gives them power as they feel that they can bully other boys who do not conform to the masculine ideal and also pressure girls to do whatever they want to with them.

The School Environment

The school environment plays a major role in the development of childhood gender and sexuality as children spend the majority of their time during childhood in school and are immersed in an environment where they are constantly learning, unlearning and relearning both from the hidden and explicit curriculums. Children's exposure to their environment, as well as to the people around them, has an impact on the way they view gender and sexuality. The

routines and rituals of a school also have an impact on the way in which learners view gender and sexuality. These regimented rules and regulations are ingrained within the school culture and are rarely questioned by teachers and learners alike; however, these form part of the hidden curriculum and learners are in constant negotiation of these rules and regulations as they form their identities (Ingrey, 2013).

The male/female divide is prevalent in the daily routines of a school such that they become internalised. When learners approach a classroom, they are told to stand separately in lines of boys and girls before they are asked to enter the classroom. In assemblies, girls and boys are usually separated and the ways in which girls and boys sit in the classroom is also divided across gender lines. For a boy to sit next to a girl and vice versa is viewed as a punishment by both genders and both usually prefer to sit within their own gender groups. Teachers facilitate this process by threatening to make a girl sit next to a boy and vice versa if they do not behave appropriately in the classroom. Furthermore, girls and boys actively choose to sit far away from each other so as not to be perceived as being in a romantic relationship both by their peers and their teachers. An Islamic school in Uganda also separated boys and girls in the classroom so that there was no mingling whatsoever between boys and girls as stipulated by Sharia law (Muhanguzi, 2011). When class discussions took place, teachers monitored their interactions carefully to ensure that there was no frivolity between the sexes. These divisions across gender lines serve to reinforce the differences between boys and girls and also position girls as inferior to the boys.

Divisions according to sex and gender are also prevalent outside the classroom space on the playground, which is less dominated by adults. Research conducted by Mayeza (2015) in a South African township school shows how gender binaries are constructed on the playground through the spaces that learners occupy during their breaks. The centre of the playground is dominated by the boys who play soccer whilst the girls are scattered on the periphery of the playground playing games like skipping. In the study, boys indicated that soccer was a sport reserved for males and that girls were not allowed to play with them. By dominating the playground, they were exhibiting their masculine prowess. Furthermore, Janak and Bhana's (2023) study with 12–13-year-old girls demonstrates how the playground is a space in which boys and girls engage in romance and sexually suggestive activities such as kissing. This implies that the playground and other spaces in the school have a role to play in the construction of gender and sexuality.

Uniforms and Dress Code

In addition, uniforms at many schools are strictly regulated and divided across gender lines. Learners are expected to be smartly dressed in attire that is considered fit for the learning environment. However, there is a vast difference between the uniforms of boys and girls in many schools (Aghasaleh, 2018). Girls are expected to wear clothes such as dresses that cover them up and do not reveal the shape and form of their bodies. In many cases, girls are uncomfortable wearing these dresses as they cannot move around as much and have to be conscious of ensuring that they stand and sit in a manner that does not bare anything under their skirts. However, boys are allowed to wear pants and shorts which facilitate freedom of movement and they do not have to mind the way they sit and stand. Teachers are also hyper-focused on ensuring that girls are adhering to the dress code as they check to ensure that skirts are long enough and admonish them if the uniform does not meet the required standards (Happel, 2013). However, teachers pay less attention to the uniforms of boys and are less strict about any infringements. Rather, they focus on the boys' behaviour and academic performance. The targeting of girls in terms of uniform is quite concerning as it makes girls feel self-conscious about their bodies and they have to pay much more attention to their appearance than do boys. Further, it teaches girls that their bodies need to be always covered for fear of drawing the attention of the male gaze. Boys are rarely taught to respect girls' bodies regardless of how much is on display.

In addition to dress codes being very strict, there is a lack of attention paid to learners who may identify as non-binary or transsexual (Reddy-Best & Choi, 2020). Girls who want to wear pants and boys who want to wear dresses are not catered for and rather are ridiculed by both teachers and other students. This lack of accommodation places learners into a binary where they have to conform to the gender that is represented by their uniform. Thus, they have no choice in the way they express themselves as individuals. Further, it is viewed as a contravention of the school rules if a learner is seen wearing something different from the other learners. This constantly reinforces the idea that they are different from others and that their gender identity is unacceptable and need to be changed so that they conform to the dominant heteronormative culture. These learners are also used as examples by teachers to warn other learners against identifying as a different gender or sexuality and to teach learners how they should behave if they do not want to be marginalised by the school community. Further, teachers punish those who choose to dress differently and have even gone as far as accusing the queer learners of witchcraft (Francis, 2017).

Classroom Procedures and Punishment

The division of labour and duties at schools is highly gendered and is practised by school management, teachers and learners. Men are usually promoted for management positions over women and there are far more schools with male principals than female principals. Female teachers accept this as the norm and do not question the promotion of males over themselves, thus being complicit in their subordination. Further, male principals garner much more respect from learners and teachers as they are assumed to be in a position of authority and control naturally (Dunne, 2007). However, female principals are heavily criticised for their roles, as well as being undermined, because seeing a female in a position of power is unusual, especially in Africa (Bereng & Mutekwe, 2021). In addition, female teachers are much less respected than male teachers by male learners (De Lange et al., 2012). This is because males in African culture are taught that women are soft and feminine and are much more domesticated whilst men must be regarded as superior and authoritative. Thus, female teachers report that they are often disrespected in class by male learners and spend much time in their lessons disciplining the boys, who feel free to be disruptive in class because a female teacher is standing in front of them.

The duties that girls and boys are assigned at school vary to a great degree. A study conducted by Dunne (2007) in Botswana and Ghana showed that boys are given the jobs that require heavy lifting and moving whilst girls are given duties that are domesticated in nature, such as sweeping the classroom and collecting books. This is under the assumption that girls are much more serious when it comes to academic study, so they are given much more responsibility in that area. However, it is also assumed that sweeping and looking after the classroom is a female duty as this is what they are expected to do at home. When boys are told to do these duties, they are mocked by their peer groups which discourages them from taking up these duties. While girls are more than willing and capable of assisting boys with their duties and face no criticism, most boys refrain from assisting girls with their duties for fear of being mocked for being effeminate. This double standard serves to reinforce gender binaries and hierarchies that persist throughout the school years and creates a culture of inequality that is also enabled by the teachers and school management without being questioned.

Although corporal punishment was abolished in South Africa in 1996, it still exists in many schools today (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Teachers use corporal punishment to discipline wayward male learners especially, to teach them how to be a “real” man. If a boy is suspected

of being gay or exhibits behaviour that may be viewed as effeminate, he is hit in order to ensure that he remains masculine and straight; beaten into submission. This is usually done publicly in front of other boys who also jeer and contribute to ensuring that the boy is “straightened up” and shown how to behave like a real man (Francis et al., 2019). This kind of abuse reinforces the violence that is also prevalent in South African society and teaches boys that the only way to deal with conflicting opinions is through violence (Guedes et al., 2016). Girls are also hit by teachers but in a gentler manner when compared to the boys (Humphreys, 2008). However, these are also measures that teachers take that are intended to be corrective but end up being more harmful in the long run.

Homophobia

Textbooks and the materials that teachers use to teach the curriculum is a huge issue in schools and serve to reinforce heterosexual ideals as part of the hidden curriculum. A review of the Life Orientation textbooks used in South Africa showed that most of the diagrams and drawings that accompanied the topics related to gender and sexuality were of heterosexual couples (Francis, 2017). When teachers use examples in class to teach, they also always refer to heterosexual relationships and are silent about queer sexuality. Many teachers state that they are actually afraid to mention or teach about queer sexuality as they fear the backlash they may receive from the school governing body and from parents. South African society is relatively conservative about gender and sexuality issues as these ideologies are predominantly influenced by cultural and religious values. Therefore, the fears of the teachers are reasonable as parents are adamant about what should and should not be taught to their children. However, these values are not consistent with the goal to eradicate homophobia through education but instead perpetuate it.

In addition to teachers being afraid to widen the scope when teaching about gender and sexuality, many teachers are largely ignorant, silent and in denial about these issues (Ngabaza et al., 2016). They try to correct girls and boys from identifying as queer and are of the belief that queer sexuality is contagious and infectious. They therefore advise learners not to go near anyone who is suspected of being queer for fear that it spreads like a disease. This reinforces the homophobia that is prevalent in many schools and contributes to the shunning, shaming and marginalisation of learners who identify as a different gender or sexuality. Furthermore, teachers are unsympathetic towards learners who report bullying or teasing based on their

gender or sexuality. They dismiss the learner who reports the issue and do nothing to assist. Hence, learners have nowhere to turn when they have issues fitting in at school.

Moreover, teachers do not want to discuss issues about queer sexuality for fear that they themselves will be labelled as queer by fellow teachers as well as learners and would rather play it safe and avoid these issues completely. One teacher in a study by Msibi (2012) reported that when queer learners came to him, other teachers labelled him as a teacher who deals with these issues and as someone who also identified as queer. Instead of supporting him, they chose to distance themselves from him. It is necessary for learners to have a safe space to talk to teachers about their issues with sexuality as it helps to boost their confidence and gives them support when they need it. Research has shown that when children feel supported by the significant adults at school, they are then much more likely to stand up to bullies and stand in their own identities rather than succumbing to what the rest of the school population and society expects them to do (Msibi, 2012).

Sports and Spaces

There are spaces in schools in which gender and sexuality issues are brought to the forefront simply by the ways in which learners behave in these spaces without the supervision of adults. Locker rooms are one such space in which toxic masculinity and misogyny is bred by the culture that prevails in them. Fields and Payne (2016) cite a study conducted in a girls' locker room, which showed that a girl who identified as lesbian was treated warily by the rest of the girls as they refused to change their clothes in front of her for fear that she was looking at them in a sexual manner, despite her reassurances that she was not doing so. It was only when she stepped outside into a secluded area that the rest of the girls were comfortable enough to openly change their clothes. Ironically, when they played with her on the soccer field, she was the most popular and celebrated player by the team as she was the top scorer. This scenario exposes the double standards that the girls had: on one hand that a lesbian was someone to be afraid of, and on the other, that being good at sport and exhibiting strength and agility was something to be celebrated. In another example, lesbian girls chose to sit on the steps in the hallway near the cafeteria. When other girls saw that this spot was occupied by the lesbian girls, they vehemently refused to sit in the same space. Instead, they spread rumours about the lesbian girls by exaggerating about the sexual acts that they performed on these steps. This shows that school spaces are not neutral and are always involved in the negotiation of gender and sexuality and can actually serve as a breeding ground for homophobia and misogyny.

As much as there is homophobia and transphobia amongst girls who play sports, research has shown that girls who are lesbians have found that playing sport is a safe space for them to express their gendered and sexual identities without feeling as though they are being judged (Storr et al., 2022). This is because there is an existing stereotype that lesbians are more masculine and therefore prefer to play sports, so there is an expectation by society for them to exhibit masculine behaviour. This is quite paradoxical, as the girls may have found safe spaces, which is a positive for them, but it still plays into society's stereotype that all girls who are sporty are lesbians and disassociated with femininity. These stereotypes are rigid and do not allow for any fluidity.

Furthermore, sports activities at schools are also divided according to gender lines (Solmon, 2014). The sporting codes that are offered to girls are not the same as those offered to boys. For example, netball is offered to girls but very rarely to boys, whilst girls are discouraged from playing soccer and boys are encouraged. When boys choose to play sport with girls they are mocked and teased for not being masculine enough. Boys also do not want girls on their teams as they feel that girls cannot play sports that are traditionally designated for and made popular by men. Sports that are traditionally meant for females are not given much attention and infrastructure and sponsorships are difficult to come by. Activities like dancing classes and gymnastics are also viewed as feminine and not regarded as sport which makes it difficult for girls who participate in these sports to be taken seriously (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016). There are also fewer coaching opportunities for girls as compared to boys. The uniforms are vastly different, and accommodations are not made when girls are on their periods.

The imbalanced popularity of sports is another way in which girls are marginalised continuously. Soccer matches between boys are attended by many spectators but the same sport played by girls does not garner any interest from the teachers, parents, peers or community (Mayeza, 2017). This lack of support is quite discouraging as it relays to the girls that they are playing sport for recreational purposes rather than out of passion. In addition, girls are sexualised due to the type of uniforms that they are required to wear and thus the sport becomes more a discussion of their bodies and "sexiness" rather than their skills in the game (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016). This is contrast to sports played by boys which are attended by industry scouts and where discussions centre around talent, skills and development opportunities. The matches are much better attended and there is funding made available to assist boys in developing their skills further. The kind of attention given mirrors what occurs in professional

sports around the country and thus sport is never seen as a sustainable avenue for girls to take up as a career path.

When learners who identify as bisexual or non-binary try to play sports, they find that they are excluded from many of the practices that take place due to homophobia and bullying. The boys' locker room is a space in which hegemonic masculinity is nurtured and anyone who deviates from the norm or shows tendencies of alternative masculinity is treated differently (Storr et al., 2022). This leads to these learners fearing participating in sports as they feel that they are not welcome. Thus, the school becomes a hostile space that is exclusively for learners who subscribe to a particular form of masculinity. "Locker room talk" is also common, in which boys gossip about their girlfriends and make derogatory remarks about girls in general. They compare notes on which girls they had sexual encounters with and also discuss and rate girls' bodies and sexual appeal (White & Hobson, 2017). Boys who do not choose to participate in such discussions are teased and face a lot of pressure to fit in otherwise they are seen as not being a sport or team player. In addition, coaches are also very aggressive towards boys and make homophobic remarks to ensure that the boys learn to be as tough and as masculine as possible. Showing sympathy, empathy, feelings or emotions are considered weak forms of masculinity and more equated to being feminine.

Research has shown that in physical education (PE) classes, those learners who are not as sporty and competitive as the other boys were called names and given less attention than those who showed more enthusiasm and a competitive spirit (Bowley, 2013). This suggests that despite the fact that physical education is meant to be inclusive of all learners at schools regardless of their physical ability, learners are still excluded by their coaches because they are not deemed fit enough to participate. This is problematic as early physical education is critical in inculcating the values that sports teaches to the learners, as well as contributing to the overall health status of nations over a long period of time. Once learners have negative experiences with physical education, they are less likely to continue being active later on in their lives. Furthermore, toxic forms of masculinity are instilled in learners from a young age and they learn that only a particular type of boy is allowed to be a part of a team or participate in physical activities. This reinforces gender binaries rather than being inclusive. The bullying could also lead to violence as sports that are particularly physical in nature can become sites where homophobia and transphobia are reinforced.

Studies conducted by Cockburn and Clarke (2002) show how the regimented requirements of physical education uniforms impede girls from performing at their best. The most common dress code for girls across the different schools studied was a plain t-shirt and shorts. Girls were not allowed to embellish their PE uniforms in any way or wear any jewellery during the PE classes. In addition, girls were not allowed to swap out any of the clothing for something else. Due to these strict requirements, it was found that many girls were very uncomfortable wearing these articles of clothing as it drew attention to parts of their bodies that they did not want to be inspected. For example, girls felt uncomfortable about their weight, their legs being on display, and the poor manner in which the PE clothes fitted over their bodies as it made them look frumpy and unfeminine. As a result of this, participation in PE was not as enthusiastic and learners simply participated in PE because they were forced to instead of actually enjoying it. Girls also went to the extent of refusing to participate as they did not feel comfortable doing so. This evidence clearly suggests that PE teachers view physical activity as masculine and therefore girls also have to look masculine in their PE kits in order to participate in the activities. Furthermore, girls interviewed stated that if they had more freedom in the ways they could customise their PE kits, they would be much more likely to fully engage in and even enjoy PE lessons.

In addition, this study further showed that the activities that the girls were asked to participate in were mostly in view of the public including boys and teachers (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002). Teenage girls are in the process of identity formation and in the peak stages of puberty and therefore are self-conscious about their bodies. The public performance of physical activity further serves to exacerbate their insecurities as they are at risk of being mocked on their physical performance. Further, physical education is an activity that is traditionally seen as a field in which boys excel and dominate and therefore in order for girls to be accepted as being good at physical activity, they have to exhibit what is called a “feminine deficit” (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002). This is when they have to perform like the boys in order to be considered as good at physical education. They have to exhibit masculine traits and hide their feminine traits, which is paradoxical. Due to these uncomfortable situations, many girls choose not to excel as they do not want to be perceived as unfeminine. This attitude is quite concerning as physical well-being is a critical part of growing up as a healthy teenager.

Girls report using their femininity as a badge as they complain about their hair being messed up and their nails being damaged as excuses not to play sports. They play up to hyperfemininity

as a way to prove to their peers that they are still attractive girls and women and do not want to be associated with male culture, especially sports. One girl interviewed in Cockburn and Clarke's (2002) study claimed she was not allowed to swim because she was Muslim to avoid having to swim at school, even though this was her own decision rather than a religious rule. However, these prevailing attitudes play up to stereotypical expectations of gender in society and do nothing to promote gender equality. Rather, the girls' choices form part of established gender norms by creating a binary between activities that are considered to be for males and those that are meant to be for females (Cárcamo et al., 2021).

Girls who do try hard in sports also face their own share of problems. They have to be strong and masculine in order to prove that they can also play sport, otherwise they are excluded by the boys and their coaches (Bevan et al., 2021). Coaches exacerbate this fear as they mock girls for being too "girly" which forces girls to choose between their feminine identity and their "sporty" identity. Once they do excel in sports they then have to face being perceived as "tomboys" and lesbians which creates a pre-determined identity for them which they are not allowed to deviate from. When sporty girls display interest in things other than sports such as fashion and make-up, it comes as a shock to most of their peers as they do not expect tomboys or sporty girls to have an interest in anything that is associated with femininity. On the other hand, in order for them to prove that they are still girls with multiple interests, despite being lumped together with the boys, sporty girls feel pressure to compensate for being sporty by showing off their feminine qualities outside of the sports field. They have to create a double identity and compromise on certain aspects of their personalities in order to fit in with the male-dominated sports field as well as with the rest of the girls.

Being sporty also has implications for the desirability of a girls as they are not seen as feminine enough to be dating boys (Cárcamo et al., 2021). When boys do date sporty girls, the boys are questioned about why are dating another male, thus implying that the boys are queer. However, girls also resist emphasised femininity and choose to stand with who they are, thus breaking away from heteronormative norms. Girls who are sporty may choose not to pay attention to their physical appearance as much as other girls do and also choose not to have boyfriends simply to prove that they are girls. They choose to put up with the bullying and the teasing rather than backing down as they feel passionate about the sports that they engage in. However, this confidence to break stereotypes does not come without struggle and brings to the fore the contradictions that girls face in terms of their gender and identity when they choose to pursue

their passions; they have to face loneliness and rejection by their peers which does not allow for a healthy and tolerant school environment. One girl in the study by Cárcamo et al. (2021) stated that if she had a crush on a specific boy, she would downplay her interest in sport to make herself more attractive and to be perceived as more of a girl. The patriarchal standards applied to girls means that they either have to conform or resist, with consequences on both ends of the spectrum.

Bathrooms

The school bathrooms or toilets are another space in which gender and sexuality is performed and negotiated without the prying eyes of adults. In these spaces, boys and girls have intimate discussions about their bodies as well as about the opposite sex. These conversations can quickly turn into mocking and bullying, especially of those learners who are gender diverse. This type of behaviour leads to gender diverse students avoiding the use of bathrooms at school altogether which compromises the school as being a safe space for all (Porta et al., 2017). The bathrooms are a space in which masculinity and femininity are established as cliques form and intimate secrets and details are shared. Gossip culture is rife and this can also lead to slander and exclusion of others. Gender neutral bathrooms are an option for schools to install; however, there is much backlash from conservative parents as well as from learners themselves, as it identifies those who may not want to declare that they are different from any of the other learners at school (McGuire et al., 2022). The spaces in which these bathrooms are located is also an issue as they cannot be built in distant parts of the school as this would compromise the safety of the learners who choose to use these bathrooms.

Research by Ingrey (2013) suggests that bathrooms are a space in which gender is constructed and negotiated. Her study of girls' bathrooms in schools in the UK shows that they serve as spaces in which gender is policed. The construction of the bathrooms is concerning as privacy is limited even in the stalls as there are gaps that others can see through. This makes girls who are using the stalls self-conscious as they are afraid of being judged. In addition, when girls approach the big mirrors, they avoid eye contact if they do not know each other in order to avoid the judgement of their peers in terms of their bodies. Thus, the mirror holds power as the subjects, the girls, perform in its presence (Butler, 1990). School bathrooms are therefore a space in which bodies are regulated and approval is granted based on dominant discourses of the time.

Moreover, girls also choose which stalls they want to use and which stalls they do not (Ingrey, 2013). This is an attempt to get more privacy and to step away from peer regulation. Those using stalls closer to the spaces which most girls use in the bathroom are more likely to be commented on. The walls and mirrors are further used to inscribe graffiti on which girls are called names like “slags” and “sluts” to shame them. Those who are considered slags and sluts are mentioned by name and thus publicises and exacerbates the bullying that the girls are subjected to. The name-calling and public shaming feeds into the hegemonic masculinity that is perpetuated by the boys as it further entrenches misogynistic attitudes in which girls are pitted against one another for male attention. Thus, in the bathrooms, girls are socialised into and complicit in competing with one another for male attention even without the male gaze being present.

In addition to bathrooms being a contentious space for gender and sexuality being formed, for girls, facilities for menstruation are not taken seriously by schools. Numerous studies have shown that period poverty is a phenomenon experienced by girls worldwide as they do not have access to pads and tampons and as a result have to stay home from school when they are menstruating (Carneiro, 2021; Kennedy & Severe, 2020). This has a severe impact on their education and can lead to a gap arising between the academic performance of girls and boys. Furthermore, schools are not very well equipped or resourced at providing period products for girls which creates more embarrassment and shame for those girls who need them. Teachers and administrators are also not very sympathetic about cramping or girls needing to go to the bathroom during lessons and this adds additional stress on girls as they need to navigate these obstacles in addition to focusing on getting an education. Boys also mock girls who are on their periods and this is damaging to their self-esteem. In terms of gender, it also reinforces patriarchal attitudes among boys as in many cultures and schools, periods are a topic that is not meant to be discussed by or with boys. Their lack of knowledge on the subject has negative consequences for the girls as they have to use coded language in order to communicate their needs, which places them in an inferior position.

Sexual Spaces

Spaces may be designed and intended to be educational, but learners may use them for reasons other than education. The sports fields are a space that is designated for learners to get physical exercise and to socialise, however sexual activity also takes place in the far corners of the sports field unsupervised. A study by Allen (2013a) in New Zealand showed how boys and girls hid

in the far corners of the playground in order to be romantic with each other. However, when teachers started noticing these activities, they tried to regulate and supervise the space. When learners noticed this, they stopped clustering in one spot and chose to spread out to different parts of the field so that they were not as noticeable anymore. This evidence shows how, despite the best efforts of teachers to control the learners and to ensure that spaces are used for their intended purpose, learners will still make these spaces highly politicised and sexualised as part of the formation of their identities. Similarly, unsupervised spaces like corridors, seating areas, dining areas and the entrances outside classrooms are also used by learners to engage in sexual activity as well as to have informal discussions about sex and sexuality which inform their outlook on these matters. They learn about sexuality by observing others in the act as well as by listening to others narrate their sexual experiences to them. They also learn which behaviours are taboo and which are tolerated, based on each other's actions and reactions. The formal curriculum dictates what should be taught and when, especially regarding sexuality, however, the hidden curriculum has a role to play in what information is accessed by learners at school and must be taken into account when attempting to understand how sexual identities are formed (Hernández et al., 2013).

In addition to the sports field being a place for learners in romantic relationships to meet, it is also used as a site where boys and girls sexualise each other's bodies (Kostas, 2022). Learners will watch the sports matches, which is what the fields are intended for, but at the same time they will also look for sexual or romantic partners within the same space and at the same time. This means that the body is continuously on display and up for discussion and this places extra pressure on young people to ensure that their bodies are in line with what is considered to be desirable. While bodies are restrained and confined in terms of movement in the classroom, learners have much more freedom on the sports field to show off their bodies however they want. Thus, desire is evoked through the flexing of the body and results in new sexual and romantic relationships being formed. The field then becomes a space in which sexuality is expressed in addition to being a social and physical space.

Another space that learners use to express themselves are the walls and desks on which they plaster graffiti. The walls and desks have the intended purposes of protecting learners and enabling them to study, respectively. However, when adults are not looking, these spaces can become sexual in nature based on what learners choose to do in these spaces. Allen (2013b) interviewed high school learners who found that boys had drawn erect penises on the desks in

the classroom. This is a clear indication of their sexual prowess and their macho masculinity. Despite the classroom being designated as a site for learning and under supervision by adults, the boys demonstrate that they are still in control of their bodies and can make a space sexual. The resistance to the school rules and norms is a demonstration of their phallic power and, in turn, their masculinity. The act of forcing the body to be still in the classroom makes the mind more active and thus the graffiti is not only way to entertain themselves but to subconsciously signal to others that they are also sexually virile.

School libraries are intended to be quiet, educational spaces in which learning takes place. However, they can also be turned into a space where sexuality is learned and demonstrated (Allen, 2013a). Libraries do have information about sexuality in scientific books such as those about anatomy; these are used to educate learners about the functioning of the body but there is an expectation that sexual acts will not take place in the library. Therefore, pornography is strictly banned in school libraries as it is considered inappropriate, However, when libraries have books that have accurate information about sexuality, it creates a space for learners to learn about sexuality either in private or publicly without being ashamed of embarrassed. When libraries showcase books about sexuality to learners, it allows them to gain accurate and correct information rather than information that may be false and spread through rumours or hearsay.

In addition, school computer laboratories are another space in which learners potentially have access to sexual material. Computer laboratories are intended for learners to have access to the internet and to learn computing skills. However, this is can easily be turned into a surreptitious hunt for pornography. Many schools have installed firewalls preventing learners from being able to access pornographic material, which implies that they prefer learners not to be sexual at school; however those schools that do not have firewalls find that learners are easily able to access pornographic material without being traced as teachers and administrators are too busy to look into the search history of learners (Rothman et al., 2015). Furthermore, learners also bypass firewalls and protections put in to place by searching sexual terms under the guise of conducting research in encyclopaedias and scientific websites. This proves that despite school spaces being designed and deemed as neutral, they are still sites with agency that have the potential to be repurposed and used beyond what they are intended for; learners make these spaces their own by exercising their agency.

Social Media

With the introduction of the internet, social media has become a major part of most people's lives. For many children and teenagers, this is a space in which they are entertained, educated and communicate (Tartari, 2015). Therefore, social media has a big role to play in the construction of gender and sexuality. Many learners have access to technological devices at home as well as at school. Most significant adults in their lives attempt to restrict the amount of activity that learners are engaged in on social media, however, adults cannot keep up with the new features and abilities of social media and cannot always control or monitor what their children get up to. Furthermore, there is no real enforcement of laws on social media from authorities so the freedoms that learners have on social media are seemingly endless compared with what they are allowed to do in their real lives at school and at home (Ringrose et al., 2013).

On social media teenagers have the ability to interact with their peers in unlimited ways by sending pictures, messages, videos and other forms of media. Thus, it becomes a completely different space to the physical environment in which children can engage and interact with each other. The word "sexting" is a portmanteau of "sex" and "texting" and this is when sexually explicit messages, photos or videos are shared via social media platforms (Ringrose et al., 2013). In a study by Ringrose et al. (2013) with teenagers in two schools in the UK, it was found that boys were more likely than girls to ask girls for pictures of themselves in sexually suggestive poses, dressed in a seductive manner as it gives them bragging rights with their peers. Therefore, girls are compelled to make excuses as to why they cannot send these pictures for fear of being ridiculed or slut-shamed. However, they find themselves in a double bind, as when they do refuse, the boys make a mockery of them, stating that they are being too modest and that it is not worth it to text with them. When boys do obtain these pictures, they show them to their friends as a performance of masculinity. Girls have to negotiate between these choices which places them in a vulnerable position (Salter, 2016).

The issue of image-based sexual harassment and abuse has been problematised by the media and therefore it is seen as the responsibility of the sender to ensure that that they do not share sexually suggestive messages (Hasinoff, 2013). Further, this responsibility is placed on girls specifically as they are seen as vulnerable to falling victim to sexting scandals (Renold & Ringrose, 2017). Thus, girls are warned not engage in sexting as their pictures or messages may be used for cyber bullying or for other nefarious purposes. However, there is a double standard in this as those who request such messages are boys and they are rarely warned or face any repercussions for doing so. Further, when these messages are posted on social media

by girls, instead of viewing them as exercising their capacities, they are slut-shamed for choosing to post sexually suggestive images. The images are seen as vulgar and the girls risk being bullied and trolled on social media. This implies that girls' sexuality is seen as something that needs to be controlled and contained (Jackson & Cram, 2003).

Another study by De Ridder (2017) with teenagers in Belgium found that when girls looked at social media profiles of other girls online, they were very judgemental and positioned themselves as morally superior. The girls found other girls' pictures too be too fake or inauthentic, or claimed that a girl was trying too hard if she posted inspirational quotes. They slut-shamed one girl when they saw that she had posted bikini photos and accused her of oversharing. This shows that the girls had essentialist viewpoints as to how girls should act and behave on social media (Fox & Bale, 2018). When probing further, however, these girls could not arrive at a consensus as to how girls should pose and post on social media. Many claimed that they themselves had also posted similar types of images on social media but were still judging others for posting the same. Thus, it was found that girls rely on their peers to justify whether what they share is appropriate or not. There was not one set standard but different standards for different peer groups depending on how they felt that girls should behave on social media. These findings are similar to that of Bailey et al. (2013), Carboni and Bhana (2019) and Ringrose et al. (2013). This suggests that morality cannot be used as a barometer to judge what is appropriate for social media as the norms keep changing depending on context and personal opinions. Therefore, young people feel pressure to conform to these ever-changing trends and this pressure can be overwhelming. Equipping children with the means of navigating these rapid changes is where the focus should be, rather than passing judgements on the social media platforms themselves (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012).

According to Bailey et al. (2013), the types of pictures that girls choose to put on social media are those that are linked to stereotypes of femininity. Their study of girls between the ages of 18 and 22 in Canada showed that girls chose to post images that were sexually suggestive and in attractive poses, wearing clothes that revealed their bodies. They wanted to be seen as sexy, flirtatious and desirable. Aesthetics are important and girls will go to great lengths to portray themselves, their lifestyles and their friends and partners as attractive (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). They also focused on ensuring that they seemed confident and carefree as well as open to having other relationships. This focus on the visual is a performance of their sexual capacities but plays up to the pressures that hegemonic masculinity places on young girls, which requires

them to behave in this particular manner (Manago, 2013). The images that are posted on social media serve to regulate the types of femininity that are acceptable on social media and influence other girls to comply to these standards as well.

De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2013) conducted research in Belgium on how teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 commented on social media posts and it was found that more girls comment on posts than boys, which suggests that commenting on social media posts is a gendered practice. These findings are similar to De Ridder's (2017) later work in which he found that girls posted more images than boys on social media. Further, girls mainly reacted to boys' pictures through emojis and boys mostly commented on girls' pictures. Whilst boys' comments remained public, girls carried on their conversations in private. This suggests that girls found social media to be a bonding experience whilst boys were mostly detached from the experience. In addition, the comments that girls made on boys' posts were in praise of their looks and expressed sexual desire. In contrast, the comments that boys made on girls' pictures were not sexual, and rather appreciated the beauty of the girls in a polite manner. This finding suggests that there are boys who are leaning toward alternative forms of masculinity and resisting practices associated with hegemonic masculinity. However, in contradiction to this finding, the boys also enquired about the girls' boyfriends which suggests that heterosexuality is still the norm online (Mulholland, 2015). To reiterate this point, pictures of heterosexual couples are widely accepted and acknowledged but those of queer couples generate controversial debates and discussions (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013). These all form part of the regulatory and policing practices which serve to show others which types of images are acceptable to post and which are not.

When constructing social media profiles, young people are bombarded with advertising containing images of idealised masculinity and femininity (Bailey et al., 2013). These images usually show men as strong and dominant whilst women are portrayed as desirable and flirtatious. Young people mirror this on their own profiles by posting similar images of themselves, thus integrating the two worlds of advertising and social media. Teenagers will also post images of popular images from the internet and advertising such as the Playboy bunny or sexually desirable famous women in order to gain a reaction from their followers and to subtly show that they subscribe to these forms of masculinity and femininity (Manago, 2013). This intersection between celebrities, advertising and social media can be used as a tool to

reinforce the status quo or to experiment with alternative forms of femininities and masculinities online without the same pressures as in real life.

A study on online constructions of masculinity by Manago (2013), exploring how young people curated and chose what to display on their social media profiles, shows how misogynistic images and phrases get affirmed by other young men through the comment section. Therefore, in a sense, young people are seeking validation for what they post and this spurs them on to continue posting similar comments. However, the male presence online is expected to show bravado and not to express that any negative comments affect them as much as they actually do. Being “too emotional” is viewed as something that is feminine and therefore undesirable for boys to engage in. The policing of masculinity on social media ensures that boys do not deviate from the norms that are set by the predominant groups. For example, posting a photo of a sexy women, be it a celebrity or someone who is well-known to the poster, instantly elevates his status on social media as the aesthetic of a beautiful women being associated with a man shows that they have sexual prowess. Through this process, women are then subjugated and objectified (Carboni & Bhana, 2019).

Manago's (2013) research further revealed that when men posted pictures of themselves in poses that were parodies of the way in which women posed, they were praised. Being associated with femininity was a cause for laughter and jokes, which places women in an inferior position and inadvertently teaches boys that emulating female behaviour is not condoned. Further, posting images that imply queer sexuality elicits homophobic responses that can escalate abuse and violence (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). Moreover, men who post images of their physique that comply with narrow definitions of masculinity receive validation for their posts and this becomes an infinite loop of reward from male peers as well as from girls, who comment on their desirability. Boys who comment on and praise the boys' desirability do it in comedic manner that makes it obvious that it is a mockery of queer sexuality (Odenbring & Johansson, 2021).

In addition, when heterosexual couples share their relationships on social media, it is a way for them to confirm their desirability and to show that they conform to societal norms of what a romantic relationship should look like (Renold & Ringrose, 2017). However, when sharing their relationships online, it is notable that boys have to navigate between showing themselves as vulnerable to being in a romantic relationship, as well as still having to maintain the tough exterior (Mod, 2010). Showing oneself as vulnerable and sensitive online is a risky endeavour

as it can open up a platform for teasing and mockery, especially if it is a committed relationship. Due to boys taking pride in their ability to have multiple relationships at once, showing oneself as being in a committed relationship is risky and can be viewed as weak and not conforming to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. However, this can also be a catalyst for change, as being daring enough to post one's relationship status publicly is an invitation for other boys to also post their relationships which makes alternative forms of masculinity more visible and popular (Connell, 2020).

Publicly posting relationships and having a wider network of friends on the internet can lead to jealousy and to nefarious activities such as stalking. Research has shown that girls check their boyfriends' profiles on social media often and this leads to the power dynamics in a relationship being skewed (Muise et al., 2009; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). Due to this, teenagers can also create multiple social media profiles for different people and engage in clandestine relationships without each of their romantic partners knowing of the other partner. The boundaries of relationships are also blurred as the rules of engagement on social media differ to that in real life (Manago, 2013). For instance, a boy liking another girl's picture could be intended to be a show of approval, but the romantic partner could interpret it as being flirtatious towards another girl. In this way new boundaries have to be established which can be different for each couple.

“Revenge porn” has become popularised with the advent of social media and is a way for boys to get revenge on girls after a breakup. They post sexually explicit pictures of their ex-girlfriends, which were sent privately, on public platforms (Eleuteri et al., 2017). This is done to get back at the girl for breaking up with them. Revenge porn then leads to slut-shaming and other forms of bullying as the girl's body is available for public consumption without her permission. These posts can be shared and reposted many times which is damaging to the reputation of the girls. By engaging in this type of behaviour boys regain their pride and girls are sexualised and judged for being willing to share such pictures with their boyfriends (Salter, 2016). A double standard is evident here because when sexually explicit images of boys are released, they are praised for it. However, a girl who steps outside the bounds of traditional femininity is shamed by those around her, which reveals an imbalance in power relations.

Renold and Ringrose's (2017) study of UK teenagers' entanglements with image creation showed how boys asked girls for headless pictures of their bodies with the boys' names scrawled across their chests or other parts of their bodies. The boys created a competition with

the girls in which the best picture that was sent to them would then be posted as their social media profile picture. These types of actions place boys in a position of power as they are able to toy with girls' emotions and need for desirability in order to gain the approval of their peers and to elevate their hegemonic status (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). They also tagged the girls who sent the pictures to them, clearly identifying who the girls were. This resulted in girls fearing that they would be tagged in these images especially seeing as these images were not identifiable, so if an image were to be tagged with a particular girl's name, she would be shamed regardless of whether the picture was actually one of her body or not. Additionally, scrawling the names of the boys across their chest or stomachs gives the boys a sense of ownership and thus makes girls feel as if they are objectified. By girls sending these photos to the boys, they are being agentic by owning their bodies and sexuality, but also being complicit in fulfilling the boys' agendas.

Social media is used by queer youth to connect with others who also identify similarly to them and to find support when trying to navigate the issues that are associated with identifying differently to heterosexual peers (Downing, 2013). Hence, there are social media networks that are dedicated to the queer community which are used to connect with others. Research by Downing (2013) shows that even though the apps are mainly meant as dating sites, most are used for friendships and for forming connections with other like-minded individuals. Further, these apps are used to organise social gatherings as well as to garner support for marches and rallies. Hence, members of the queer community are able to find a space in which they can express themselves and find a community of like-minded individuals. However, within these apps there are also hierarchies that are present. Those who are more flamboyant and fit in with the stereotypical image of someone who identifies as queer enjoy more popularity than those who are not. Those who have been on the apps longer and are willing to meet up with people in person also enjoy more popularity. When it comes to romantic interests, these conversations usually turn into phone calls and private chats. Teenagers also look for people who are geographically close. They then meet up and take their relationships further. In this way, the lines between the virtual and the real worlds are blurred (Drushel, 2010). This study will also show how learners use social media to form and maintain romantic relationships away from the adult gaze.

Pornography

The use of pornography for entertainment purposes is cited by many teenagers as it forms part of their use of the internet and social media (Mulholland, 2015). Teenagers state that pornography is easily accessible and one does not need to go into a specific pornographic website in order to access it. Therefore, when it is freely accessible, it becomes quite easy for teenagers to discuss and share what they have seen with each other. The adult point of view, which posits that porn should be blocked and eliminated from teenagers' lives, can be seen as unrealistic as their exposure is not premeditated. Therefore, new conversations need to be had by adults with teenagers to discuss the ways in which teenagers navigate pornography and what this might mean for the development of their identities. Rather than banning it, it is imperative to acknowledge it as part of the teenage experience. Goldstein's (2020) focus group research with participants between the ages of 18 and 21 in Canada shows how porn can evoke humour and that participants found many of the sexual positions and stories ridiculous rather than an erotic experience. Women pointed out the ways in which the porn industry treated women in an unfair manner and positioned them as sex objects for male gratification. However, Setty's (2022) research with high school learners in England shows how girls are conditioned to condemn and vilify pornography as their responses in the focus groups were similar to that of Goldstein's (2020). In contrast, in the individual interviews, girls revealed that they did engage with pornography and that it was a pleasurable as well as a learning experience for them.

Research by Mulholland (2015) of teenagers in Southern Australia shows that young people are increasingly comfortable and confident in discussing pornography and sexually explicit content. Her focus group discussions revealed that most of the teenagers admitted to watching pornography and stated that it was completely normal for teenagers to watch, share and discuss pornography. This finding goes against the bulk of research which frames pornography as something that is private, shameful and harmful (Fine, 1988). Further, Mulholland's (2015) research shows that popular culture is becoming highly sexualised and that the lines between what is considered porn and what is not is blurred as teenagers consume content that is sexualised but normalised. Therefore, their perception of pornography is different from those of older people as they are embedded in a culture that is becoming "pornified" as made popular through music videos, films, toys and branded products. Teenagers have become used to seeing these images as they have constant access to the internet and digital media and can therefore quickly gauge what is trending and popular and adopt these trends into their own lives and make it a part of their daily discourse.

However, despite the open-minded reaction to porn and pornified culture, Mulholland's (2015) research also shows that the teenagers always perceived porn and its associated culture through a heterosexual and heteronormative lens. This suggests that although the definitions of porn and what it constitutes are constantly shifting and changing, heteronormativity is still entrenched in young people's mindsets and is the default position when thinking about sex and sexuality. Hence, heterosexuality is viewed as "good" and acceptable by society and anything that strays from the norm is seen as deviant and indecent. This perception is also discriminatory along class lines as traditional middle-class beliefs are predominantly heterosexual in nature and related to the nuclear family structure (Fox & Bale, 2018). Therefore, if sex is monogamous and non-explicit, it is classified as good. However, children's narratives run counter to this as they cite that sexual conduct that is public in nature is acceptable and tolerated. This shift in perspective signifies that traditional definitions of the spaces in which sex and porn are accepted are changing.

When scrutinising the media that children consume for entertainment, it has been found that women are characterised by their embracing of femininity to the point where it can be seen as excessive. This is depicted by the comfort with which female celebrities display their bodies and flaunt their sexuality. Mulholland's (2015) research shows that teenagers idolise these celebrities and admire their confidence to show off their bodies and wealthy lifestyles filled with excess (Halberstam, 2015). It is notable that even though young people appreciate the fleshy explicitness of the content they consume; they still draw lines about what behaviour is acceptable which are based on class and gender lines. The term "slut" is used often by teenagers to describe women who may be considered to be doing too much to display their femininity. For example, they could be seen as wearing too much make-up, looking unclean and untidy, or looking for too much attention and approval. This suggests that even though embracing one's femininity is appreciated, it needs to still fit into the middle- and upper-class norms of what it means to be attractive and valuable (Goldstein, 2020). In contrast, women are described as desirable when they look clean, have healthy lifestyles and healthy relationships. The difference between "trashy" and "respectable" lies in the behaviour that women exhibit which must conform to traditional roles of femininity that most women are expected to embody. Therefore, it is evident that there is a clear double standard that girls and women are expected to comply with in order to be respected.

In Mulholland's (2015) research it was further found that it was mainly female role models who were labelled as sluts and never males. When interrogated about this, both boys and girls responded that males have never been classed as sluts and that it is a term that is reserved for females. Hence, males are not judged for their behaviour whilst females are subjected to judgement and have to conform to specific behaviours in order to be accepted, or otherwise risk being called derogatory names. These findings are similar to Ringrose et al.'s (2013) study which investigated teenage sexting behaviour in the UK and found that girls who sent promiscuous pictures of themselves to boys risked being labelled as sluts while boys who sent similar pictures were complimented and glorified by their friendship groups. This double standard places young women in vulnerable positions as they have to display modesty in order to be accepted by their peer groups. The curtailment of their sexual capacities plays into patriarchal attitudes towards female sexuality (Goldstein, 2020).

In addition, Setty's (2022) study demonstrates how boys are also curious about whether girls watch pornography and are dubious as to whether they are speaking the truth when they say that they do not watch pornography due to social norms. These findings show that some boys are aware of the double standards that girls have to negotiate in order to be seen as good and respectable young girls. Young boys displayed curiosity and ambivalence about pornography as they were unsure of the effects of pornography, most of which they had heard through the significant adults in their lives. Older boys were much more confident about admitting that they did watch porn and that it was for entertainment purposes as well as to masturbate and experience sexual pleasure. However, the porn that the girls and boys watch conform to gender norms as they are usually heterosexual in nature (Attwood et al., 2018). There were some girls who stated that they enjoyed watching lesbian porn as it was not as violent and rough as heterosexual porn. They also used heterosexual porn as an educational tool to learn how the bodies of the opposite sex look and to learn about different types of sexual positions so that they appeared knowledgeable in front of their partners (Ramlagun, 2012).

Although certain girls admitted that porn can improve the sexual aspects of relationships, many maintained that it actually ruins relationships and raised concerns about boys choosing to watch porn over being in their relationship (Setty, 2022). This insecurity is caused by the perfect images of women portrayed by porn sites and concerns that they may also be expected to look the same and have the same knowledge as the porn stars. However, boys expressed that it improved relationships and they viewed porn as separate from their own relationships and did

not compare their relationships with those of the porn stars. Boys also expressed that they learned how to please a woman better by watching pornography (Fox & Bale, 2018). In this study, it will be shown how boys and girls use pornography to derive sexual pleasure and to satisfy their curiosities about sex.

Sexually explicit video games and pornography tend to position women in a submissive manner whilst men are positioned as dominant and in control (Setty, 2022). In these video games violence against women is normalised and has an impact on how men perceive women, especially seeing as more males play video games than women. Research by Guggisberg (2020) has found that those who play sexually explicit video games have a higher likelihood of engaging in violence against women. Adolescents who play video games are susceptible to having highly idealised expectations of women in terms of looks, as the women portrayed on the video games and pornographic have stereotypical Barbie-like features with perfect bodies that are artificially enhanced (Bhana, 2022). This translates to real life as boys' expectations are not met and abuse follows. Their expectations of women also change as they view them as subordinate and as sexual objects and expect similar sexual acts to those they see on the porn videos. However, the reality is very different and it can eventually lead to the rape of women (Guggisberg, 2020).

The amount of porn that is available online increases daily and this means that young people have easier and easier access to porn every day, through dedicated porn sites, video games and social media sites (Ringrose et al., 2013). The inadvertent access to porn is almost guaranteed and the issue of pornography for young children has been problematised and intertwined with beliefs around sexual innocence (García-Gómez, 2018). Adults believe that young people are too innocent to be engaging in this behaviour and need to be protected and restricted from such material. However, the discourse around pornography needs to take into account young people's attitudes towards pornography and having an understanding of their desires and sexual capacities. Research has shown that both boys and girls access pornography and use it as a tool to learn about sex which is otherwise a taboo topic in many cultures (Attwood & Smith, 2023). Hence, through the consumption of pornography they learn about their own bodies as well as sexual acts and use it as an aid to fulfil their sexual needs and masturbatory fantasies.

However, research has also shown that pornography is dangerous for young people as they harbour fantasies of the virtual acts coming to life and spend more and more time in the virtual world and risk becoming addicted (De Alarcón et al., 2019). Men and boys also show less

empathy towards women the more they play violent video games or consume pornographic material. They are therefore desensitised to issues that women face and the media they consume reinforces prevalent stereotypes that women face on a daily basis. Consumption of pornography can lead to the emergence of rape culture as well and to narratives that women enjoy being raped, as well as reinforcing sexist attitudes that are prevalent in real life. These attitudes and behaviour are linked to neurological changes in the brain which develops differently as more and more pornography is consumed (Foubert et al., 2019). Therefore, for young developing minds this is dangerous as it is not as easy to reverse these attitudes and alterations later on in life.

Despite these dangers that form part of dominant discourses, the viewing of porn by young people is much more nuanced and needs to be examined further from their own points of view. Through porn, young girls and boys learn what sexual acts they like and what they dislike and are able to discern what types of porn they do or do not enjoy (Bhana, 2022; Setty, 2022). They are also cognisant of the way in which men and women are positioned in these videos and this is not always received in a positive manner. Young people are able to debate the way in which women are portrayed and make demands for change and equality on porn sites. Furthermore, porn has an impact on the ways in which young men and women view themselves as they compare the bodies that are depicted on these sites to their own and this can lead to insecurities (Goldstein, 2020). This also relates to the intersectionality between race and gender as it has been found that the dominant desirable body is that of a tall, thin (sometimes curvy), blonde woman and that this type of body is desired by both white and black boys (Bhana, 2022). This leads to girls of colour questioning where they fit in, as videos featuring women of colour are not as popular as those depicting white women. Further, heterosexuality is usually the norm in these videos which reinforces sexual binaries and heteronormative ideals.

Boarding Schools, Gender and Sexuality

My study is situated within an independent co-educational school which has boarding facilities as well as day scholars. The learners who participated in this study are predominantly boarders and therefore, the study contributes to an understanding of how boarding spaces have an influence on the construction of gender and sexuality. It is important to discuss how the boarding experience is slightly different to that of day scholars. Goffman (1961) describes boarding schools as an example of a total institution. This is due to a number of characteristics that are unique to a boarding school context. According to Cookson (1982), the boarding school

focuses on building the holistic character of the student rather than largely focusing on academic aspects, as experienced by day scholars. The focus for the boarders is based on building character and ensuring that they become well-rounded individuals by exposing them to experiences outside of academia. This means that boarding schools offer a host of extra-curricular activities that are not typically offered to day scholars so that they may be nurtured into well-rounded individuals who contribute to society. South African research conducted by Vigar-Ellis (2013) shows that learners who attend boarding schools achieve far better academic results when compared to learners who attend non-boarding schools and this is attributed to the better facilities that are available to learners in boarding schools.

What qualifies a boarding school as a total institution are the daily routines and activities that learners engage in (Morrell, 1993). Learners all live communally and engage in regimented, supervised activities that are co-ordinated by authority figures employed at the boarding house. For example, learners sleep in shared rooms at a particular time, they study together, they eat together, they engage in organised activities together. All of the regimented routines at a boarding house are designed to fulfil the aims of the institution. This makes their experience unique compared to a day scholar, who typically has to follow the academic routine for the day but then leads a separate life once they go home. Thus, a boarder's life experience is intertwined with their academic experience as the highs and lows of their experiences are shared with each other. The absence of parents is another unique characteristic of boarding schools, as paradoxically, even though there may be strict rules implemented in the boarding space by adults for the group, individually the learners are under much less scrutiny, which gives them more agency (Koh & Kenway, 2016).

According to Cookson (1982), another role of boarding schools is to impose a collective sense of morality on the students as part of their character development. The process that is undertaken to achieve this goal is quite extensive and is implemented through the hidden curriculum over the number of years that the learner lives at the school. The first way in which moral communities are created is through the stripping of the learners' old identities and foisting a new identity on to them by aligning learners to the values of the school (Zhu, 2022). For example, there are initiation ceremonies and rituals that the learners are expected to participate in. The rules are also designed in a uniform manner that aims to stamp out undesirable behaviour and instils behaviour that is acceptable and aligned with the institutional goals. In the school in my study, new, younger boarders were assigned to mentors who were in

the senior grades whom they could go to for advice on adapting to the school and its rules. Although the intentions were positive, this did not always work out well, as senior learners who engaged in undesirable behaviour influenced the younger learners to do the same, which was not aligned with institutional goals and the culture that the school was trying to create.

In addition, boarders are taught to stand in solidarity with one another and are constantly told that they are expected to display behaviour that is exemplary within the school and within the broader community (Cookson, 1982). The history of the school is constantly taught to them and reinforced through old boys' and old girls' networks as well as by teachers who have been at the school for a long time. The sports and extra-mural activities they participate in also build a sense of community, solidarity and kinship amongst learners, as well as with parents, which ensures they band together well beyond the school. As much as community and a shared identity is important, boarding schools also focus on homing in on and shaping the individuality of the learners. Many boarding schools aim to instil leadership skills in learners with the aim that they become leaders in society in the future (Allan & Charles, 2014). Therefore, learners are given individual attention and achievements are celebrated. As a result, many learners from boarding schools go on to be accepted into prestigious universities and continue to build upon what they have learned in school. In the context of my study, learners in all the boarding houses across all grades were elected for different kinds of leadership positions such as head of house, study monitor, kitchen duty etc. On weekends they also participated in sporting activities and leagues that were designed to build a sense of camaraderie amongst the boarders.

The relationships that boarders have with each other is unique when compared to the kinds of relationships that day scholars may have with each other. As boarders do almost everything together, both personal and academic, their interpersonal lives continually cross over and bonds are continually created and broken depending on the situations that arise (Zhu, 2022). Intimate, lifelong relationships can be created within a boarding house as well as relationships that involve bullying and teasing that is instigated on a daily basis. Boarding learners have their own ways of dressing and speaking which are identifiable to those who are familiar with their dynamics (Drew et al., 2016). For example, in the context of my study, day scholars always mentioned that they could easily identify a boarder from a distance, whether they knew them personally or not, simply because of their mannerisms, the ways they spoke and dressed, and the items that they carried to school. These behaviours and codes of language serve learners

long after they have left school as they act as identifying markers of belonging to a particular tribe and can lead to beneficial relationships (Morrell, 1993).

Another characteristic of boarding schools is that they give access to a higher status and position in society (Bertron, 2016). This is due to the fact that learners who come from diverse backgrounds spend immense amounts of time together and develop close bonds with each other as well as with the families of their friends. Many parents who choose to place their children in boarding schools do so because they are in occupations that are highly influential, such as politics, business and media, which means that they are well-connected and can afford to place their children in well-resourced institutions. Hence, the friendships that learners have at school are beneficial after school because they draw upon these resources to secure jobs or positions that also lead to growth and success. Further, graduating from a well-known boarding school leads to access to prestigious universities, as these schools are recognised for the high quality of learners who graduate from them and can also serve as a guarantee that their learners will continue to be successful students in university and make a positive impact on their image (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). Being a boarder is an indicator of someone who is resilient and adaptable as they constantly have to navigate the challenges of boarding at an early age, which implies that they will then easily adapt to university life as well as to life after university. Within the context of my study, the backgrounds of the students who were boarding were diverse, from learners who were on a scholarship and came from disadvantaged homes to those learners who were the daughters and sons of politicians, professionals and highly influential people. The bonds that learners made with each other did not discriminate based on economic class and learners quickly became friends across diverse backgrounds. They would then visit each other's homes during the holidays or go out during the weekends which meant that the families also got quite close to each other.

In addition to the benefits, as boarders become more and more institutionalised and aligned with the values of their school, they may also experience a reality shock when they leave the school and go out into the world beyond (Cookson, 1982). Due to the boarding school being a total institution in which the rules and routines are clearly demarcated and it being a space in which so much time is spent, learners become confident and self-assured in the space. However, it can be jarring for learners to go out into the world beyond school because the rules and routines are not as clearly specified and one has to discover and create these for themselves. Hence, learners continue to rely on their boarding school peers to navigate the complexities of

the real world. Their networks remain strong after graduation and schools enable this by setting up alumni associations which alumni can access when they need assistance or to reach out to their former boarding peer groups (Koh & Kenway, 2016). Similarly, in my study, the school had set up an alumni association in which the administrator assisted with keeping former learners connected with each other and also organised alumni reunions so that learners could reconnect. This is advantageous to the school because alumni can be relied upon to donate funds to the school and reinforce the school's links to the community. They may also want to send their own children to the school which strengthens the relationships that the school has with its parents, alumni and learners (Drew et al., 2016).

Boarding schools in many cases are elite and privileged which leads to the reinforcement of race, class and gender privilege as well as to unequal relations of power. According to Maxwell and Aggleton (2015) privilege, agency and affect are intertwined. Elite schools are recognised for having the best facilities and expansive space and boarders in particular have a large amount of time that they pass by using these spaces for various activities, both legitimate and illegitimate. Privilege is not only exhibited through the material environment but also through the behaviours that are displayed which can change based on fluctuations in social, economic, political and cultural factors (Koh & Kenway, 2016). Elite schools use the spaces around them to leverage the privilege they have over other institutions. Therefore, the way in which the spaces are set up indicate to the broader community that they are privileged. For example, the vast football grounds and associated facilities can be used as a space in which toxic masculinities are promoted, created and manifested (Storr et al., 2022). Elite schools, specifically boys' schools, are well known for their sporting prowess and use this to promote their schools. Therefore, by showing boys are masculine, tough, sporty and speedy, they are demonstrating the type of boy they nurture and put out into society. Girls' schools, on the other hand, use motifs of nature in promotional material, wherein there are images of girls who are holding hands and running in the grass or laying on a field (Wardman et al., 2013). Many of the analysed websites show them as being studious and academic. This is an attempt to portray and produce girls who are hyperfeminine as nature symbolises the caring and nurturing qualities of girls. By using such images in the promotional materials, it suggests that the school will produce an idealised version of what a female should be: studious, caring, gentle, nurturing, and possibly willing to take on domestic roles one day (Wardman et al., 2013).

This suggests that boarding schools are complicit in producing particular kinds of masculinity and femininity. In a study by Yeo (2010) at an elite Australian boys' boarding school, it was demonstrated how the boys' masculinity was shaped based on a few deliberate factors. The boarding masters who lived at the school and looked after the boys were chosen based on their family values, intelligence, sports skills, artistic skills, morality and eagerness to contribute to the school. In other words, they had to be well-rounded individuals with a plethora of skills, knowledge and experience so that they could act as role models to the boys. Hence, the boarding masters who were chosen would have to be balanced individuals who were aligned with the values and goals of the school. Staff members were expected to become a part of the community of boarders by joining in games with them as well as interacting with learners on a personal level (Cookson & Persell, 1991). Therefore, learners would see the boarding masters outside the classroom space as holistic individuals with the hope that the boys would emulate their behaviour. The boarding masters also lived alongside the boys' boarding houses with their families so that boys were exposed to how a traditional family unit works, that is, that a man is the head of the family and looks after his family as a heterosexual male. Similarly, in my own study, the boarding masters lived adjacent to the boarders and were involved in the boarders' lives. The learners knew their families and also developed friendships with their children.

Furthermore, learners' involvement in sports is a huge part of being in a boarding school. Boys especially are expected to participate in the popular sports that schools market themselves as excelling at. There is a connection between playing sports and the creation of a gendered identity as the team usually spends a lot of time together which means that they eventually take on the behaviours of their team mates to become one organism (Morrell, 1993). Locker room talk and shared experiences and conversations are some of the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is embodied. Those who resist these norms are looked down upon and can become possible targets of bullying or are manipulated into embodying similar characteristics so as to fit into the dominant group (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). Other activities that are offered as part of the boarding curriculum assist in forming group identities through working together. The identities could be formed explicitly or implicitly depending on the goals of the institution or whomever is the most domineering in a particular group. Family cultures within the learners' homes also play a role in creating hegemonic masculinities as these have to be regulated by schools in order to create one common group identity (Drew et al., 2016). In the context of my study, the boarding boys usually participated in soccer and basketball as these were the most popular sports amongst the learners. Consequently, the boys who participated in these sports

were some of the most popular boys within the boarding houses, who were recognised and familiar to everyone who was within the space, for both positive and negative behaviour.

Feminine identities are also highly emphasised when it comes to boarding schools. Research by Allan and Charles (2014) in elite boarding schools in the UK and Australia shows how class intersects with gender and race in order to produce an acceptable form of femininity. These girls' schools also focus on creating girls as leaders of the future by empowering them and giving them confidence. Therefore, this study noted that there was much focus on nurturing the girls' independence through various activities such as assisting them in setting up their own businesses at school and giving talks and presentations, as well as offering financial literacy programmes intended to empower the girls to become independent leaders. These observations indicate that the focus was on creating youthful femininities who were wealthy and glamorous as opposed to women who were "loud, excessive, vulgar, and disgusting" (Skeggs, 2005, p. 965).

In addition to empowering girls through wealth creation, the schools also expected them to contribute to community initiatives to indicate that they cared about those around them, that they were aware of the difficulties being faced by those who were underprivileged and to demonstrate that they were global citizens who wanted to make a difference in the world (Allan & Charles, 2014). Therefore, the girls were positioned as responsible and caring citizens. By participating in these various activities, the girls created a particular classed identity which became normalised and seen as the desired form of femininity. Race also came into play as the white girls, who were in the majority, made non-white friends to show that they were aware of differences in identity and culture and were able to integrate with different kinds of people seamlessly. Therefore, it was implied that those who were not white and middle-class were not as independent and needed to be empowered. Within the context of my own study, the girls were positioned similar to those in Allan and Charles' (2014) study as they also participated in community initiatives and activities that assisted them in becoming self-sufficient, thus forming one identity despite their diverse backgrounds. These findings are consistent with Drew et al.'s (2016) argument that elite schools serve to reinforce the privilege of a particular class of people who are deemed respectable in society.

Furthermore, sexuality is exhibited in a unique manner in a boarding context. Boys and girls are predominantly viewed as heterosexual subjects and activities and routines are created within this framing. The employment of boarding masters who are members of a nuclear family

unit is an indicator of the heteronormative behaviour that is expected to be displayed by the learners as well. Girls and boys are separated as much as possible on the assumption that they will develop romantic relationships with each other, which is discouraged (Drew et al., 2016). Interactions between the opposite sexes are limited and boys are not allowed to go into the spaces that girls occupy and vice versa. Girls live in closed spaces that are meant to be a home away from home; private spaces that are governed by the rules of the owner. Unwanted ideas and behaviour are not welcomed, and learners are expected to comply to a specific set of rules. The aim is to ensure that children remain innocent and safe as expected by parents who choose to place their children in boarding schools. Boarding schools compare themselves to close-knit families in which learners subscribe to family values and ideals (Yeo, 2010).

Research by Fredrick et al. (2022) suggests that those learners who do identify as a different gender or sexual orientation have a more difficult time fitting in within the school and its culture. Their contributions and emotions are suppressed which leads to unhappiness within the school environment. This is contradictory to the goals of a boarding school which are predominantly to ensure that the child is happy within the school environment (Drew et al., 2016). Therefore, with contrasting identities and ideologies it is difficult for learners to achieve true happiness as identities that do not align with the goals of the school are silenced and suppressed. There is also a lack of safety protocols in place for learners who identify differently from the norm and support for these learners is minimal as they belong to a minority population within the school and are therefore overlooked. They are instead bullied and victimised in spaces that are not monitored by adults, which can lead to self-harm or risky behaviour. Friendships are also hard to come by which leads to social exclusion. This can be especially traumatic for boarding learners as bonds and friendships amongst the learners are the foundation upon which boarding schools are built. The social exclusion of learners usually leads to them changing schools which ensures that the boarding school remains an exclusive space within which particular ideologies are maintained (Drew et al., 2016).

Research by Zhu (2022) shows how girls in a boarding school in rural China form close relationships with each other in the boarding house due to the amount of time that they spend with one another. They exercise their agency despite the tight control that is applied by the regimented rules and routines of the school and may not be within the confines of adult-sanctioned behaviour. In Zhu's (2022) study, it was found that girls formed close relationships with their female peers and shared intimate details of their romantic pursuits and exploits with

each other. They advised each other on the romantic relationships that they should pursue or avoid and relied heavily on each other for advice on managing their romantic relationships. Children communicated with each other in the boarding houses, in the study halls and in their rooms away from the adult gaze. Girls also pursued boys in whom they had a romantic interest by joining their games or initiating friendships with them. In this way, the girls cemented their heterosexual identities but at the same time also protected themselves from teasing by their peers for choosing to enter into these romantic relationships. These findings suggest that there is a balance that needs to be maintained between having friendships and romantic relationships at boarding schools as both are critical in ensuring that the boarding school experience is successful (Cookson, 1982; Koh & Kenway, 2016; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005).

Within the South African context, the connection between boarding schools and gender and sexuality has been understudied. Morrell (1993) has written about the history of predominantly white boys' boarding schools in KwaZulu-Natal and their complicity in constructing hegemonic masculinity. The goals of these prestigious institutions were similar in that they wanted to create gentlemen out of the boys who attended the schools. Some of the ways in which this was done were through initiation rituals and corporal punishment implemented by both teachers and prefects. Religion was important as the values of the school were informed by Christian principles. Sport was a predominant way in which boys learned how to be tough and masculine and to embody team spirit, and rivalries were created and maintained between prestigious schools so that boys could compete as well as make connections with each other that would last well beyond their school days. Many of these traditions, perhaps with the exception of corporal punishment, still continue today as boys are required to conform to the school's culture, and if not, the boys are at risk of being bullied. Queer sexuality, or the display of any behaviour that is considered feminine, is not tolerated at these types of schools and can be dangerous for boys who display these tendencies (Morrell, 1993; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). My study is situated within the South African boarding school context and shows how boys and girls use the boarding space, in addition to the school space, to their advantage when negotiating gender and sexuality.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a background to the study by exploring the related literature. It has been shown that gender and sexual identities are socially constructed concepts that are constantly in flux from the time one is conceived all the way to adulthood. Gender binaries

exist and people are constantly put into boxes by society, however the research shows that these concepts are fluid and ever-changing depending on factors that influence one's identity (Kelly-Ware, 2016). Schools are spaces in which gender and sexual identities are constantly being shaped, negotiated and resisted (Bhana, 2013). In the primary years, children learn about gender mostly through play as well through the conversations in which they participate. Teachers play a major role in shaping children's identities and their biases can influence learners' perceptions around gender and sexuality (Gansen, 2017).

A common misconception by adults is that children are innocent beings and they therefore tend to deny that children are capable of having sexual feelings or desire (García-Gómez, 2018). The bulk of the literature reviewed proves that this is not the case and that children are, in fact, sexual beings who experience desire and engage in conversations and behaviour that are sexually charged and can lead to romantic relationships even at young ages (Skrlac Lo & Wiseman, 2022). Masculinity and femininity are defined for children at a young age and this is informed by the practices of adults around them as well as the media and games to which they are exposed. Young boys and girls are taught from an early age what it means to be a man and a woman and this has a huge impact on the way in which boys and girls relate to each other. Boys are taught to be tough and dominant whilst girls are taught to be meek and submissive (Muhanguzi, 2011). This kind of conditioning can result in gender inequalities and injustices. The differing ways in which girls and boys are treated and punished by teachers has an impact on the way they perceive the differences in gender. Furthermore, young girls and boys are assigned tasks and roles according to their gender which cements the gap between girls and boys. These types of learning form part of the hidden or implicit curriculum and are not as obvious unless examined carefully (Gansen, 2017).

Religion and morality play a big role in the shaping of gender and sexuality and it has also been found that curriculum design is largely based on what is considered to be moral at a particular time (Robinson & Davies, 2008). Therefore, topics around gender and sexuality are often excluded from the curriculum in the primary years as parents, teachers and political leaders believe that primary children are too young to discuss sex and gender and fear that they may be exposed to ideas that are not within the norm. This leads to a discussion on heteronormativity as children are taught from a young age that being heterosexual is the norm and that any behaviour that does not fit within those binaries is subjected to scrutiny and condemnation.

Therefore, identifying as gay or bisexual is not accepted as freely (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005).

As young children grown into becoming adolescents and teenagers, they become hyper-aware of gender, sex and sexuality. Teenagers take many more risks in terms of sexual behaviour and gender norms become much more deeply entrenched as teenagers quickly adapt to understanding what is acceptable and what is not. Peer influence is a major factor in this and this can lead to teenagers experimenting with unprotected sex or abusing drugs and alcohol (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018). Different gendered attitudes towards sex are much more finely tuned as girls engage in romantic relationships due to experiencing feelings of love and affection. Boys, on the hand, are driven by desire, and seek to consummate the relationship so that they may experience sexual pleasure and also brag about their exploits to their friends, thereby proving their masculinity (Kelly et al., 2010). Girls experience a double bind as they are expected to be sexually experienced but can also face being called derogatory names by their peers if their behaviour is perceived not to be feminine, which is characterised by being modest (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). Girls also have to ensure that they are using protection when they are sexually active but also face pressure not to do so due to trust issues that may arise from boys in their relationships (Kelly et al., 2010). Girls remain in these relationships despite being abused and having no voice. For boys, the virginity of a girl holds high appeal as she is seen as pure (Bhana, 2016a, 2017a). However, it has also been found that girls also have sexual capacities and can be assertive in their relationships by choosing to insist on using protection or by having multiple partners to satisfy different needs (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018).

Homophobia is still a common practice amongst teenagers and queer learners are usually marginalised and bullied at school (Muhanguzi, 2011). Class and race play a role as well as black learners feel significantly marginalised compared to their white and Indian counterparts (Pattman & Bhana, 2009). Unsupervised spaces within the school are used by learners to negotiate gender and sexuality. The uniforms that girls and boys wear are different which reinforces gender binaries and the sporting activities and expectations are different for boys and girls (Francis, 2017).

Social media is a major aspect of the construction of gender and sexuality as girls and boys can use sexting to coerce each other and images of hypermasculinity and femininity are shared online (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Ringrose et al., 2013). Boys and

girls use porn extensively to learn about their bodies and also to experience sexual pleasure (Attwood et al., 2018; Carboni & Bhana, 2019). It has been found that much of the popular culture that teenagers access is pornified and that the line between what is considered porn and what is not is becoming blurred. More and more learners believe that watching porn is normal and informative and have their own preferences for which types of porn they watch (Mulholland, 2015).

Boarding schools are a unique space in which gender and sexualities are constructed. Girls and boys spend a large amount of time together and thus are conditioned to conform to institutional goals and norms (Cookson, 1982). Girls and boys are nurtured to be upstanding members of society and their education is therefore holistic in nature. The activities that girls and boys engage in are highly regimented and are based on compliance. It has been shown that boarding schools perform much better academically than day schools as the learners in boarding schools have better facilities (Vigar-Ellis, 2013). The learners also are also considered to be elite and privileged as they form close connections with elite members of society. Heterosexual relationships are considered to be the norm and the desired forms of masculinity and femininity are clearly defined (Allan & Charles, 2014; Morrell, 1993; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005; Zhu, 2022).

My study aims to contribute to the literature on how girls and boys construct gender and sexuality in South Africa. This study is unique is that it is situated within the context of a private school, and this is an area that has been under-researched, especially within South Africa. The literature has shown how children's constructions of gender and sexuality has been studied in public schools across South Africa and internationally, but very few studies have been conducted in private and boarding schools (Morrell, 1993). These institutions are guarded carefully to protect their reputations as elite and prestigious. Furthermore, few qualitative studies on constructions of gender and sexuality have been conducted in the North West province of South Africa. In this study, it is argued that learners construct gender and sexuality through challenging sexual innocence, pursuing pleasure and desire, and forming queer romantic relationships. However, this is mitigated by the dominance of hegemonic masculinity and the regulation and surveillance of girls and their bodies. It seeks to understand how these constructions manifest in their everyday relations and interactions. The next chapter will outline the methodology that was used to conduct this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature that is pertinent to my study. This chapter will outline the methodology that was employed to conduct the study. Research methodology refers to the processes and procedures that are undertaken to conduct a study. It elaborates on my approach to the study and provides justification for why these techniques were employed. It is important to outline the research methodology as it adds reliability and credibility to the study. This section describes the research design, ethnography, research site, sampling and participants, data collection techniques, ethical considerations, researcher reflexivity, and data interpretation techniques.

Research Design

This study is qualitative in nature and falls within the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research entails studying data that are descriptive in nature and is a method that is employed in the social sciences when one seeks to understand society and behaviour (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). It is concerned with the how and why of social phenomena. According to Taylor et al. (2016) the interpretivist paradigm is also referred to as the phenomenological perspective and is concerned with understanding the experiences of human beings in society. From the phenomenological point of view, it is important to experience the realities of the participants as they do (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, the researcher has to experience all the phenomena as though it were happening for the first time without letting the biases and subjectivities of the researcher get in the way. This means that the researcher cannot make assumptions about the phenomena being studied, but must rather, rely on the data that are presented to draw conclusions.

Roller and Lavrakas (2015) argue that qualitative research has certain qualities that distinguish it from other forms of research. The first is that there is no absolute truth, which refers to the idea that all information gleaned is situated within a particular context and that the context and the researcher have an impact on the type of information that collected. In addition, the researcher's interpretation of the data also impacts the way they are understood as this is subjective in nature. Another quality of qualitative research is that the research context has an impact on the data that are collected. Further, the meaning of the research differs based on the

context that was selected as well as the tools that were employed to collect these data. The next factor that is unique to qualitative research is that the researcher is at the centre of the data and is also the instrument through which data have been collected. This can actually strengthen the study but it can also create limitations as researcher bias is linked to the way in which the data are collected and interpreted.

Conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, this study is situated in a co-educational school, Dinaledi Academy (a pseudonym) in the Bojanala District of the North West province of South Africa. The method that was used to collect data was an ethnography, which involves being immersed in the field. This study was conducted over a period of three years and combined observations, individual interviews and focus group discussions in order to collect data. My study aims to understand how boys and girls aged between 12 and 15 construct gender and sexuality within the school space and beyond. Through the data collection methods, the participants' voices are foregrounded and give insight into how they construct gender and sexuality through their experiences and perspectives.

Ethnography

According to Hammersley (2018) ethnography is a research process which involves spending a long time at the research site. The research is undertaken in a natural setting and relies hugely on observing the participants within the natural context. The ethnographic process employs different types of data collection methods alongside participation observation and is focused on documenting the meaning that people attribute to their surroundings and the experiences and activities that go on around them. The data that are collected are holistic in nature and provide a detailed perspective of what goes on within institution and the ways in which people navigate its complexities. Merriam (2009) states that ethnographic research entails being able to understand the culture of a particular organisation or context and its impact on the participants of the research and vice versa. The most important aspect of ethnography is that it requires thick descriptions so that it encapsulates the context within which the research was conducted.

Ethnography involves being fully immersed in the field in order to understand the participants who are being studied. According to Taylor et al. (2016) the best research site is one that is easy to access in which the researcher has a good rapport with the participants and can aid in answering the research questions. In the case of this study, I was employed as an English

teacher and a boarding master at the school that was studied. This meant that I had access and insight into the learners' thoughts, experiences and behaviours as I was involved in their lives on a daily basis in a variety of contexts. I had similar routines to the learners in terms of scheduling and was also involved in enforcing these routines together with the rules of the school. Being an educator at the school also meant that I had access to the inner workings of the school and that I could see both sides of issues, from the teachers' point of view as well as the learners'. I was therefore an active participant in the lives of the learners who were studied. Being a teacher in the environment gave me a unique perspective into the ways in which the learners interacted as I was not only a part of their inner world, but I had full access to them on a daily basis to observe their development. Furthermore, I was able to form close bonds and relationships with the learners so that they could give me insights into the ways in which they viewed the world. Being an English teacher was also an advantage as I had lessons with the same learners every day. Therefore, a relationship of trust was formed, and I could catch up with news and events of the day. I had insight into their journal and creative writing, which were personal reflections, and I also had the freedom to generate debates and discussions in class to gauge learners' understandings and positions on gender and sexuality. As a researcher, I found myself becoming more aware of the nuance in the words and actions that the learners portrayed and framed it within a gendered lens.

The Research Site

Dinaledi Academy is a private school that located in the North West province of South Africa. It is a relatively new school and is located within a village on the outskirts of a central town and is surrounded by the natural setting of picturesque mountains. The school was deliberately designed to be different from other private schools found across South Africa as it was created to cater to and empower the black students of the community, who are from underprivileged backgrounds. The school is run by a board of governors as well as the headmaster who oversees every aspect of the school. Below is a map indicating where the North West province is located within South Africa (Figure 1):



Figure 1: North West province of South Africa (McKenna, 2024)

Dinaledi Academy is a co-educational school which offers grades R to 12 and also includes boarding houses for high school learners who opt to board. The school has 848 learners in total and is divided into two sections: the primary school for grades R to 7 and the high school for grades 8 to 12 (see Table 1). Both the primary and high school have a principal who run the day-to-day business of the school. At the beginning of this study, the grade 7 learners were part of the high school, but two years later, under the direction of a newly appointed headmaster, grade 7 learners were moved into the primary school. The school is founded and based on the values and principles of the Setswana culture as it is located within the Setswana-speaking community and was built for the improvement of the community. Hence, unlike many private schools across South Africa, the majority of the learners at the school are black with a minority of white, Indian and coloured learners (see Table 2). The school fees are approximately R8000 per month (US\$422 dollars) for matric learners and lower for the grades below matric, calculated on a sliding scale. About 50% of the learners come from the surrounding rural areas and their fees are subsidized so that they are able to attend the school.

Number of Learners at the School	
Total number of learners: primary and high school	848
Number of learners in the high school	444
Number of learners in the primary school	404
Number of boys in the high school	200
Number of girls in the high school	244
Number of boys in the primary school	185
Number of girls in the primary school	219

Table 1: Number of learners at the school

Racial Profile of Learners at the School	
Black	769
White	32
Indian	30
Other	17

Table 2: Racial profile of learners at the school

In the primary school, each grade has two classes of 24 to 30 learners and each classroom has a teacher and an assistant teacher who helps the teacher with discipline and with conducting the lessons. All the learners in the primary school are day scholars and come from the local community and the local town. The curriculum that is taught in the primary school is a blend of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) curriculum from the Department of Education. Therefore, there is plenty of room for creativity and the small class sizes allow for each learner to be given individual attention. The subject Life Orientation is included in the curriculum, and this is where sexual education is delivered, together with a variety of other topics such as dealing with stress, looking after one's mental and physical health, and career counselling. However, due to the limited time given to the subject as it is non-examinable, teachers do not have the luxury to cover each section in depth hence, issues concerning gender and sexuality are neglected. Furthermore, teachers' biases also interfere with curriculum delivery as some Life Orientation teachers at the school are deeply conservative and religious and have revealed that they are uncomfortable teaching about gender and sexuality.

In the high school, each grade has four classes and is comprised of 24 to 30 learners per class. The learners walk from class to class to attend their different subjects which are taught by specialist subject teachers. Instead of having class teachers or homeroom teachers, there is a tutor system that monitors the progress of the learners. Groups of 12 to 15 learners are assigned to a teacher who acts as their tutor for the rest of their schooling careers. Tutors and tutees meet twice a week and the tutor's job is to mainly to play a pastoral role in the life of the child at school: a central figure who the learners can consult for any assistance they may need at school. An intimate bond is created between the learners and the teacher over the time they spend together, and it is also the tutors' responsibility to build a relationship with the parents of their tutees so as to act as the liaison between the school and the home.

The learners in the high school are taught and examined according to the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) curriculum which is guided by the CAPS curriculum. There are a number of subjects on offer for learners to choose in grade 10 including, amongst others, engineering graphics and design, computer applications technology, dramatic arts, visual art and French first additional language. The language of instruction is English and most learners are fluent in the language. The first class of the day begins at 07:30 and the last class ends at 14:30 with a 20-minute break and a 40-minute lunch break in between. Each class period lasts 50 minutes with learners having six to eight classes per day. There are also test periods which are built into the school timetable in which all the learners write tests.

The management of the high school comprises of the principal and two deputies. One is the deputy of academics and the other is the deputy of pastoral/student affairs. Each department has a head who answers to the deputy principals. Finally, under each department are the teachers who teach each subject. There are a total of 89 teachers employed at the school, the majority of whom are black (see Tables 3 and 4). Once the academic day ends for the learners in the primary school, they have the option to participate in sport, to go home or to go to aftercare, which is an additional service that the school offers for a fee to look after learners whose parents work until late and cannot pick their children up immediately after school. For the learners of the high school, after school is a time for extra-curricular activities. Learners can participate in a variety of sports such as soccer, netball, basketball, rugby and chess. They can also participate in clubs centred around debating, Model United Nations (MUN), public speaking, and community service. Further, they have the option of attending classes in advanced English and advanced mathematics, to be examined at the end of the matric year.

Learners can also opt to go home should they choose to do so. The school day officially ends at 16:30 but both teachers and learners can go home earlier should they wish to.

Number of Teachers at the School	
Total number of teachers	89
Number of teachers in the high school	47
Number of teachers in the primary school	42
Number of female teachers in the primary school	34
Number of male teachers in the primary school	8
Number of female teachers in the high school	29
Number of male teachers in the high school	18

Table 3: Number of teachers at the school

Racial Profile of Teachers at the School	
Black	46
White	38
Coloured	4
Indian	1

Table 4: Racial profile of teachers at the school

What is noteworthy about the school's afternoon schedule is that it is unregimented and unstructured and therefore it is impossible to account for where each learner is located during the afternoon. There was no official afternoon duty roster for staff at the school to supervise students. Teachers hold meetings and consultations and complete administrative tasks during this time. This means that learners have unsupervised time to do as they wish in different parts of the school without the supervision of any adults around them. It is common for learners to go off into the fields and the bushes to engage in substance abuse or have intimate relations with each other. Many stories have been told by teachers and learners who have seen other learners in the bathrooms having sex after school or engaging in substance abuse. I found many learners kissing or having sex during this time and was compelled to report the matter. As a

teacher at the school, I reported the learners I encountered in compromising positions to the head of discipline. This involved writing a statement of my observations and the learners being required to do the same. The matter was then handled by the head of discipline. However, being caught out does not deter other learners from behaving in a similar manner as the massive school space allows them to go largely undetected.

For the boarding learners, the opportunities for afternoon activities are also similar. However, between 14:30 and 16:30 the boarding houses remain unsupervised. This means that learners can go into the boarding houses should they opt to, to drop their bags, change their clothes, have a shower or take a nap. However, learners also used this time and the unsupervised spaces to initiate romantic relationships with each other and to engage in sexual relations. This was observed countless times by both teachers and learners. In addition, at 16:30 when day scholars go home, boarders are still in different parts of the school until dinnertime at 17:30. However, dinner is also a time when learners can walk off and engage in unsupervised activities as a roll call is not taken in the dining hall. Many learners have been caught smoking at this time as well as engaging in sexual relations in the bathrooms.

The School Campus

Dinaledi Academy is an expansive school spanning 80 hectares and cost approximately R450 million (US\$24 million) to build. Buildings are spaced out and the focus of the school is nature and architecture. A long pathway, of almost half a kilometre, leads up to the main school administration building. A left turn leads to the boarding houses. To the left of the administration building, a few short paths lead to the primary school, which is comprised of classrooms, offices and play areas. All classrooms in the primary and high school have courtyards that the learners can play in. There is no official boundary between the primary school and the high school and both are easily accessible to all staff and learners. As one continues beyond the primary school there is the staff parking lot. Next to the parking lot are the hockey fields and beyond that are two netball courts. Next to the netball courts is a 25-metre swimming pool as well as a smaller pool that is shallower and used to teach beginner swimming classes. In the swimming pool area, there are showers as well as grassy areas for spectators to sit when swimming galas are hosted. Located beyond the netball courts are two basketball courts. There are various ponds situated around the school which add to its natural beauty. Around the circumference of the school there is a 5-kilometre Parkrun route and the Parkrun is hosted every Saturday for the local community. There are also areas that are used

for mountain biking and hiking which are difficult to access on a day-to-day basis. However, for learners, this provides plenty of space to sneak off and engage in illicit activities without being caught. An example of this is when a grade 9 boy was found growing a marijuana plant on the school premises. Because the school is surrounded by wild fauna and flora, he assumed that he would not be caught.

Behind the main administration building lies the high school. It is considerably larger than the primary school and each building is dedicated to a different subject area. There is the high school administration building which the learners nicknamed “The White House” because the school management is mostly comprised of white people. This nickname points out the irony of white leaders running a predominantly black school. Located on the top floor of the administration building is the staff room, the headmaster’s office and the two school psychologists’ offices. The psychologists deal with any academic and personal problems that are encountered by the learners at school and their schedules are usually filled with appointments throughout the day as learners make use of their services.

However, many learners stated that they did not like to approach the school counsellors for assistance because they were white and Afrikaans and therefore the learners assumed that the counsellors could not understand the problems faced by black learners. These racial judgements were often made by learners when they were talking about the white teachers at the school. An incident that stands out to me was when matric learners put on a play at school about Steve Biko and his activism during apartheid. The content of the play was considered to be quite offensive to the white teachers as it was believed that the learners were actively blaming white people for apartheid. This event provoked many conversations amongst learners and teachers in the subsequent weeks about racism at the school. The majority of black learners that I spoke to felt that the white teachers were racist and that this was evident in the way in which they were spoken to and treated in the classroom. On the other hand, white teachers felt that they were unfairly blamed and that they were not racist. This incident underscores the racial tensions that were prevalent at the school and had an impact on the dynamic between learners and teachers.

On the bottom floor of the administration building is the secretary’s desk, and the deputy principal’s offices. There are also two boardrooms located in the administration building, one upstairs and one downstairs, for meetings. Beneath the staff room, is an auditorium which can seat up to 100 people. The auditorium is equipped with plush red movie-theatre-style seats as

well as a large projector and screen. There is an expansive amphitheatre outside which is the central focus of the school, and this space is used formally for assemblies and performances and informally as a space for learners to relax, have lunch and play games. There is also a large dining hall in which all boarding learners eat their meals. During the school day, this is the space in which all learners who pay for lunch, as well as teachers and support staff, eat lunch. There is a tuck shop next to the dining hall which sells snacks and cool drinks. There is 24/7 campus security which patrols the campus and there are cameras placed in many locations across the school which are monitored in the security office. However, learners quickly work out where the cameras are located and tend to break the school rules in spaces where there are no cameras, such as behind buildings and trees.

The school also has a hall that can seat approximately 600 people and is used for assemblies and performances as it has a large stage, a surround sound system and a projector. The school hall is a popular spot that many learners referred to when they explained where couples usually went to have intimate relations. The hall is an unsupervised space that is usually left open for the entire day for anyone to access. Behind the stage are many showers and bathrooms that serve as a dressing area and there is a viewing gallery upstairs. These spaces are dark and poorly lit and this is the perfect spot for learners to engage in illicit sexual activities.

There is a music department which is equipped with all types of instruments and specialist music teachers who teach music to all the learners in the primary school as well as to some learners in the high school. Downstairs from the music rooms, there are offices for the psychologists and therapists who give special needs students assistance and evaluate them for learning disabilities. There is also a clinic which employs two full-time nurses who look after anyone who is ill and especially assist boarding learners with any ailments they have and take them for doctors' appointments. A physiotherapist and a doctor also visit the school about once a week to take appointments.

There are three science laboratories that are fully kitted out and all the classrooms have projectors, smartboards and whiteboards. The insides of the classrooms are L-shaped and were designed in this way so that teachers could freely visit other teachers' classrooms to observe lessons and improve their craft. There is an art room, a drama rehearsal space and a library from which learners can access materials online and offline. There are two IT labs which learners use for computer lessons, and a printing room which teachers use to print their materials. Teachers have the freedom to decorate their classrooms in any way they wish and

are encouraged to make them creative and inviting spaces. There are a multitude of bathrooms across the school and there are no bathrooms that are specifically for teachers. The learners and teachers are told to use any bathroom they wish as it is an attempt to remove hierarchies between learners and teachers. These bathrooms are used extensively by learners to have sexual relations in and to engage in substance abuse and there were many accounts almost every day of boys and girls being caught in the bathrooms for illicit activities. These spaces are unmonitored, and many teachers turn a blind eye to what they find in the bathrooms, as it became cumbersome to deal with.

Digital Devices

Although the school code of conduct states that cell phones are not allowed in school, almost all learners carry their cell phones to school. Learners are also forbidden from using phones in the classroom but many learners do use their cell phones in the classroom to text and to listen to music whilst they are doing their work. Some teachers are strict about cell phones in the classroom whilst others are not, which leads to inconsistency amongst the learners. However, regardless of what the rule is in class, almost all learners take out their cell phones as soon as they leave one class to go to another. Cell phones are always used during meals, breaks, extra-curricular activities and excursions. The enforcement of rules around cell phones often failed and meetings were often called to discuss the issue, but to no real effect. All learners were issued with Chromebooks to accommodate the use of online resources and the cost of this device was added to the school fee account. It was hoped that learners would stop using their cell phones, and teachers would have more control over what learners were using their devices for, but this did not deter learners in any way. If their cell phones were confiscated or forbidden in a particular class, then learners would simply log on to same application on their Chromebooks, as the use of Chromebooks was allowed. These applications could be WhatsApp and any other social media including Pinterest. Many a time in my own classes, I found learners watching YouTube or updating their Pinterest boards while the lesson was going on. Even though the school attempted to block certain websites from being accessed by the learners, the learners found ways to circumvent this, such as using VPNs to download pirated films and access blocked websites and applications.

Dress Code

The uniforms that the girls and boys wear to school differs slightly according to the seasons. In summer, boys wear pants and Madiba style school shirts which do not need to be tucked in. In winter they are required to wear a tie and shirts that can be tucked in. The girls are required to wear a shirt under a wrap dress. In winter they must add stockings and a chiffon tied around their necks. They are not allowed to wear pants unless it is for religious reasons and receive special permission. The girls' school uniforms were a point of endless contention as girls often questioned why they were not allowed to wear pants. The stockings they were required to wear in winter were thin and flimsy and the girls were almost always shivering whilst the boys were much warmer as they wore thick pants. Girls felt very uncomfortable showing off their legs in summer and complained about how it restricted their movement and that their legs were always being scrutinised and commented on by the boys and by other girls. The girls also complained about how the dress rode up when they walked or when it was windy as some of them had large bottoms. However, when the school management were asked about why they could not wear pants, they stated that the uniform was designed by the founders of the school, and nothing could be done to change it. Another teacher stated that even though the uniform was cumbersome for the girls to wear, it was designed in such a manner so that the girls looked smart and professional and to avoid the uniform looking like other public-school uniforms. This is consistent with Allan and Charles' (2014) argument that elite schools are sites in which class differences are accentuated. In addition to the school uniforms, girls and boys are required to wear sports uniform on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which consists of shorts and a golf shirt. Both boys and girls wear the same sports uniform, which is a contrast to the formal school uniform. On assembly days, learners are required to wear their blazers and each sporting code has a different uniform that the learners must wear if they participate.

Even though the girls' dresses were expected to be knee length, most of the girls rolled up their dresses or had them sewn shorter so that they could show off their legs. On certain days of the term there were uniform inspections and girls were usually asked to wear longer dresses and given a time frame in which this needed to be achieved. Most girls complied and had one or two knee-length dresses that they wore when these inspections were going on, but once the attention had worn off, they went back to wearing their shortened and tightly-fitted dresses as they felt that they were more flattering. Those girls who chose to wear knee-length dresses were seen as nerds and were not as popular.

A conversation that stood out to me was when one of my tutees mentioned that she hated the school uniform because she identified as non-binary and that the requirement to wear a dress was in direct contradiction to her gender identity. Other girls also stated that they identified as a different gender to what was assigned at birth and that they felt restricted in expressing themselves by the school uniform. Despite these experiences, there was a learner in the school who was transgender and had transitioned from male to female. The school had been made aware and she was allowed to wear the girls' school uniform and conduct her daily activities as a girl. Most of the students and teachers at the school were accepting of this and by the time she had reached matric, the matter of her gender was not questioned, and most students and staff assumed that she was a girl, and her transgender identity was accepted.

School Activities

To build camaraderie and community, the school has a house system. This is similar to the house systems that are prevalent in English boarding schools (Seaborne, 2020). The learners gather once a week in their respective houses where they are told what activities they need to participate in and they compete as representatives of their houses in inter-house activities. Each house devises its own songs and chants and tries to get everyone involved so that learners get to know one another as they work together to achieve points for their house. House competitions are held throughout the year and the house with the most points gets a prize at the end of the year. These events include sports, debates, singing and talent shows amongst others. Further, the school hosts leadership activities, excursions, plays and community events throughout the year in which the staff and students are expected to be involved. There is also a school song that is sung at the end of every assembly and that learners are expected to memorise. This is done to promote a sense of unity amongst learners and staff alike. There are also international exchange programmes where grade 10 learners apply and are selected to go to various conferences held around the world.

Discipline

The school has an official code of conduct for learners but the way in which discipline is administered is on a case-by-case basis and is intended to be restorative rather than punitive. Therefore, two learners who commit the same contravention may get a different sanction based on their past behaviour and history in the school. Sanctions are also decided by taking into account the political influence of the parents. Therefore, the school can sometimes succumb to

the demands of the parents especially if they pay full fees. This is usually found out by the learners, and they take this as a precedent to behave poorly as they also expect similar sanctions. However, many learners expressed how unfair it was that learners who had committed similar offenses would get different sanctions. Teachers mostly adhere to the school code of conduct but there are some teachers who, during my time at the school, were asked to resign because they were accused of sexual harassment by the learners. Hence, male teachers are always cautioned not to discipline girls about their hair and dressing and rather to leave it to the female teachers and the management. The school code of conduct on hairstyles allows girls to wear braids and afros which the girls found to be liberating. Learners are not allowed to wear jewellery, but many learners disobey the rule until they are told off by teachers.

A colleague of mine lamented how biased the sanctions were, giving the example of a girl in grade 10 who was caught kissing a boy at a school event and was immediately expelled, while there were boys and girls who were caught in similar compromising positions almost on a daily basis and were never expelled and were given multiple second chances. She mentioned that because the mother of the girl was a working-class woman and did not have any influence in the school, it was easier to expel her rather than a child who had parents that were politically connected and could go the media and ruin the reputation of the school. For example, two matric learners recorded a sex tape, and it was spread across the school. However, the learners were allowed to complete their matric year. A few years later the girl who had been expelled for kissing a boy was offered the opportunity to return to school to complete her matric year at the age of 20. She attended school for a few weeks but then left to complete her studies online as she found it difficult to adjust to high school again.

Boarding

The boarding houses are located on the other side of the soccer fields from the teaching and administration buildings and are positioned closely to each other. The main philosophy underpinning the boarding system is the idea of creating a “home away from home”. This is often critiqued by boarders, as many state that they do not really feel at home as the rules are too strict. There are four boarding houses, two junior houses for grade 8 and 9 boys and girls and two senior houses for grade 10, 11 and 12 girls and boys. This is located along a street within the school which also has homes for the boarding masters, the headmaster and deputies, all within walking distance of each other. The first boarding house on the street is for the senior girls in grades 10, 11 and 12 on the right-hand side of the street. As one walks about 200 metres

further, on the left is located the junior girls' house and next to it, about 10 metres away from the junior girls' house, is the junior boys' house. As one walks about 100 metres further, on the right-hand side is the senior boys' house. Further along the road are individual houses for the boarding masters. Each boarding house also has boarding masters who live in apartments built inside and adjacent to the main boarding house. I was a boarding master at the school, and I lived in an apartment inside the senior girls' house for the duration of this study and shared the same entrance as them. Being a boarding master and living in close proximity to the learners on their comings and goings, I had access to the ways in which the youngsters went about their daily lives in their natural environment.

Boarding Schedule

A typical weekday in the boarding house begins with learners waking up at around 04:30 to shower and get ready for school. However, due to the hot water running out very quickly after a few learners have showered, many learners opt to wake up at around 03:00 to shower and then go back to sleep to wake up later to get ready for school. At 06:00 appointed learners inspect rooms for cleanliness and others complete their chores. At 06:20 the boarding matron arrives at the house to take a roll call and to address any issues that learners may have. At 06:40 learners are released to walk to the dining hall where breakfast is served. The boarding master for the day meets the learners at the dining hall and takes over the duties from the boarding matron for the rest of the day. At 07:00 the senior learners file into the dining hall to join the juniors for breakfast. At 07:15 learners are expected to clean up the dining hall and then join the rest of the school learners to attend classes from 07:30.

At 16:30 the boarding master arrives at the house and sends all learners who are in the house to the dining hall at 17:30 for supper. The walk to the dining hall is about 500 metres and learners are largely unsupervised as they walk to the dining hall. This means that they can go anywhere, even though the boarding master does lock the house and walk to the dining hall with the learners. There is no roll call done at the dining hall, therefore the boarding master cannot know the whereabouts of all the learners. Learners often use this time to meet with their romantic partners or to abuse drugs and alcohol in secluded parts of the school where they cannot be seen. At 18:15 the learners walk back from the dining hall to the boarding houses and this is when a roll call is done for the second time in the day. Study begins at 18:30 for the juniors and 19:00 for the seniors and lasts for two hours. Learners mostly stay in their rooms to study and the house is quiet. However, staff often found that learners did not use the time to

study and were on their devices playing games, lying in bed or whispering to each other. Boarding masters usually remained at the front of the house throughout their boarding duty and rarely checked what learners were doing in their rooms. However, some boarding masters did dutifully check what learners were doing their study time and disciplined those who did not comply. It was almost impossible to check what learners were doing on their devices as they quickly switched tabs when they saw teachers were approaching. If they were threatened that their devices would be confiscated, most learners claimed that they needed to use their devices for homework and refused to hand them in.

After study, the juniors are required to hand in their phones at 20:30 and these are always returned to them when they return from school at around 14:30 the next day. It is interesting to note that learners quickly found ways to avoid handing in their phones. Once they found out about this system, many of the learners started to bring two phones to boarding. One of the phones was an ordinary older phone which some called a “burner phone” that they handed in each night, and the other phone was their primary device that they kept with them throughout the night and all day. Those few learners who did not have two phones used their Chromebooks for whatever activities that they needed to throughout the night as they had VPNs installed that circumvented many of the controls that the IT department had in place.

In informal conversations, learners confessed to me how they were on their devices throughout the night texting each other and using social media into the early hours of the morning. Many teachers, including myself, noticed how boarding learners slept a lot during class time and the main theory was that this was because they were on their devices throughout the night. There was also an incident where a male learner was found to be watching porn every night for at least seven hours each night. However, nothing much was done about controlling the ways in which learners accessed the internet as they always found a way around it. Furthermore, the senior learners had their phones with them at all times. There was a time when the school instituted the same rules around cell phones as the junior house, where phones had to be handed in for the night. However, this rule only lasted a couple of months as learners protested about not having their phones and needing to have their devices for various reasons throughout the day. The new rule was reversed which meant that learners could have their phones on their persons all the time. Learners had access to Wi-Fi at all times at school and in the boarding houses.

Boarding masters typically left the boarding house at around 22:00 and this is when the learners had free reign. Many learners were caught sneaking to other houses to meet their girlfriends and boyfriends whilst many girls indulged in sexual activities in their rooms with each other. Bullying also took place at this time and a notable incident was when grade 10 boys were beaten by the grade 12 learners at around midnight as part of a clandestine initiation process. As the junior girls' and junior boys' houses were close together, both houses had balconies that were visible from the other house. At night, girls and boys stood on the balconies and communicated with each other. If the balconies were locked by the boarding masters, the learners complained that their rooms were hot and stuffy and that they needed the balcony to be opened, especially in the summer months. Many learners also abused drugs and alcohol at this time of the night and these substances were hidden if there were inspections taking place by the boarding masters, which was rare and occurred mostly once a term. Vaping was very popular amongst the learners and vape pens were often found in the rooms of the learners. At the end of one matric year, some of the boys placed a crate of alcohol bottles in front of one of the boarding masters' apartments as they left the school as a show of how much they had drunk throughout the year. One year, I also found matric girls drinking in the boarding house. Similarly, in the junior house, girls were caught drinking Listerine, a popular mouthwash that contains alcohol, in an effort to get drunk. Girls were mixing the mouthwash with soft drinks and energy drinks as an experiment to see if they could get drunk. Some girls claimed that they did get drunk by consuming this concoction.

Boarding House Demographics

With regard to the demographics of the learners in the boarding houses, about 60% of the boarding learners come from Botswana and the rest were from Gauteng or North West province in South Africa, and from Namibia. The total number of boarders is 146 (see Table 5). At the time this study was conducted, there was also a learner from Egypt. All boarding learners were black. Learners travelled home during the holidays and were allowed to be visited or picked up by their relatives or parents during the weekends. Most of the learners who were in the boarding houses were full fee-paying learners and there were a few scholarship learners. However, staff were not made aware as to which learners were on scholarship so as to protect them from being treated differently. As many of the learners were full-fee-paying, they came from diverse backgrounds. Many of their parents were professionals or executives working in large companies. There were some learners whose parents were high-profile politicians and celebrities.

Number of Learners in Boarding	
Junior boys (grades 8-9)	27
Junior girls (grades 8-9)	30
Senior boys (grades 10-12)	35
Senior girls (grades 10-12)	54
Total number of learners in boarding	146

Table 5: Number of learners in boarding

Due to their diverse backgrounds, it was fascinating to note the ways in which learners interacted. Trends were usually set by the wealthier learners and the rest followed. Due to their constant access to social media, learners were up to date with the latest trends and faced immense pressure to comply. This was in regard to fashion, phones and hairstyles. Some learners were called out for having cheap braids or for having particular hairstyles that were not considered to be fashionable. Furthermore, most learners spoke Setswana, however, there were some learners who did not grow up speaking Setswana and could not speak the language at all. They were often ridiculed by the Setswana-speaking learners for not speaking the language or any other African language and were told that they were not really black or that they were letting black people down. In addition, the Setswana dialects differed between South African learners and the Batswana learners so South African learners often made jokes about the Batswana dialect. In addition, students would joke that Botswana had more cows than people. There is also no McDonald's franchise in Botswana and learners were mocked because of this as well. This was done by South African learners to accentuate class differences and to position themselves as superior to the Batswana learners.

On the weekends, learners had large amounts of free time and the freedom to mix and mingle with each other. Although there were organised activities such as sports, baking and movie nights, girls and boys were also allowed to see each other outside their houses and go for walks around the school without being supervised. Therefore, much of the undesirable behaviour occurred in the corners of the school where children were not supervised. There were many incidents of learners being caught smoking, drinking and having sex in different parts of the school during the weekends. In addition, boarders were also often caught sneaking out of school to visit their friends at the mall.

Gaining Access to the Research Site

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012) it is imperative to obtain permission from the organisation being studied before conducting the study. I approached the headmaster of the school with a consent letter (see Appendix B) detailing the purpose of the study and how I intended to conduct it at the school. After a brief conversation, permission was granted, and the form was signed. Taylor et al. (2016) state that obtaining access to an organisation to be studied is relatively easy unless it has to do with high-profile government institutions or sensitive spaces such as psychiatric hospitals. They further stipulate that in order to gain access into an organisation, one has to be truthful about the purpose of the study as well as the methods that would be employed to conduct the study. As I was also going to be interviewing boarding learners, I also obtained permission from the head of boarding so that she was aware that learners would be going to my classroom for their interviews. I sought permission from the boarding masters on duty before escorting learners to my classroom to be interviewed.

Sampling and Participants

This study employed the purposive sampling technique as my research is centred around how girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 15 negotiate gender and sexuality. Convenience sampling was also employed, where participants are selected based on time, money, location and the availability of the research participants (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam and Grenier (2019) qualitative research includes specific questions that need to be answered, and therefore it is important that the population that is selected is the one that is most able to answer the research question. This is referred to as purposive sampling. Grossoehme (2014) states that the goal of qualitative research is not to have participants that would represent a broader population, but rather to choose participants that would answer the research questions. This adds a depth and a richness to the study which is critical to qualitative research (Patton, 2014).

Due to my being an English teacher at the school, I had the opportunity to see most of the learners I taught every day as they were required to have daily English lessons. Furthermore, as a boarding master, I lived on campus and had boarding duty every week and on weekends once or twice a month, therefore, in both the classroom context and the boarding space I had the opportunity to forge close relationships with many of the learners at the school. This allowed me the freedom to use the same learners in my study. I chose to work with grade 7, 8 and 9 learners in my study most of them were learners that I taught at the time and had the most

access to. However, it is important to highlight that I was not familiar with all the learners who participated in the study as some were not in my classes. When the study started, the grade 7 learners were initially in the high school and were later moved to the primary school, therefore I turned to the grade 8 and 9 learners who agreed to participate in the study. Because most of the interviews were conducted after official school hours and on weekends, most of the participants turned out to be boarding learners, who were the most accessible as they lived at school.

A total of 101 learners participated in the study aged between 12 and 15 years old (see Table 6). This is divided into 52 girls and 49 boys. All participants were black, except for three boys who were Indian. A total of 69 semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted and 16 focus group discussions took place. The reason why the interviews included fewer than 101 participants is that some learners decided to bring their friends and peers to the focus group discussions who did not opt to be interviewed later. The total number of boarders who participated in the study was 60 learners and the total number of day scholars who participated in the study was 41. The mix of boarders and day scholars allowed for a wide range of experiences to be taken into account and contributed a wealth of data to the research.

Summary of Participants in the Study	
Total number of participants	101
Total number of girls	52
Total number of boys	49
Total number of interviews	69
Total number of focus groups	16
Total number of boarders	60
Total number of day scholars	41
Total number of black learners	98
Total number of Indian learners	3

Table 6: Summary of participants in the study

Data Collection Techniques

Interviews

The data collection techniques that were used were semi-structured, individual interviews, focus group discussions and observations. deMarrais and Lapan (2003) describe the interview process as a conversation that takes place between the researcher and the participants, but which has a particular purpose. Interviews enable the researcher to find out that which cannot be observed and allow the researcher access into the thoughts and feelings of those being observed. Semi-structured, individual interviews were deployed in his study as this format is more flexible and assumes that each participant defines their world and experiences in their own unique ways (Merriam, 2009). However, the interview is guided by a pre-determined set of questions.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with learners with questions that were formulated prior to the interviews (see Appendix E). However, I did not stick to the script and allowed the learners to elaborate and expand on issues that they raised during the interviews. This allowed for the process to be much more organic, and learners felt comfortable sharing their experiences when they were encouraged to do so, rather than being curtailed. At the onset of each interview and focus group, it was reiterated that everything that was said would be kept confidential unless it was found that they were harming themselves, harming others, or being harmed by others. This made learners feel comfortable to share openly even though I was their teacher and, by extension, an authority figure in the school. In the individual interviews it was found that some learners were much more hesitant to speak as they were alone with me and some felt intimidated by the fact that I was recording what was being said. However, other learners were much more comfortable in the individual interviews as they felt free to speak honestly without being judged or reported on by me.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are similar to interviews in that they are also a conversation and involve questions and answers. However, as stated in the name, these interviews are done in a group setting with a number of participants and are highly dynamic and interactive (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). There are multiple perspectives that are presented in a focus group discussion and the responses are much more spontaneous when compared to the measured responses that are given in an individual interview (Carson et al., 2001). GrønkJær et al. (2011) state that there needs to be some form of homogeneity within the group but also not too much as it could cause

single-mindedness in the opinions that are shared. However, it cannot be heterogenous as it could cause conflict, and therefore, a balance of the two is recommended.

Focus group discussions for my study were held in a similar manner to the individual interviews and similar questions were asked to gauge how learners' responses differed between what was stated when they were alone with me, the researcher, and when they were together with their peers. It was generally found that learners were much more comfortable sharing information while in the safety of their peer groups, were much more forthcoming and felt brave enough to share information about themselves. The group discussions were filled with jokes and laughter and learners encouraged each other to speak about their experiences. Most of the focus group discussions were animated, with learners talking over each other and sometimes the recorder did not pick up their voices as there was a lot of shuffling and moving about. These were times when I had to ask learners to speak one at a time so that the recorder could clearly pick up what was being said. The benefit to the focus group discussions was that learners called each other out when they felt that the other person was lying, which elicited more honest answers. The group discussions consisted of between three and eight learners. In the bigger focus group discussions, some learners were quieter than others, even when prompted to speak, and it was found that they preferred to speak on an individual basis which was much more effective.

Interview and Focus Group Experience

The interviews lasted on average between 20 and 45 minutes whilst the focus group discussions lasted between 45 minutes and one and a half hours each, depending on how much learners had to say and how much time their schedules would allow. The questions that were asked were open-ended which allowed for flexibility in the ways that the learners chose to answer the questions. I, as the interviewer, was also able to probe further into some of the responses that the learners provided, which led to a richer set of data. Some learners were apprehensive and nervous when they were interviewed as they did not know me very well and had only seen me around school and at the boarding house. However, as time passed in the interview and they realised that they were being heard, they opened up much more easily. Learners would also go back to the boarding houses and tell each other what types of questions were being asked. Because the questions were mostly consistent for each participant, they knew what to expect. Many learners would come up to me excitedly stating that I would be asking questions about sex and asked when they would be called for an interview so that they could give their opinions on the topic too.

The interviews and focus groups took place in my classroom at the school. There were brightly coloured mats on the floor, beanbags and couches as well as chairs and tables and learners were invited to sit wherever they felt most comfortable. This inviting atmosphere made them more willing to speak as this was one of the classrooms in the school the learners enjoyed spending time in as it had a variety of comfortable seating. The classroom had floor-to-ceiling glass doors and windows and although anyone who was walking past at any point could see that a conversation was taking place, they could not come in or hear anything as the doors were closed to ensure full confidentiality. The reward for participating in the interviews and focus group discussions was a small pizza and a buddy-sized cool drink.

The interviews and focus group discussions mostly took place on the weekends as this was the time that most suited learners as they had much more free time than they did during the school week. Some interviews with day scholars took place after school and during exams as learners had free time after they wrote their papers in the mornings. If learners were busy and could not come for the interview, then they were accommodated at a later stage when they indicated that they were available. I allowed learners to decide who they wanted to have with them in the focus group discussions as they could speak much more honestly in the presence of learners who they considered to be friends. As a result, some of the focus group discussions consisted of only boys or only girls, some in the same grades and others across different grades. There were also some mixed focus groups of boys and girls which allowed me to observe the ways in which boys and girls related to each other when they were answering the questions.

Consent and Assent

It is imperative that informed consent is obtained from all participants involved in the research (Taylor et al., 2016). For children under the age of 18 consent needs to be obtained from their parents and learners also need to give their permission to be involved in the study as children are considered to be part of a vulnerable group. As part of obtaining consent, all participants need to understand the research and its purpose, as well as its risks and benefits. The gatekeeper of the institution granting access does not guarantee that the research group will also grant permission to be involved in the study (Burgess, 1991).

All learners who participated in the study did so voluntarily and the purpose of the study was explained to them beforehand. Parents were required to sign consent forms and learners signed assent forms granting their permission to be a participant in the study (see Appendices C and D). Furthermore, learners were asked for permission for their interviews to be recorded. I used

a tape recorder and, later on, my laptop to record the interviews and the focus group discussions. These data were later transcribed and reviewed for authenticity.

Observations

Observations allow the researcher to record events as they are taking place and facilitates the triangulation of data (Merriam, 2009). It is a method that is used to observe the behaviour of the research participants which has become routine to them. In addition, observation allows the researcher to understand the context that the participants are a part of and how it influences their behaviour. Furthermore, when participants do not want to discuss a particular event in the interviews, observation assists the researcher in understanding the event first-hand.

As I was a teacher and boarding master at the school, I had the opportunity to be involved in most aspects of school life and could observe learners within the school environment during school hours as well as outside of school hours and on weekends. My informal conversations with learners during breaks, house activities, sports activities, dinner times, class times and in the boarding houses contributed greatly to my understanding of how learners navigated their gendered and sexual identities on a daily basis. My role as a staff member also gave me insight into how teachers perceived and viewed learners and into their issues with different learners who I may not have noticed or interacted with daily. My observational notes added to the claims that learners made about themselves and their identities as it helped to verify some of the information that they provided.

Field notes were taken when I noticed behaviour or conversations that would be useful to my research. However, at certain times this became cumbersome (Merriam, 2009) and I mostly recalled events and incidents while writing this thesis. In addition to observing the participants of the study, it was also interesting to note the thoughts, actions and behaviours of learners who were not a part of this study. It helped to highlight commonalities between what the participants stated during their interviews and what actually happened at school according to my own observations. It was also enlightening to have conversations with senior learners and to observe their influence on the junior learners as the juniors tended to emulate the behaviours of the seniors and had close relationships with them.

Since I was a teacher at the site being studied, it made it easier to establish a rapport with the students, which is important when conducting qualitative research (Taylor et al., 2016). As an English teacher I could select texts and open discussions that were related to my study; and

gender and sexuality were often topics that allowed for rigorous debates and where students were passionate about sharing their opinions. This allowed me to have an overview of the learners' general attitudes towards gender and sexuality. As a teacher, I also had access to the teachers' points of view and the ways in which they perceived the boys and girls in their classes as well as the discussions that were held in the staff room around boys' and girls' behaviour and the ways in which they addressed it. One particular incident stands out to me:

I set the grade 12 June examination paper, and in order to keep it topical and relevant, I set the paper based on the theme of celebrating and putting forward the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community, as June was also Pride month. The response to the paper was quite varied. Some learners, mainly boys, stated that they hated the paper and did not like the fact that they had to read and write about the LGBTQ community. They also stated that their religious and moral views did not allow them to be accepting of those who identified as queer. Other learners, mostly girls and a few boys, stated that they enjoyed the paper and felt that their own struggles with sexuality had been highlighted and validated.

Beyond this, the two teachers who had been invigilating the paper also had surprising reactions. Both teachers came from an Afrikaans background. In an informal conversation over lunch in the dining hall, one of them asked me if these were the issues that the English department was advocating for. The comment was laced with a sceptical undertone and the conversation then went on to discuss religion and what the Bible had to say about queer sexuality. Although the teacher did not outright state it, it was quite clear that he was disapproving of the choices of texts in the paper.

At the same time as the exams were being written, learners who were leaders in the school had asked the school management to be allowed to put up an LGBTQ flag in the school in celebration of pride month. The management reluctantly agreed but stipulated that it would be placed inside the dining hall alongside the human rights flag as they did not want it to be displayed in a prominent place where it could possibly offend the cultural beliefs of parents and anyone else who might see it. When the flag was placed in the dining hall, many learners, especially boys, refused to queue anywhere near the flag and instead chose to stand on the other end of the dining hall or outright refused to eat. Although the flag was meant to be put up for the entire month, it was taken down after three days because many learners went to management to complain about the flag

and stated that it did not represent their views regarding queer sexuality. They claimed that it was an affront to their religious and cultural beliefs. Some teachers were also divided on this issue. These incidents highlight the controversial attitudes of teachers towards sexuality, as well as teachers' impact on learners' attitudes.

In addition to having access to the learners and teachers, I was also one of the younger teachers in the school which made it easier for me to relate to the learners. Many chose to confide in me because they felt that I would understand what they were going through. Most of the time, I attempted to understand their issues and sympathised with them rather than immediately providing solutions or dismissing their issues as teenage problems that they would get over. I also told stories about my own life experiences to better relate to the learners and there was lots of banter between myself and the learners which was not always possible with the older teachers and made it easier for them to talk to me like a big sister rather than a parent. Throughout my stay at the school, I mostly dressed casually in jeans, t-shirts and sneakers which was similar to what learners wore. This helped them view me as approachable and trustworthy. There were no topics in class and the boarding house that were off limits when speaking to me, and I endeavoured to reserve judgement rather than be dismissive and this assisted with my relatability. Due to the factors above, learners often told me what was going on around the school and what issues they were experiencing, as well as all the latest updates on their relationships, crushes and what they got up to on social media, at school and outside school.

In addition, I attended learners' sports matches both at the school and away at other schools. I accompanied them on excursions for different extra-curricular activities. I sat with many learners in the dining hall during breakfast, lunch and supper and listened and participated in their various conversations. When I was on boarding duty, I visited learners in their rooms to take an interest in their hobbies and to see what they were getting up to. One incident stands out to me as it highlights the paradoxical position that I was in as a teacher and a researcher:

I was on boarding duty in the senior girls' house, and I was going to each room to ask the girls to leave the house for supper. As I opened the door to one of the rooms, I saw that two girls were passionately kissing. They quickly jumped apart when they saw me enter. As any intimacy between the girls was against the rules, I reported this to the head of boarding, and she had a conversation about it with the girls. This incident

clearly demonstrated how the boarding house is a highly sexual space and allows for girls to explore their sexuality.

Finally, as I was in the boarding house for duties during the week and the weekends, I had the opportunity to have many informal conversations with the learners to pass the time. I could also observe their interactions with each other, outside the structures of the school. As I was not a boarding master for the boys, I did not have access to what the boys got up to inside the boarding house which limited what I could observe. However, I did see the boys and girls interacting with each other during their free time. I also chatted often to the male boarding masters and they told me about the issues that they experienced in the boys' boarding house. Having boarding meetings with the staff also gave me insight into the challenges that the girls and boys had from the perspective of the boarding masters.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). Further, permission was granted by the principal and the headmaster of the school to conduct this study. Informed consent forms were issued to the learners who then got permission from their parents to participate in this study. Furthermore, all participants signed an assent form giving consent to be a part of this study. All stakeholders were informed about the purpose of the study and exactly what was required of them. All participation was voluntary, and learners could opt out of the study at any point without any ramifications.

In addition, when learners arrived for the interviews, learners were again reminded of the purpose of the study in simple terms and told that they could withdraw at any time and did not have to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with. The names of all the participants and the name of the school have been kept confidential as well as the names of everyone who was mentioned during the interviews, focus groups and observations. Anonymity was guaranteed by using pseudonyms for the school and the participants as well as the research context. All original notes, recordings and transcripts will be kept securely and be destroyed after a period of five years.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is concerned with the researcher's influence on the research process and how the researcher's subjectivities and biases may impact the data that were collected and analysed

(Flick, 2022). The major factor that has influenced the way in which the research was conducted is that I was a teacher at the school, which affected the power dynamic between myself and the participants. This means that I still had to be a disciplinarian and deal with any behaviour that was not sanctioned by the school. As a teacher and boarding master, learners would naturally hide any behaviour that they did not want me to observe for fear that they may be in trouble. Also, some learners were also hesitant to be honest during the interviews for fear that they would be judged or reported. For example, in many individual interviews when participants were asked about their engagement with porn, most stated that they had never watched porn or they used to watch it in the past and then stopped. However, in the focus group discussions, learners revealed that they did in fact watch porn and that they enjoyed it.

However, the assurance that all recordings and identities would be kept confidential helped to minimise the discomfort felt by the learners. Many answered the questions honestly and the relationship of trust that had been developed between myself and the learners helped to ease any discomfort as I was not a stranger in the school. Outlining the purpose of the study and its details excited the learners, especially the girls, as they were often having conversations about gender and sexuality in their own peer groups and were quite passionate about the issues raised. Furthermore, once a few interviews had been completed and learners noticed that I was not reporting the information to anyone else or getting them in trouble, other learners felt more confident about participating in the process in an open and honest manner.

Initially, certain findings of this study were personally startling, particularly given my own conservative background, where discussions surrounding sex and sexuality are taboo. However, this was mitigated by allowing myself to challenge my beliefs at every turn and to refrain from passing judgement on what the learners told me both in the interviews and in informal conversations. Where other teachers chose to give learners advice and to admonish them for getting into certain kinds of relationships, I refrained from doing this and rather chose to listen to the learners and to understand their points of view. This helped to establish a rapport with the learners and very soon hearing these stories did not shock me anymore as it became normalised. I became someone the learners felt that they could confide in.

Being Indian also was a disadvantage as I was a teacher and researcher at a predominantly black school. Most of the learners communicated in their home language of Setswana amongst themselves, although they were all fluent in English. This means that I missed out on observing some of their interactions as I could not understand what was being said. Sometimes learners

deliberately switched to communicating in Setswana when they heard myself or other English-speaking teachers approaching as they did not want us to hear their conversation. In addition, there was a cultural barrier that I had to overcome as the Setswana culture is different to Indian culture. I learned the ways in which family dynamics worked and some of the cultural norms that were associated with being Setswana. I also visited Botswana as a chaperone on some school field trips and this allowed me to get a sense of the landscape that learners were referring to in some of our conversations. I asked lots of questions to learners in trying to understand their backgrounds, and also drew similarities and differences with my own cultural background.

Data Interpretation

Once the interviews and the focus group discussions had been conducted and recorded, the recordings were sent to a professional transcriber to transcribe the data. When the transcripts were returned, I read through them to ensure that they corresponded with the recordings. Some of the transcripts exceeded 60 pages and due to the large number of participants, learners were not available to read through the transcripts again and it would have also been cumbersome to read through each interview with them, therefore, I did not do so. Reading through the transcriptions myself and comparing them to the recordings ensured that accurate data had been captured. I also corrected any errors and inaudible words so that the transcription was as authentic as possible.

Once the above checks were completed, I then loaded the transcript into NVivo software to assist me with coding. I read through the transcripts together with my research questions and grouped data together according to different codes. For example, data related to masculinity were grouped in one section, data relating to sexuality were grouped in another section and so on. Thereafter, Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic coding system was used to group the data further into common themes that emerged from the study. I ensured that I used rich, thick descriptive data that would strengthen the argument made in this study. The themes that were most dominant and answered the research questions were used in this study. This is also referred to as inductive analysis.

The first of Braun and Clarke's (2012) requires the researcher to familiarise oneself with the data. I did this by reading through the transcripts a number of times as I received them from the transcriber and started inputting them into the software. This also assisted me in asking

more refined questions to the participants I still needed to interview. The next step involves generating codes by looking for patterns. I generated codes by looking for key words and phrases that had been repeated by different participants as well as the according to the questions that were frequently asked to the participants. Some of these codes were porn, sex, gender, uniforms and others I also looked for stories, events or experiences that were recurring or similar to each other in terms of answering the research questions. As I coded, I started batching these codes into themes. For example, one of the themes was social media, where I added responses related to porn and the use of other social media apps by the teenagers. Once I had a general list of the themes, I reviewed and refined them as some data needed to be placed in other categories and also overlapped with each other. Thereafter, I defined and renamed the themes according to the data they contained as well as how it aligned to my research questions. Finally, I began the process of analysing the data.

The theory of social constructionism was used to analyse the data (Thorne, 1997) as well as post-structural feminist theory (Numer & Gahagan, 2009). This was done together with a focus on Foucault's (1975) theory of power and Connell's (2020) theory of masculinities and gender relational theory (Connell, 1987). These theories are best suited to my study as it explores how gender relations between boys and girls serve to create a balance or imbalance of power. Once the coding and thematic groupings were completed, I linked the theory and literature to the data to find similarities and differences, which was then written up in the analysis chapters. I looked at the data from the theorists' points of view and drew conclusions based on these links. Furthermore, I found literature that corroborated with my findings as well literature that went against in order to place my study within the broader context of existing research. This was also to avoid bias as much as possible and allowed me to reflect on the methodological limitations my study.

Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology that was used to collect and analyse the data for this study. This study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm and is an ethnography. The research was conducted at a private school located in the Bojanala district of the North West province. Participants were selected using purposive and convenience sampling methods and girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 15 were selected to be a part of this study. The data collection methods that were used were semi-structured individual interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Permission was granted by the school, the parents and learners

in order to conduct this study. Ethical approval was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the data were coded and analysed according to dominant themes that emerged from the study. The next chapter will present the findings of this study.

Chapter 5: Teenage Expressions of Sexuality

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methodology that was used to conduct this study. This chapter will analyse how teenagers express their sexuality through the pursuit of pleasure and desire. It begins by outlining the ways in which learners challenge sexual innocence and goes on to show the ways in which they invest in relationships. Thereafter, there is a discussion on the ways in which boys and girls exhibit hypermasculine and hyperfeminine behaviour in order to attract each other. The chapter then moves on to the ways in which learners use the online space in order to express their sexuality. Lastly, it shows how the school space is used in order to pursue pleasure and desire.

The theory of social constructionism (Thorne, 1997), post-structural feminist theory (Numer & Gahagan, 2009) as well as Foucault's (1975) theory of power. It is argued that learners are constantly in a position of expressing their heterosexuality through their pursuit of pleasure in order to fulfil their desires. Power is an important aspect of the construction of gender and sexual identity as it is wielded in order to conform to, as well as to resist, the gender order. In addition to the theory of social constructionism and theory of power, Connell's (2020) theory of masculinities will also be employed to show how boys are complicit in promoting hegemonic masculinity as well as the ways in which boys resist conforming to hegemonic norms.

In this chapter, it is found that girls challenge sexual innocence by expressing progressive views on marriage, virginity and religious edicts. However, they also hold on to myths around sex that restrict the ways in which they perceive sex and sexual activity. Girls support each other through having a healthy outlook on masturbation and also support each other by educating each other about contraception and sex. Dating has different meanings for learners and includes texting and engaging in sexual activities. Girls express the ways in which they would like to be treated when they enter into relationships as well as the physical attributes they would prefer in potential partners, which are limiting as well as liberating. They face challenges in terms of racial dynamics which place learners in difficult positions. Boys mention the types of girls they would like to date and the body is a central focal point; this is echoed by the girls as well. Girls and boys flirt with each other in numerous ways including online and challenge the notion of monogamous relationships by engaging in open relationships. Learners use social media to

display their sexuality as well as to access pornographic material. Class issues also come into play as learners wield their class privilege in order to access school spaces for sexual activity.

Challenging Sexual Innocence

A common conception about girls is that they are passive victims who are unable to make decisions about sex, desire and pleasure for themselves due to the prevalence of traditional gender roles (Seabrook et al., 2017). The girls in this study challenge this notion and show that they are able to make decisions about relationships for themselves, as demonstrated in this section.

Interviewer: Do you value virginity? How important is it to you?

Sazi: I don't know, I don't really wanna have sex but I don't - It's that thing of yes, it can happen, and it can take over your virginity, but it end up like, in the same light, like ma'am, if you're gonna take my virginity, don't take it in an aggressive manner like raping for example. Just take it in a way of like it's... I'll be that...I'll be the main thing.

Motswedi: Or like you love the person and like if you love that person that you can just take it because uhm, you just take it or you just want to have fun with them. (FGD 6, grade 9)

The girls in the focus group state that virginity is not something that is important to them. Rather, they associate sex with love and would be willing to make their sexual debuts if they felt deeply enough for a person. This suggests that girls are breaking away from traditional norms around virginity and are choosing to make educated and mature choices around their sexuality (Bragg et al., 2018). They also associate having sex with fun which implies that the social construct of virginity is broken and not as important as being able to experiment and explore their sexuality. They outline the conditions and boundaries under which they are willing to have sex and clearly state that they are not willing to have sex that is coercive and aggressive. Rather, they would like to dictate the conditions in which sex takes place and it should be pleasurable and enjoyable. Therefore, these stances suggest that girls are willing to stand up for themselves and resist any forms of violence and aggression and place themselves as equals in their relationships, whilst also experiencing pleasure.

Some learners question the role of religion and its ruling on sex before marriage:

Ma'am, ma'am what I know is, but ma'am I don't know if this is true, because everyone does this ma'am. So in the Bible it says marriage before sex, and they say that if you have sex before marriage, it's a sin. And ma'am I don't know why is it a sin, because norm- like they normally have sex before they get married. And some people they don't even get married or it means that if they don't get married at all, they don't have sex at all. (Tshenolo: FGD 4, grade 8)

Tshenolo interrogates the biblical notion of sex before marriage as not being practical to her as she has a different experience. She notices that her peers do have sex before marriage and that it has been normalised. These data suggest that learners are resisting normative ways of practising sex and sexuality and are open to exploring their sexual identities rather than being restricted by religious edicts. To this participant, it does not make sense that one cannot have sex at all prior to marriage, which suggests that the pursuit of pleasure should not be restricted and rather advocated for. This also goes against traditional notions of femininity which suggest that women should be pure and whole by remaining virgins (Palit & Allen, 2019). She rejects this idea and questions whether it makes sense by looking at the prevalence of the behaviour that is exhibited around her.

I've read up a lot about you know sexual activity and stuff like that. If a girl were to lose her virginity for like the first time, a lot of changes happen to your body. And it affects your body in a bad way, like your vaginal area becomes painful, you can bleed sometimes, like it just changes your body. Like I don't know, I don't know why I'm not remembering the information now, but what I do remember is that it's not good. A lot of changes happen to your body and before your body actually becomes... it takes a while for your body to get used to what's happening. Because I think they said for the first five times, you sleep with someone, you're going to get sick, it will be painful, because I think it's something new to your body. And then I think after the 7th time or so, then your body is alright. But if I'm going to sleep with a man who's like 30 years old, he could actually like kill me. So it's really dangerous you know. So sleeping with people is just, might be yeah. (Khaya: FGD 2, grade 7)

Khaya expresses interest in what happens when they first lose their virginity. This participant indicates that she does research about losing her virginity and, it is clear that much of the information she finds is exaggerated and untrue. This points to a lack of knowledge and information around the issue of sex and that most information is based on fear-mongering and

the promotion of abstinence (Mokwena & Morabe, 2016). This points to the need for better sex education as there is a lot of misinformation that is prevalent. This participant is then deterred from engaging from sexual activities due to the myths that are perpetuated around it. Research has shown that teenagers access information about sex from their peers as well as from the internet and that this information may not always be accurate (Simon & Daneback, 2013). Sex education is also based on prevention rather than acknowledging that children will explore and are curious and therefore need to be armed with the right tools and knowledge in order to make educated decisions around sex. The participant's focus is on pain rather than on pleasure.

Kago divulges how girls discuss and encourage each other to masturbate:

Kago: They just say it's a good feeling, they just do it just because it's nice. Things like that. I try and understand. I think it was Friday, uhm, I was having a conversation with one of my friends, who is also my roommate. And she was just telling me, she asked me if I masturbated and I told her no. Then she was like why? So like I just, I've never masturbated, I don't see any reason to.

In the above extract, Kago discusses how she was encouraged to masturbate by her friends. Studies show that masturbation is a topic that is taboo, especially for girls and it is ensconced in the narrative that girls are not sexual beings and need to abstain from such activities (Carboni & Bhana, 2019). It has been framed as a sin and forbidden from a cultural point of view. There are also many myths surrounding masturbation and its harmful effects, so much so that its positive feelings of pleasure and excitement are hidden and viewed as shameful. In this extract, not only does the roommate admit that she masturbates, but she also encourages Kago to do so as well. This is indicative of the changing attitudes towards sex and sexuality that learners embrace as they feel confident enough to discuss these issues rather than shroud them in shame. Other learners explain how it feels and discuss the pleasurable feelings that it evokes. Thus, girls associate masturbation with pleasure rather than with shame. This incident also demonstrates how the boarding house is a confidential space that allows for bonding as well as the expansion and exploration of sexuality in ways that are not traditionally the norm (Setty, 2022).

When asked about whether the girls in the boarding houses talk about sex, Tlotlego has the following to say:

Tlotlego: Yes we do. But, like, I don't know anyone in the house that has actually had sex. But we talk about it a lot, and we talk about, we talk in my friend group, we talk

about what we like in sex and what we want in the near future and stuff. And yeah, we also, I think we had a conversation about contraception like condoms and birth control and is it an IUG, IUD? Yeah, IUDs. And we just talk about them and we're just like okay, yeah, if this happens, this is how we are going to defend each other. We're like okay, if we need something, we're gonna be there for each other and like that. That's what we talk about.

Plotlego explains how sex is a frequently discussed topic amongst the girls. They discuss the desires that they have and the ways in which they would like to derive pleasure from sex in the future. This is consistent with the research that shows that children do engage in fantasies and envision scenarios of themselves as sexual beings (Renold & Ringrose, 2017). Much of the research states that contraception is not something that is discussed enough through the Life Orientation curriculum but learners express their curiosity around this subject (Eccles & Francis, 2013; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). There is also a sense of intimacy and a close bond created among the learners when they discuss sex. This is consistent with the research that shows that discussions around sex and sexuality in boarding houses allow for learners to form close bonds with each other (Setty, 2022). Plotlego then goes on to speak about how the girls band together to defend each other if they are going through difficult circumstances in their intimate relationships. It is evident that friendships are valued over romantic relationships as learners predict situations that they may encounter and how they will deal with these situations. The friendships become a source of power and the intimate topics of discussion creates a co-dependent relationship between the girls.

Attitudes towards sex and relationships vary between different grades as well as between public and private as conveyed by the focus group participants:

Uhm, so dating right, especially in like this school. If you at it, when you're in like grade 7 like in my grade - grade 7, grade 8 dating can be just like texting on your phone, and sending each other lots of messages or whatever. That could be your dating. And then as soon as it gets to grades, like grade 8, okay, but this, specifically the grade in our school, grade 8, that bunch, yoh, is very like messed up. Like they're sexually like active, and like I talked to them because I wanna find out like what's going on. So if you look at the boys, the boys don't like the girls. Because they say they're loud, they're childish and they like fighting you know, they're not trustworthy. And when you look at, when you ask the girls what they think of the boys, they say the exact same thing,

they're immature and childish. But what I don't get, is that they still you know sleep with each other if they want to. Like I've actually seen it, the grade [8s sleep with each other]. (Naledi: FGD 2, Grade 7)

Naledi describes how dating and relationships vary between different grades. She states that for grade 7 learners, dating is done over the cell phone by sending each other text messages. This suggests that social class influences the interactions between learners as it is a big part of dating culture at school. Dating has different meanings for learners as it can be conducted online as well as in person through physical touch and romance. The exploration of sexuality is not limited to traditional perceptions of dating which are monogamous (Allison & Risman, 2013). The participant then goes on to describe the grade 8s and the ways in which they date and the participant expresses her shock at what the learners get up to in terms of their sexual conduct. This implies that her expectations of the sexual activities that learners engage in are relative to the age of the learners and her disbelief suggests that she has a more conservative outlook as to what activities learners should be engaging in. She describes them as “messed up” and at the same time expresses her curiosity as to why they behave in the manner she claims to have witnessed. From her perspective, these activities are inappropriate for the ages that they are at. However, the research shows that learners are making their sexual debuts at younger ages in South Africa (Richter et al., 2015).

The participant quotes the criticisms that boys and girls have of each other. Boys state that the girls are loud, childish, quarrel a lot and are not trustworthy. These claims are made by boys to disassociate themselves from girls and to put on a farce of bravado where boys see themselves as superior to girls (Bhana & Chen, 2020). Through these criticisms, it is implied that the boys are much more united and do not engage in such frivolous acts. Furthermore, teenage boys are expected not to engage with girls as it is seen as effeminate, hence they are engaged in fostering a form of hegemonic masculinity. Girls also claim that boys are immature and childish. Research by De Wet et al. (2019) has shown that girls often look for older romantic partners as they view them as much more understanding and capable of forming emotional attachments. It is also perceived as an achievement for girls to have an older person as a romantic partner as it is believed that he is much more capable of looking after them and can attend to their needs in a sensitive and gentle manner (Chappell, 2017). By viewing their peers as immature and childish, notions of romance are not entertained and the teasing acts as barrier to ward off any unwanted sexual attention.

The contradiction that is pointed out by the participant is that learners openly express their distaste for each other but still engage in casual sexual relations. These engagements demonstrate how learners are sexual beings who have the capacity to have sexual feelings for one another and also to act upon it. Therefore, sexual relations are not linked to feelings about personality and emotional entanglements but are rather about pursuing sexual desires and deriving pleasure by engaging in sexual activities. The literature shows that girls form romantic feelings for boys before they engage in sexual acts with them (Ranganathan et al., 2017), however, this data shows that both girls and boys are in these relationships for physical pleasure rather than to cultivate deep romantic relationships that last a long time. The girls and boys are acting upon their urges and satisfying their sexual curiosity and fantasies and have a clinical and practical approach to the ways in which they fulfil each other's sexual needs. Therefore, this demonstrates that desire is not linked to personality and feelings but rather to the body and one's ability to give and receive physical pleasure.

Baona speaks about the sexual activity that girls are involved in:

Baona: Uhm, sexual activity, like, as in giving somebody head, I think that's yeah. Like...the boys do it to them. I think it just happens, like I don't think it's a thing of "let's do it", I think it's a thing of they're just chilling, and it just happens.

Baona reveals how girls are involved in oral sex at school and that it is something that happens naturally in an attempt to experience sexual pleasure. The girls and boys are involved in sexual negotiation and attempt to explore sexual positions. The girls willingly participate in the process, which suggests that they are confident in requesting for sexual favours and are agentic in the process. Bhana and Anderson (2013) argue that much of the research on African girls' sexuality places them in an innocent, vulnerable position where they are taken advantage of. However, Baona's statement contradicts this as she explains that the girls have complete freedom and agency in their decision to administer as well as to receive oral sex.

Investments in Relationships

Teenagers and their dating relationships are viewed as harmful and risky and adults attempt to dismiss them instead of understanding them (Boislard et al., 2016). However, teenagers do take their romantic relationships seriously and invest in romantic relationships with the intention of exploring their sexual identities. The data presented below show how learners negotiate relationship norms and have clear ideas as to what they expect from their romantic investments.

When the girls are asked about what attracts them to a boy, they state the following:

The princess treatment. (Motswedi: FGD 14, grade 9)

This response implies that girls have high standards and wish to be treated in a respectful manner with a lot of care when it comes to their romantic relationships (Singh, 2013). They are not willing to compromise on what they value. However, this also suggests that the relationship is not one of equals and rather that girls expect the boys to be at the forefront of the relationship, leading the way and ensuring that the girls are properly looked after. These power hierarchies place girls in a subservient position as traditional gender norms are reinforced. The girls also fantasise about being treated in a manner that pampers them which means that an idealised version of a relationship is fostered. The term “princess treatment” is derived from traditional children’s fairy tales in which the women are usually in need of rescuing. When applied to this context, the girls expect to be treated as if they are fragile and in need of lots of attention. These fantasies serve to remove the control and agency that girls have over their own lives as the princess treatment simultaneously demands that girls and women be perfect in highly feminised ways, which could be unattainable. Furthermore, this assertion can also be linked to the desire for financial security and material wealth as this is considered to be a gateway to a successful life (Salawu et al., 2022).

Noxolo adds to the conversation:

Uhm, most people prefer muscular men, who have six packs who look good and sometimes, most girls are lover girls, so they like looking at a boy’s personality.
(Noxolo: FGD 14, grade 9)

Noxolo states that girls also prefer boys who have six packs which adds to the notion that physical attraction works both ways and that it is not only boys who have physical preferences. Girls prefer to date boys who have six packs because it demonstrates a sense of strength and power which makes them much more masculine in girls’ eyes (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). Therefore, in a way, the girls are complicit in promoting hegemonic norms and set standards that boys need to aspire to in order to be desirable.

Noxolo goes on to describe girls who prefer good personalities as “lover girls”. This connotes these types of girls prefer to have emotional connections with the boys and fantasise about having romantic relationships that go beyond the physical (Anderson, 2013). This evidence

suggests that, for teenagers, desire is both physical and emotional and plays a big role in the romantic partners they choose and the relationships they enjoy.

Race also factors in the ways learners choose to enter into relationships:

So ma'am, in this school are this, there's a guy at this school ma'am, but this person is not white, he's Indian which is Faisal. Then he came to this school I used to have a crush on Faisal ma'am. But then I didn't, I couldn't tell anyone that I have a crush on this guy, I never knew him, I was new to this school. And then in my mind, I was like but is it right to date someone who's not black. But then ma'am at the same time, I don't know, I don't know, like I don't know if I'm black, or I'm coloured. Because my dad is white, my mom is black. But at the same time, this white dad of mine, is not my real dad and I have a different dad, who I re- whom I don't even know. So yes ma'am. As of right now, I have this other, I have a crush on someone, but I think that person is not available and he's white. Yes. (Shiluva: FGD 4, grade 7)

The participant states how race causes her great conflict as she does not know whether she should date a boy because he is Indian and she is coloured. In apartheid South Africa the racial segregation placed white people at the top of the pecking order followed by Indians, coloured, and then black people (Gradín, 2019). Shiluva faces an identity crisis as she does not know whether she should pursue a boy who is Indian and is uncertain as to whether he would accept her. She is also conflicted because she is scared of being judged for dating someone who is not black. Therefore, she is pressured into finding someone who is black and to conform to relationships as demarcated by race. She also states that she has a crush on a white boy but faces the same conflict. She is uncertain of her own identity as she is black but has a white stepfather and does not know where this positions her in terms of race. This extract suggests that race plays a big role in the kinds of relationships that learners choose and places restrictions on their engagements with each other. She also feels powerless in her position as a black girl as she sees the pursuit of someone from another race as something that is unattainable.

One of the boys also mentions an experience where the girl had stipulated her preferences in relation to what she looks for in a partner:

I was talking yesterday to someone. He went to a girl...and then the girl is just like, is like, "I'm into like tall, light skins". Yoh. (Remoratile: FGD 12, grade 8)

Remoratile describes a situation wherein the girls also specify what types of boys they want to date. This is based on physicality and the girl described by the participant specifically mentions that she prefers to date tall boys who are light skinned. Girls are able to discern what their preferences are and to state these outright. This brings in the elements of race and class, as historically during apartheid, white people were seen to be superior to black people. Therefore, this learner also draws on the racial ideology that white is superior and chooses to have partners who are light skinned in order to increase her social class, popularity and desirability (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). The school under study is predominantly comprised of black learners and when she says “light skins” she is referring to black boys who are lighter skinned in complexion. Therefore, there is also colourism evident in her response, as for her, dating lighter skinned black boys is associated with privilege as she believes that someone who is lighter skinned is much more attractive. This incident suggests that race and skin colour are still factors that are taken into account and these ideologies are still entrenched in learners even after three decades of democracy.

Tshireletso speaks about why she does not want to get into a relationship at this stage of her life:

Tshireletso: Not necessarily in my age currently, ‘cause like the boys of this year, I'm gonna say, like all they care about is like maybe how, like, how big your butt is, or how big your boobs are. So like I really don't want to be involved in this, like, stage of theirs of phase or whatever they are going through.

Tshireletso describes how boys are constantly discussing the physical attributes of girls. It is made clear that all they are interested in are girls who have large breasts and large bottoms as these features are sexualised and seen as a marker of a girl's ability to have good sex (Renold & Ringrose, 2013). Tshireletso's refusal to participate in this culture of sexualising girls' bodies suggests that girls have to resist complying with boys' ideals and this does not allow them to have any meaningful relationships because these relationships are largely reduced to sex.

When girls are asked whether they could be considered “players”, the structure and nature of relationships is contested:

‘Cause I feel as if with some people, they feel as if like when they're in that talking stage, they're like together, but it's not necessarily. But it doesn't mean it's a relationship, like I'm talking to this person and this person likes me. But then I talk to other multiple people, you know. But like yeah, you see when it's in a relationship, I

feel like that's when you should like stop talking all those people who you are talking to, and like stop flirting. (Anele: FGD 14, grade 9)

A “player” refers to someone who has multiple relationships going on at the same time, without the different partners knowing about each other. Anele states that cheating and being accused of being a player are contingent on a variety of factors including the stage of the relationship involved. The learners name the point at which they flirt with each other and get to know each other better the “talking stage” and this is when learners are actively deciding whether they want to pursue the relationship further or not. Therefore, they have multiple online conversations running at the same time and are not committed to a particular person (Ling et al., 2014). These beginning stages are not considered to be relationships and this gives learners the freedom to flirt with multiple people (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018). The participants state that once they are actively in a relationship, the multiple talking stages are expected to stop and one should be committed to one person. This suggests that the dynamic around relationships and their norms is changing and that learners are much more open to pursuing relationships that have first been put on trial. They also demonstrate that they are accepting of flirting with multiple people at a time and the choice to pursue a particular relationship becomes theirs to make.

Lehumo points out how open relationships have also become quite popular amongst teenagers:

So a boy and a girl are dating in a relationship, but they have made the agreement that we can still sleep with anyone else we want to sleep with. So I could be dating John, and then I can sleep with another boy and he can sleep with another girl and it's okay. So we're in a relationship, but we've allowed each other to sleep, to cheat on each other basically, and it's okay. And I feel like that's what's happening nowadays, 'cause you get boys who are in relationships with three girls at the same time, and the other girl knows. So like uhm, I was talking to my friend, a boy. He said he told his main chick something, and then I was like main chick? Then he's like yeah, I'm dating two other people. And I'm like so does your main chick know that you're dating other people? And he said yes. So it's come to the point where people are so desperate for sex, that now they really don't even have respect for each other. They just do what they want yeah. And then it's very rare to find people who actually think about you know, what's gonna happen afterwards. And that's why I feel like having sex after marriage, is the best thing. Because when you're married, everything is stable. You know that you can

trust this person and you're gonna be with them for the rest of your life. (Lehumo: FGD 2, grade 7)

This participant describes what open relationships are and how they operate amongst the learners at the school. Her understanding of these relationships is that they are based on an agreement that is undertaken by all partners involved. This participant equates it to cheating as, for her, romantic relationship must be monogamous in order to fit in with the dominant understandings of what a true romantic relationship entails. The example that she provides suggests that both boys and girls exercise their agency in communicating their needs and having relationships based on sexual pleasure rather than on emotional attachments (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013). This is in contradiction to the literature which suggests that girls are invested in relationships for emotional security (Bhana, 2015). By agreeing to a polyamorous relationship, boys and girls open themselves to exploring other avenues for seeking pleasure and fulfilling their relationship needs. However, this form of non-committal relationship is also tied to risky behaviour and involves putting oneself at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV if forms of protection are not used (Bhana, 2017a).

The participant describes her interaction with one of the boys and it is evident that he is involved in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Having three girlfriends gives him power and status as he is viewed as a man who is desirable (Kreager et al., 2016). The descriptors that he uses to speak about his girlfriends are noteworthy. He refers to his first girlfriend as a "main chick" and in other interviews, it is revealed that additional partners are referred to by the slang term "side chicks". The comparison to chickens suggests that girls are viewed as commodities who are dispensable and the boys are given a free pass to behave in a misogynistic manner. The main chick is usually the girl who is publicly paraded to others as the girlfriend whilst side chicks are used secretly to derive sexual pleasure. This is problematic as girls are coerced into accepting this as the status quo and enabling the behaviour of the boys by agreeing to an open relationship rather than having to endure the disappointment of finding out later that their boyfriends were cheating (Masters et al., 2013). However, the girl contests this by also pursuing other partners. The boy also ensures his own security as a male by having multiple partners so that he always has an option when he needs to experience sexual pleasure (Jonas et al., 2016).

Lehumo points out that the learners behave in this manner because they are "desperate for sex". This suggests that romantic relationships are formed based on their ability to fulfil one's sexual

appetite. The learner puts it down to a lack of respect. For her, a respectable relationship is one that is monogamous and not based on sexual desire. Her assertion is that learners are so invested in fulfilling their desires that they do not think of the consequences of engaging in such relationships. Her argument is valid as the research has shown that boys especially concentrate on deriving pleasure rather than investing in monogamous emotional attachments (Graham & Mphaphuli, 2018). She points to the conflict that these types of relationships may cause later which suggests that, in her experience, these relationships are not designed to last for a very long time. The participant goes on to point out why marriage is a better option as it is monogamous and is a guarantee that partners will be faithful to each other. These ideas are consistent with findings that suggest that learners idealise marriage and assume that it will provide the security that dating and unmarried relationships do not (Singh, 2013). This is also embedded in religious traditions, as Christianity and other religions advocate for marriage as a way for people to show loyalty to each other. She equates marriage to being a trustworthy relationship and that abstinence is a way to preserve oneself for a partner who is going to be faithful. However, it is well documented that this is not always the case and that holding idealised views of marriage is no guarantee that partners will be loyal and trustworthy (Chappell, 2017). For Lehumo, marriage represents the pinnacle of a healthy romantic relationship.

In the below extract, Katlego, a female learner, explains the short-term relationships that learners invest in:

I feel like in this school there are those certain couples you know, like when you see those types of people, you know this one is with this one. But maybe next week you'll find out that grade 12 with a grade 8, that happens in this school, ma'am. (Katlego, FGD 15, grade 8)

Katlego points out that couples move quickly from relationship to relationship without any loyalty – from week to week. The learners are aware of the relationships that are taking place and note when the relationships eventually end. This demonstrates that despite the curtailment of complete freedom at school to navigate relationships, learners have normalised expanding their sexual repertoires at a quick pace (Manning et al., 2014). This can also be framed as problematic as notions of what relationships entail are not explored fully. Therefore, the loyalty of partners is questioned as interest peaks and wanes very quickly. The participant also points out that grade 12 learners date grade 8 learners. Therefore, the age gap and the perceived

innocence of the younger learners are taken advantage of. The grade 8s gain popularity by dating someone who is older than them and the grade 12s are easily able to take advantage of the grade 8 learners who are vulnerable to being exploited. Hence, they are introduced to sexual activity at a much younger age than they may initially plan to.

When Palesa was asked if girls could be considered “players”, this is what she had to say:

Palesa: Yes, they can. Because they can play around with a boy’s feelings, make them feel the exact same way. But I feel like when it’s a girl, there’s more - like boys like just stop liking that person. It’s not a cool thing to be a player, as a girl, because it’s seen as oh, you are disgusting, you kissed this many girls, these guys or done this. But with a boy, even if the boy has had sexual intercourse with ten girls, it’s seen as wow, I wish I could do that. But if a girl do that, they’d be like oh, that’s disgusting.

Palesa points out the double standard that is evident when girls behave in a similar manner to boys. Boys will go to the extent of shunning a girl who is suspected of being promiscuous as it is believed that she lacks self-respect. Hence, the biases are gendered in nature as they create specific rules for how girls should behave versus how boys should behave. Seeing girls behave in such a manner is seen as repellent and this results in the girls being outcast. However, for boys, having many women is admired and it becomes a trait that is envied (Ninsiima et al., 2018). This points to the unequal power relations that exist between girls and boys as girls’ ability to explore their sexuality is constrained whilst boys are applauded for adhering to hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity

Hypermasculinity is defined by hegemonic norms in which boys’ behaviour tends to subordinate girls (Connell, 2020). Hyperfemininity refers to when girls conform to traditional gender norms in which they are complicit in upholding hegemonic masculinity and exaggerate their femininity (Holland & Harpin, 2015). This section shows how girls and boys conform to hypermasculine and -feminine norms in order to be desirable to each other.

Bonolo discusses the obsession that girls have with cleaning their genital areas:

Bonolo: Ma’am yoh, our generation’s going downhill, these people are buying soaps for their vaginas, soaps for the penises. To make them smell [good], so to balance their pH level when all you need is water.

Interviewer: Why do they use it?

Bonolo: Because uhm, well, there was a time where a girl in my group or in my grade, she said that a boy asked to have like a session. A very not innocent session. So, she just said, just to be prepared, she wants, she will be ready.

The above extract shows how girls and boys prepare for when they will have intimate relations with boys. By buying products that claim to keep vaginas and penises clean suggests that they are undereducated about the ways in which the body functions. It also demonstrates how girls may be insecure with their own bodies and thus they are compelled to buy hygiene products in order to smell good. It also indicates that both boys and girls anticipate having sexual relations and prepare for it to enhance their sense of femininity and masculinity, as well as to ensure that they are attractive to each other. Thus, they sexualise themselves (Smolak et al., 2014). The ability to buy special soaps is a sign of economic privilege as this means that the girls are able to access the items they need in order to make themselves desirable. Bonolo further goes on to explain how girls are approached to have a “session”, a term that is laced with sexual and lustful connotations. Thus, the preparation for and anticipation of illicit sexual activities informs their sexual identities. By preparing, they try to impress each other in the hope that the relationship will go further.

Girls and boys exhibit their desirability in different ways according to the participant below:

I feel like girls tend to try and like attract boys like shortening their dresses, like shorts, like, like it's so short to the pelvis like if they bend down, you can see that under their dress. So I feel like that's one thing that girls tend to do. For the boys, I think in my opinion, boys like this thing of wearing tight school pants. Yeah. (Dineo, FGD 15, grade 8)

Girls express their sexuality and desirability by exhibiting their bodies and modifying their school uniforms in a way that shows off their sexiness. In this way, girls are demonstrating their sexual agency and their availability for sexual activity. The school uniform is intended to restrict sexual freedom, to desexualise the body and to present learners in a manner that is considered formal and respectable (Bragg & Ringrose, 2023). It also strips learners of their individuality and shows them as one entity that is representative of the school. However, girls resist these norms and seek to show off their individuality despite the constraints of the school uniform. Similarly, boys do the same by tightening their school pants to show off their bodies.

Boys and girls are consciously engaged in using their bodies as tool to draw attention to their desirability.

Tefelo discusses how she is bullied in the boarding house by other girls who seek the attention and validation of boys:

Tefelo: Uhm, sometimes maybe like uh, they talk about me behind my back, right? Or especially when they see the boys, right? So when they see the boys, its like, they want male validation, they want to be noticed by the boy, so they kind of like start making remarks about me, because I'm an easy target. And this has come from both grade eights and nines. Mm-hmm.

Tefelo is a quiet and reserved girl in the boarding house who is introverted compared to the rest of the generally extroverted and boisterous girls in the house. She does not have many friends and has once attempted to commit suicide in the boarding house because of the bullying that she experiences. In the above extract, Tefelo explains how the girls bully her in order to seek approval from the boys. This behaviour places Tefelo in a submissive position as the girls use her as a tool to gain popularity from the boys. This is a way to demonstrate their assertiveness as well as their ability to dominate in an attempt to draw the attention of the boys (Jamal et al., 2015). She goes on to describe herself as an “easy target” which further reflects her powerlessness as she does not react to their jibes. This gives the girls more power to belittle her and to impress the boys.

Larona defines a slang term that describes how boys flirt with and attempt to seduce girls:

Larona: So it's basically where they give off this semi-sexual energy– like there's no build up to it. You just walk up to the girl and you like grab her face, you come really close or you say things that would like make her blush and stuff. That's rizz, and you use that rizz to get a girl to be with you.

Larona uses the term “rizzing” which is a common slang term that many learners use to describe the ways in which boys seduce girls. It is a shortened form of the word “charisma”. In the above example, rizzing refers to using aggressive behaviour and the element of surprise in order to seduce girls. In this way, a clear message is sent and the surprise element gives the girl no chance to react or make a decision as this is usually done in a public space at the school where all the other learners are watching. This is evidence of hegemonic forms of masculinity being enacted; girls are placed in a submissive position as they have no opportunities to react or resist

the boy's advances (Dworkin et al., 2013). By grabbing the face of the girl, it becomes an intimate and private experience in a public space which clearly communicates the boy's intentions and his dominance as a man as he takes charge of the situation. By making the girls blush they are communicating to the girls as well as to their peers that they have sexual power and can seduce a girl effectively. Larona states that there is no build-up and calls it "semi-sexual energy" which suggests that the intentions for the relationship are made clear from the very outset, which is sexual in nature.

Letsoalo describes another way in which boys rizz girls:

Letsoalo: Most boys, they basically do unspoken rizz and unspoken rizz is like calling a girl over, but no – not calling them and stuff and like changing your voice in front of them like you know, to sound better and stuff, yea.

Letsoalo describes the phenomenon of unspoken rizzing where boys use their bodies to prove their dominance and desirability. By changing their voices to sound more mature and using more sophisticated vocabulary they become much more attractive and likeable to the girls (Christopher et al., 2016). It is assumed that girls prefer boys who speak and present themselves in a mature manner. In this way, it is hoped that the girls will find them to be sexually desirable. Changing their demeanour is a form of posturing and it is used to manipulate the emotions of the girls into liking them. Hence, this becomes a form of flirtation.

Online Encounters

Children's use of the online space is highly contested. Debates and discussion prevail on the ways in which children should and should not use technology and social media and how this must be controlled and monitored. However, research has shown that children use social media in order to flirt, find romantic partners and post images of themselves that are considered attractive and desirable among other activities (Van Oosten et al., 2017). This section demonstrates how learners use social media in similar ways to exhibit their agency.

Kefilwe explains how social media facilitates interactions between boys and girls:

Kefilwe: Ma'am, if you post something, then they reply to your posts, or they'll just message you on like Instagram or ask for your number and then start talking.

Posting on social media serves facilitate romantic relationships amongst the learners (Ringrose et al., 2013). Posting images publicly acts as an invitation for the initiation of romantic

relations. Kefilwe describes how the action of posting an image can lead to a chain of reactions that eventually lead to private conversations. In this way, what is public becomes private and intimate. The shield of the cell phone and the anonymity of social media afford learners a sense of bravery and diminishes the need for physical encounters. Therefore, the social aspect is transferred online. This sentiment is reiterated by Palesa:

Palesa: Yes. I feel like it's a thing of, once you see someone pop up on your screen, and you never seen them, you get fascinated and then you just text them without thinking. Because you're not in front of them. So it's easier to just like say, oh you look so nice, oh you look... and then from there, the conversation starts and yeah.

Palesa's response encapsulates the ease of social media in allowing for the initiation of sexual relationships. She states that it is done "without thinking" which points to the potentially threatening aspects of social media especially, for teenagers as they could also be susceptible to predators and other unwanted attention (Fox & Bale, 2018). The attraction is visual as the comments are based on looks which can be deceiving. The curation of profiles on social media as well as the ease of accessibility allows teenagers to explore infinite possibilities of intimate relationships without any questions.

Rethabile goes on to describe other uses of social media:

Rethabile: Uhm, on social media, a lot of people do slide into others' DMs [direct messages]. Especially like, you could be someone in Johannesburg, but you could be sliding into someone's DMs in Cape Town, because that does happen a lot. And on groups, I feel like once, like if you have a really close friendship with a lot of people and in our group, they're going to talk about like their hatred for someone, just because they rejected them.

Rethabile speaks about how social media is used to expand one's geographical reach when it comes to romance and flirting. She points out how someone can be in one location and be attracted to someone in a different city. She refers to this as "sliding into the DMs which is a popular colloquial term for when someone is romantically interested in another person on social media and expresses their interest through a private message. Social media thus becomes a space which has no boundaries for teenagers; relationships are initiated across geographical boundaries and are no longer limited to the school spaces and communities (Eleuteri et al., 2017). Rethabile states that this occurs often, and thus the negotiation of gender and sexuality is expanded through these networks. The use and functioning of group chats are a space in

which “group think” is facilitated and can be used as a tool for violence and intimidation. Thus, social media acts a tool for the demonstration of power and agency as it is a space which learners use to vent about others. Rethabile discusses how this hatred is inspired by rejection. The rejection is discussed in the group chat and is a means to vent and take back their power.

Mpho discusses how social media is used to expand one’s sexuality and to declare and negotiate one’s romantic interest in a person:

Mpho: Yeah. Social media’s just this thing where people can use the advantage to being a different person. ‘Cause there could be a group chat right now. And I say, “Hey, I like this boy and I'm gonna take him from you”. Or “Hey I'm gonna seduce you now” so yeah. And people can use social media as an advantage to make themselves popular and be out there. Then if you be out there, you're basically in danger, you're not, you're not really putting yourself and your body in privacy. But you're craving for this attention, to the point where you do aim for that.

Mpho points how the anonymity of social media places learners in a powerful position where they have the agency and freedom to create different identities to what they are usually known for (Bhana, 2022). The unregulated and unsupervised group chats and social media posts allow for the expansion of one’s sexuality. This enables teenagers to become popular in ways that the school environment may not allow. Social media allows one to access what is most popular and if posts become popular on social media, then teenagers are pressured into behaving in a similar manner. Thus, teenage identities are intertwined with their interactions on social media. Private spaces such as group chats are formed and it is in these unsupervised spaces that girls demonstrate their agency as well as aggression by claiming men as their property and challenging anyone who gets in their way. A sense of ownership and intimidation is demonstrated (Dir, 2017). Mpho goes on to state that social media is used as a means of seduction and flirtation and this could be linked to the girls displaying their sexuality. Mpho is concerned about the privacy of content on social media as it could be accessed by anyone at any time. However, she describes how the craving for attention actually forces young people to go on social media and to minimise the risk factor as they feel pressured to do so in order to be relevant. This extract shows how sexuality and gender is not only influenced by physical factors but also online, where young people may also garner unwanted attention. However, for learners, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

Tshenolo states how social media is used to expose and advertise explicit content:

Tshenolo: Ma'am it's like they normally post pictures of themselves or under their statuses, they write anything they want. Some of them they post people kissing or them kissing someone else. And then you find on Instagram, we saw people like undressed and yes ma'am, I feel like that's not right, because they're showing everyone their private parts. And they should be personal about their body parts, yes.

Tshenolo explains how images of kissing are posted on social media. It is used as a means to demonstrate, exhibit and express one's sexuality and sexual interests. Posting videos of kissing is a demonstration of the girls' agency and their capabilities as sexual beings. Kissing is a sexual and intimate act and posting this online and in a public space is a display of one's sexuality and sensuality. It is also used by girls to broadcast the fact they are sexually desirable as they are involved in a romantic relationship. This also links to the idea of pornified culture, as porn is not only limited to dedicated websites but is now ubiquitous as it can be viewed on any platform online by anyone be it accidentally or on purpose (Mulholland, 2015). The meaning of porn is therefore expanded and can include any sexual acts.

Tshenolo goes on to discuss how she saw her peers undressed online. This is a further exhibition of their desirability and sexuality (Dobson, 2014). Her opinion of this behaviour being inappropriate is suggestive of her conservative viewpoint on bodies not being on display and that this should be restricted to spaces that are private. Research shows that female bodies are highly sexualised and the dominant opinion in society is that female bodies should be kept secret and concealed (Youdell, 2005). Her freedom to view and curate what she would like to view and explore on social media is curtailed as she is bombarded with images that she considers to be inappropriate. On the other hand, for those girls who post their bodies on social media this is an expression of power, especially in the context of school where the freedom to wear what they want is curtailed. Therefore, the power of social media is wielded by girls to display their femininity and sexuality to ensure that they are viewed as sexual and agentic beings.

Girls and boys explore their gender and sexuality in other ways that go beyond the physical environment, including online. In the extract below, Itumeleng describes what kinds of pictures her friend posts online:

Itumeleng: And ma'am I have a friend, she's I wouldn't lie, she's a big girl. And then she has this costume, it's a two piece bikini. And then the panty is sort of like a thong

almost like a G-string. And like, her butt is exposed and she takes pornos and then she posts them on like her WhatsApp status.

The above extract demonstrates how girls use social media to flaunt their sexuality. The minimal clothing and sensual poses are an attempt to showcase desirability as a young woman. The reach that social media has means that sexuality is not only confined to in-person interactions but can go online to reach a broader audience. The use of the words “big girl” suggests a confidence and body positivity that resists the stereotype that only thin bodies are attractive and desirable (Carboni & Bhana, 2019). The girl Itumeleng describes wears clothing that exposes her body, such as G-strings and thongs, and posts these pictures online in order to garner attention and fame. The participant refers to it as a “porno” which is a reference to sexually explicit images. This is consistent with Mulholland's (2015) argument on pornified culture as learners tend to emulate their favourite celebrities on social media and porn is everywhere. The definition of porn is not limited to what is found on social media sites but can be linked to any images that are sexually arousing, including images that showcase different forms of nudity (Spišák, 2016). This finding is in direct contradiction to the notion that girls are passive and are sexualised by men (García-Gómez, 2018). In this case, the girl exhibits her agency by posting images that display her body in a manner that is considered to be sexually suggestive.

When asked about social media and the sharing of nude sexual images, Tlotlego has the following to say:

Tlotlego: Yes, well with girls, what I know is like the closer you are, like let's say you can just send your friend a nude, and they'll be like, “Oh, I'm feeling bad about my body, I wanted to show you that”, and that's basically a way of working around body insecurity, because there is a lot of body insecurity amongst girls and boys.

The above extract demonstrates that girls use social media as a tool to empower themselves and to encourage body positivity. The sharing of nude sexual images becomes a powerful tool that learners can use to show off their sexiness and desirability in order to feel better about themselves (García-Gómez, 2018). This is contrary to arguments that place social media in a negative light. This is consistent with the research that shows that boarding girls form tight bonds with each other and, in this case, aids them in overcoming the insecurities that they face with their bodies (Setty, 2022; Zhu, 2022). These bonds serve as source of encouragement and appreciation. Nude sexual images are usually viewed in a negative light for fear that they may

be leaked and lead to shame and embarrassment, however, the girls in this study disrupt this narrative by showing how nude sexual images can be used to empower and to boost confidence in themselves.

Tlotlego speaks about her curiosity related to porn:

Tlotlego: So in sex like, I've been told because my parents caught me watching porn once. So my father had a chat with me about it, and he was just explaining to me how it was bad for me and stuff. So that was a while ago, I think it was two years ago. So now I'm here now and I'm seeing on social media that porn isn't real sex, it's not real sex. That's now how sex is. So now I'm just left wondering what is sex then, 'cause hey no, if it's not porn, then what is it? And yeah, I don't know, I don't know what to expect now.

Tlotlego discusses how she was caught watching porn by her parents and they automatically assumed the position that porn is harmful. This is supported by scholars who state that porn is predominantly viewed by adults as something that is negative and needs to be curbed and disrupted (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). However, this conversation with her parents led to Tlotlego being even more curious rather than her appetite for porn being quelled. Her sexual identity and understanding of sex are formulated through her use of porn and this conversation leads to more confusion as she is unsure of what sex is if it is not porn. She then turns to social media which confirms the predominant view that porn is dangerous and needs to be avoided (Attwood et al., 2018). She is confused by what sex actually entails. This is in line with research that shows that children continue to be viewed as sexually innocent beings and that they cannot be educated about sex for fear that they might engage in it themselves (Antunes & Butler, 2023). Tlotlego's response indicates that she is already involved in constructing ideas about sex and seeks this information in different ways, including watching porn.

Inside the School Space

School spaces are highly gendered and allow for the exploration of sexual identities. Unsupervised spaces allow for sexual encounters to take place amongst learners in ways that may be prohibited by the school. Thus, a certain culture is formed which can promote some forms of behaviour and sexuality while alienating others (Linville, 2017). This section will show how learners use the school spaces to promote sex and sexuality.

Ponatshego describes the spaces in which learners perform their sexual activities:

Yes or they do things; like I don't know what's going on. Like I would go into the hall sometimes and you'd find people kissing together, others are sitting on top of other people, and it's like you know exactly what they're doing, like you can see exactly what they're doing. And they're not ashamed of it, you know. Only if it's like a teacher talking to them about it, then that's when they like to keep quiet. But the boys for instance, uhm, they would – boys, their conversations from what I heard from other boys, they normally talk about girls or alcohol, or having sex with other girls- (Ponatshego: FGD 2, grade 7)

The participant explains the forms of sexual activity that she has seen learners engage in. The school space therefore becomes a site for intimate sexual relations as learners are free to explore their sexuality without adult interference (Allen, 2013a). There is a sense of liberation felt by the learners as they are explicitly demonstrating their sexual capacities without any shame, as stated by the participant. Bystanders and other learners become an audience for whom they can perform. This is in opposition to teachers who attempt to curb this behaviour by speaking to learners about it and learners choose to be less vocal and exhibitionist in front of adult authority figures (Waratworawan et al., 2021).

The participant then goes further to describe the conversations that boys have with each other and it is mainly related to risk-taking behaviour. Through these conversations, girls are objectified and sexualised and seen as sexual conquests. This highlights the unequal power dynamics between boys and girls as girls also become complicit in promoting hegemonic forms of masculinity. The conversation around alcohol creates a sense of bravado and their ability to engage in illegal activities; as they are not yet 18, the legal age to consume alcohol, this is a showcase of how they can manipulate situations to suit their needs and allows for male bonding (Muhanguzi, 2011).

Khaya speaks about how learners bribe the support staff of the school when they are caught engaging in sexual activities:

So my brother told me, the people in his grade, they sleep together and they get caught. And sometimes they bribe the cleaners because they get caught by the cleaners, and they actually bribe them. And he said it's like prices from 200 onwards. So the cleaner sort of takes advantage of them, instead of just going straight to report them, they get bribed and stuff like that. So now I feel like dating means uhm, sleeping with each other

and kissing, you know, holding each other by the waist or by the butts. (Khaya: FGD 2, grade 7)

In the above extract, class differences play a role in allowing learners to participate in sexual activities. She explains how the learners get caught by the cleaners and then bribe them with R200 (US\$10) to keep them quiet. The relationship thus becomes transactional in nature (Jones & Norton, 2007). Cleaners at the school are contract staff and earn approximately R2500 (US\$134) per month which equates to around R83 (US\$4) per day. To earn R200 (US\$10) by finding learners in compromising situations is a guaranteed way to earn more money. This demonstrates that learners are clearly aware of the class differences between themselves and the staff and use their power and privilege to take advantage of the situation such that they are allowed to continue engaging in sexual activity.

The participant goes on to explain how, for her, dating equates to having physical exposure to each other as this is the kind of behaviour she has witnessed at the school. The school is a site for highly sexual activities as the learners are able to use their monetary powers and privilege to get away with as much as they can (Koh & Kenway, 2016). For this participant, there is pressure to conform to the activities that other learners are involved in, otherwise, it is not considered real dating. Therefore, the activities of older learners and peer groups determine what kind of behaviour is expected of younger learners when they choose to be involved in dating.

Temoso speaks about his sexual experiences in the girls' laundry room in the boarding house at night:

Temoso: So anyways, then I talk to her, Tlotliso about it, I was like, "Let's, let's just, let's make up, you know, let's just, you know, why not?" She gives me head. This other girl, Maya, she gives me head. Then Boipelo comes in, my ex situation-ship, fling. So now Boipelo is with Bogosi, right, so I almost kiss her. Which is crazy because I shouldn't be kissing her. Number one, she really broke me, number two, I really broke her, there's a lot. Almost kissed her. So then my Tlotliso comes in, gives me head, I don't finish, I don't orgasm yet, she leaves. I'm like call Boipelo. Boipelo comes in, I almost kiss her, crazy. Boipelo leaves. Maya comes in, grade nine Maya. We talk. I don't tell her about Tlotliso, we talk, one, two, three, one, two, three, she gives me head. Crazy. 'Cause it's like this for me, it's like wow, cool, that happened. We have a long moment, we talk, we cuddle, we talk out our issues there.

Temoso tells me about the number of girls whom he had sexual relations within the space of one night. He sneaks into the girls boarding house after lights-out and calls girls out one by one each of whom do him some kind of sexual favour, which is usually oral sex. This ranges from hugging, to kissing, to oral sex all within the space of an hour or so with as many girls as he is attracted to. This is indicative of the ways in which the laundry room space is used to enhance sexual relationships amongst learners. It gives Temoso the opportunity to form emotional connections with his partners as it becomes a space for shared intimacy. It is also indicative of the toxic form of masculinity that is embodied by Temoso as he receives sexual favours by multiple girls all in one night. This gives him a sense of power and virility and constructs him as a hegemonic male (Ford, 2019). All the girls are aware of what Temoso is doing and assist him in calling other girls when they have finished with him. They are complicit in allowing this toxic cycle to continue and for girls to be treated as sexual objects.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how boys and girls express their sexuality through a myriad of ways including online as well as within the school space. Hegemonic masculinity is reinforced and learners resort to hypermasculine and hyperfeminine forms of behaviour in order to seduce each other. Learners are selective about the kinds of relationships that they would like to invest in and this is based on physical, racial and emotional aspects of the relationships. Learners experiment with porn and masturbation and show liberal views towards the notion of preserving their virginity. The next chapter will elaborate on how learners go beyond the heterosexual by investing in queer relationships and will discuss their experiences and attitudes towards queer relationships.

Chapter 6: Exploring Bi-curiosity and Challenging Heterosexuality

Introduction

The previous chapter outlines the ways in which learners enter into heterosexual relationships and how they express their sexuality. This chapter will focus on queer sexuality and explores the attitudes that learners have towards queer identities and how they discover, accept and reject queer identities as well as the ways in which boys exhibit and navigate alternative forms of masculinity at school. It is argued that girls are tolerant and willing to accept queer identities, however, boys display homophobic attitudes that constrain the freedoms of those who would like to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

I wanted to ask, I just wanted to ask whether you know ... ma'am, I've heard this story, gay people, they said they're born gay, they know before they are born. (Onalenna: FGD 14, grade 9)

This chapter begins with elements from a focus group discussion with Onalenna to show how teenage sexuality is mobilised beyond heterosexuality. Throughout the study, questions about and experiences related to non-normative sexualities and the queering of sexuality was evident. Onalenna's comment highlights the eagerness and openness with which teenagers address complex questions about sexual orientation and identity. Warner's (1993) work, particularly their book, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, suggests that heteronormativity as a social and cultural framework enforces heterosexuality which revolves around the idea that heterosexuality; heteronormativity is the default or "normal" sexual orientation and the ideal form of romantic and sexual relationships as noted in the previous chapter. Heterosexuality often reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations within relationships, where a man and a woman are expected to conform to certain roles and behaviours based on their respective genders. Other sexual orientations are seen as non-normative. However, in this chapter I will proceed to show how heterosexual scripts are restrictive as they do not account for the diverse range of meanings and relationship dynamics through which teenagers in this study experienced sexuality.

Following the work of Rich (1980) and the notion of compulsory heterosexuality, several scholars have suggested that heteronormativity is constantly under threat and unstable (Butler,

1990; Jagose, 1996; Namaste, 2015; Sedgwick, 2008). In Butler's (1990) work, she understands gender as produced through repetitive stylisation of the self. In other words, gender is socially produced and does not exist through a priori discourse. Instead, it is constructed by characteristics and experiences and reflects the surrounding social world. As such, since identities are constructed, they can always be constructed otherwise.

In presenting sexuality “otherwise”, the chapter shows how young people express a diverse range of sexual affiliations that include heterosexuality and also go beyond it to trouble the taken for granted expectation of compulsory heterosexuality. As noted by Persson et al. (2020, p. 54), identification with non-normative genders and sexualities signifies a departure from heterosexual norms but it also “promotes the assumption that people who do not identify with traditional binary categories perceive themselves as different, and that their gender or sexuality is the core reason for this”. However, as this chapter will show, teenage sexuality is far from coherent. Following Albury (2015), I suggest that bi-curiosity shows how, for teenagers, sexuality is more expansive and fluid as they learn to understand and do different kinds of sexualities. In this way, the analysis provides rich insight into why it is necessary to go beyond heteronormative expectations and support young people who do not adhere to conventional sexual identity categories. Through the narratives, perspectives and experiences of young teenagers that follow, the chapter unravels teenage sexuality where heteronormative scripts are being redefined and rewritten. However, these expressions of queer sexuality are also constrained by homophobic attitudes that aim to preserve hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Attitudes Towards and Understandings of Queer Sexuality

Boys and girls have unique perspectives as to what it means to be queer. Santana and Tognasso's (2018) research with Italian teenage boys shows that they have predominantly negative attitudes towards those who identify as queer. This is attributed to a lack of exposure of the queer community as well beliefs in traditional gender roles. This section shows how girls assign different meanings to gender and sexuality.

Girls attribute liberal meanings to gender as explained by Shiluva:

Shiluva: According to me a boy is a person who chooses to be a boy. I would say I was born a boy, but then I choose to be girl. That means I am a girl. And then if I'm a girl, and I choose to be a boy, then that means I'm a boy. Or if you are born that way and you want to be that way, then you are that way.

For Shiluva, gender is a choice and a fluid concept. This is consistent with the research that suggests that gender is a social construct and is continually evolving (Burr, 2015). This participant demonstrates a progressive mindset as she clearly outlines that gender is a matter of how one chooses to identify rather than how one is born. She demonstrates that gender is a choice and does not conform to the binary ideas that are dominant in society. Hence, this progressive outlook serves the goals of a gender equal society.

Bonang: So ma'am, I like doing that in front of my friends, as in like walk as a boy. And then my friends like will be like, "Oh, baby mine" or they would be saying something and then like you know, and then I start blushing, I don't know why ma'am.

The above participant states how she imitates the way in which boys walk in front of her female friends by holding her crotch. This stimulates a sexualised response from the friends who play along and pretend that she is a boy. However, both the imitation and the reaction are both actually a demeaning act as it implies that girls who are considered to be tomboys are inferior to the girls as they are not feminine enough and thus are deserving of the mockery (Holland & Harpin, 2015). This clearly demarcates what is considered to be feminine, and therefore respectable behaviour against behaviour that is considered not feminine and therefore not deserving of respect. The participant states that she begins to blush when the girls appreciate her, which suggests that she likely is sexually aroused and pleased by the fact that she is seen as desirable. This demonstrates that sexuality, desire and attraction are not binary and rigid, but rather are fluid and can be felt by both boys and girls at any point in time (Bhana & Anderson, 2013).

Learners also express confusion between sexual orientation and gender identity:

Ma'am, I have this lesbian friend. When I met her, so I asked her can I call you a girl or a boy since you're lesbian? And then she said I can call her anything. So then there was this group chat when we're supposed to go out altogether, ma'am. Like it was a bunch of girls and a few boys. So we were just the two of us talking in the group, and I don't where the other people were. And then she greeted me and was like, hey girl, but like in Setswana. And I was like, "Hi, baby girl". And then she was like why are you calling me a girl? And then I said but you said I can call you anything. And she was like no, I prefer you to call me a boy. And then weeks later I called her a boy, and then she was like why are you calling me a boy. And I was like okay, should I call you uncle, should

I like call you grandpa, should I call you anything? And then she got offended and left the group. (Oratile, FGD 5, grade 7)

Oratile demonstrates her confusion in the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Her interaction with her lesbian friend implies that the other learner is still exploring her gender and sexuality which proves that these are fluid concepts. Her question around whether she should call her friend a girl or a boy implies that she assumes that lesbians are actually boys, which is a common gender stereotype, just as a gay boy is assumed to be effeminate (Ranade, 2018). Her insistence on finding a label for her friend suggests the predominance of binary notions of identity and that labels are required in order to understand how someone identifies. Oratile's refusal to accept that her friend is still navigating her gender identity and does not really know what she wants to be called is indicative of this. The labelling of one's gender identity in binary terms restricts the exploration of gender and sexuality and limits the fluidity of the process (Hammack et al., 2022).

In my opinion seeing two boys with each other seems wrong to me; it doesn't make sense. But it makes more sense, for me it makes more sense if I see two girls together. (Katlego: FGD 14, grade 9)

Even though girls express that they are accepting of girls who identify as queer, Katlego states that it does not make sense for her to see boys as queer. This means that she subscribes to and is complicit in the notion that queerness is a feminine type of sexuality and that it is only reserved for girls (Ingrey, 2013). For this participant, being gay is not associated with masculinity and does not make sense, suggesting that the expectation for boys is for them to be heterosexual, as this is the norm. Therefore, there is a double standard at play that is imposed upon the boys which suggests that they need to perform as men in order to be perceived as men.

Tlotlego has a unique viewpoint on what counts as losing one's virginity.

Tlotlego: I do not believe in virginity, a certain type of virginity. So like in the olden days, virginity was all about your hymen right. If your hymen breaks, then it means you are not a virgin. It's not that. I feel like virginity is, if you have had sex or not. Sex, actual sex, penis in the vagina sex, not...I don't think you can have sex with a female. A female and female, I don't think they can have sex. Sex is penis inside of the vagina. I've never, I've never heard of sex of like a female and female. Rubbing themselves against each other, I don't think of that as sex. I just think that's just playing around. Or

for gay people, the act of the penises out of the anus, I don't think that's sex. 'Cause ah, it's just not sex. But he can count it as a body count, because yeah.

Tlotlego's response demonstrates the myths and confusion that teenagers have around virginity and sex (Cinthio, 2015). She uses biology to explain virginity, which is in essence a social construct. She refers to it as the breaking of the hymen. This indicates her lack of knowledge around sex and sexuality. Research has shown that sex education is severely lacking in schools and that learners are not always clear about the biology of sex (Francis, 2013). Rather, myths around sex are perpetuated by both teachers and social media which confuses learners. She further goes on to state that for her, sex is a heterosexual act. This implies that heterosexual relationships are the norm and enjoy a sense of hegemony whilst queer relationships are dismissed as "playing around". Tlotlego demonstrates sound knowledge of the ways in which sex works in queer relationships but does not hold them in high regard. This shows how her definition of sex is narrow in nature and is based on biology rather than pleasure and desire.

She goes on to mention that, despite it not being sex, she concedes that the act can count towards a "body count". A body count is a slang term and is defined as how many people one has had sexual intercourse with. Thus, Tlotlego's response is quite contradictory as her definition of a body count is broadened to include anal sex between males but not sex between females. The body count is a way for someone to count how many people they have been intimate with and this is also used colloquially to brag about one's sexual conquests. Tlotlego's concession gives men and boys the opportunity to count all forms of sexual activity as part of their body count, thus giving them the power to boast about their sexual prowess. It is also a dehumanising term as it discounts human aspects and views people as bodies that need to be conquered (Rodriguez & Hernandez, 2018). Thus, it is a misogynistic lens through which romantic partners are viewed which places partners in an inferior position and limits them to objects rather than human beings with emotions and agency.

Exploring Queer Sexuality

Research in the South African context shown how learners who identify as queer are continually marginalised and scrutinised (Francis, 2021). Schools are especially dangerous spaces for queer learners as they are subject to bullying and victimisation. However, this section shows how queer identities are largely accepted and the norm for many learners and that the school and boarding space is a safe zone for them to explore their sexual identities.

Conversely, this is also mitigated by homophobia and the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity.

Bontle: Uhm, I think in grade eight, that's when I knew like I'm actually like [lesbian] – 'cos all my other friends were messing with boys and I was just – I was held back, I was – I just didn't find interest in boys and anytime I did anything with a boy and like even kiss them, I didn't feel anything like how people describe how they feel with males, but with females it was just different. Yeah, and people like, when they know my sexuality – most people – but they still ask me like, they still include men in everything they ask me, so like who do you wanna get married to, like what ethnicity or whatever, they mention it as a man and I'm like, I don't think I'm gonna get married to a man, and then they talk about like...the sex stuff, like so you wanna miss out on this because like if you lesbian, you can't do this and how you gonna have kids – they just start asking so many questions, so that's just also something that I think about a lot 'cos that's what people always talk about and it makes me iffy about my sexuality but I know at the end of day, I just like girls.

In the above extract, Bontle describes how she discovered that she was lesbian. Her lack of interest in boys suggests that she resists dominant discourses which assume that relationships must be heterosexual (Ringrose et al., 2013). She states that her peers expressed curiosity about why she was not involved with men and what her future would be like. Having sex with a man is positioned as the ideal and when one chooses not to conform to this, it is perceived as something that she is missing out on. This makes her feel insecure about her sexuality and she has to constantly defend her position as a lesbian (Pollitt et al., 2021). Pleasure and desire are associated with having a heterosexual relationship (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). These notions draw on essentialist ideas of reproduction and sexuality. Bontle's discomfort with the questioning and curiosity is illustrated by her use of the word "iffy". These comments are intended to make her feel uncertain of her sexuality in the hope that she may become heterosexual, which is much more normalised.

Bontle's peers also assume that she wants to get married and have children as their questions imply they have a propensity for the traditional nuclear family structure that is comprised of a mother, father and children. This shows that young people have been socialised into believing that the nuclear family structure is the norm and the ultimate goal, and is the marker against which all other relationships are measured (Francis, 2017). This places heterosexual

relationships as a symbol of power and prestige and girls are burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that they reproduce, regardless of whether they choose to or not. Hence, a girl's value in society is increased if she is willing to be married and children.

Larona: Okay, so I suspect Otsile and Karabo to not be completely straight, cause they've definitely, like there's this thing boys do where they act a bit gay, but like this one was like emotional, like it had – yeah, like there was definitely a relationship they've had – they've had talking stages with other boys, but they still say they are straight and then my best friend Pheny, uhm, he has come out to me and the rest of my friends as – uhm, I think he said homoflexible or heteroflexible, so he's almost entirely straight but he could – would definitely date a guy.

Larona, who lives in the boys' boarding house, describes how he suspects that two of his friends are queer and attributes this to the kind of behaviour that they display. Francis (2021) writes that feminine behaviour displayed by boys is usually assumed to mean that the person is gay. The term "straight" is also problematic as it has connotations of being good, correct and rigid – aligned and following the rules (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016). Therefore, anything that is not straight is usually condemned and viewed as improper. The colloquial term "talking stages" refers to the initiation of a relationship when young people talk to each other either in person or online in an effort to get to know one another better. Larona notes the contradiction in the way they behave and their claims that they are straight and uses the word "still" to express his scepticism. For him, someone behaving in a particularly feminine manner is automatically assumed to be gay, regardless of what sexuality one may claim to be. Sexuality is associated with feminised behaviour and this demarcation shows that notions of hegemonic masculinity prevail.

Larona then goes on to describe his friend who revealed that he was queer. His search for finding the correct labels and identities is indicative of the ways in which learners are exploring their gendered and sexual identities and reflects the fluidity of sexuality. The binary nature of sexuality is also removed but it could be argued that it is also reinforced as the search for a label signifies that one needs a category to belong to in order to fit in. Hammack et al.'s (2022) research reveals that when young people attach labels to different forms of gender and sexuality, it is an acknowledgement of the diverse spectrum of identities beyond male, female, queer and heterosexual. The revelation of Pheny's sexuality to his friend, despite the criticism that he may face, suggests that, counter to the previous research (Bragg et al., 2018), gender

norms are being resisted and that boys are beginning to accept that they can explore and navigate different forms of sexuality.

When Larona is probed further as to how the other learners reacted to his friend's revelation, he has the following to say:

Larona: Uhm, they treat him the same. Some guys, although they don't know, they suspect him, so they treat him kind of different, calling him gay and stuff, but I've seen it with the girls, they definitely accept him, they're more open.

The above extract shows that girls are more accepting of different sexualities than boys, as different forms of sexuality are viewed as a feminine domain. Therefore, boys reject the notion that a boy could be anything than heterosexual and choose to use name-calling and treat him differently to demonstrate their dislike for anyone who identifies as anything other than heterosexual. Further along in the interview, it is also stated that he is fearful of the senior boys finding out. This is a further threat to his sexuality as it is implied that he will be bullied and humiliated for it, which forces him to keep it a secret. The older boys are placed in a powerful position and dictate the behaviour that the younger boys display. Therefore, disrupting this chain of command is difficult and demoralising, especially to those who identify differently (Fredrick et al., 2022). Hegemonic forms of masculinity are promoted while alternative forms of masculinity are silenced and stamped out.

Maipelo: He first told me that he had a crush on a boy and I was like, "You're bisexual?" and then he's like, "Yeah, I've been meaning to tell you" and I'm like, "Okay, tell me about this boy" then he told me about him, and then from there he's just been like – I've just been the person that he told, he doesn't wanna tell any of his friends, because he feels like a lot of them are going to judge him for who he is and stuff, so he's just in the closet, very much.

In the above extract, Maipelo describes how her male friend revealed to her that he was bisexual. As queer identities are seen as feminine (Manago, 2013), it is evident that her friend finds it more comforting for him to reveal himself as bisexual to his female friend instead of his male friends. His reluctance to tell his male friends about his sexuality is validated due to his fear of being judged and vilified for being gay and thus assumed to be less masculine. This illustrates the heteronormativity and patriarchy that is prevalent within the male group. These data are in line with research that shows that masculinity is defined by being heterosexual (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016). Maipelo further uses the words "in the closet" which

illustrates how sexuality that diverges from heterosexuality is something that needs to be concealed and is not the norm at the school, especially for the boys. This binary language positions those who identify as straight to be those who hold much more power than those who do not (Fields & Payne, 2016).

Mpho: So I was in 6th grade, and we were basically going for like swimming and whatever. So we went to the locker room. And there was this one girl that I liked. And she basically just matched my energy and I felt romantic feelings for her. And then we ended up just talking and then it made me basically love her. But then she wasn't really in that vibe, so then that's when I realised okay, so I like girls, not just boys but yeah.

In the above extract, Mpho discusses how she discovered that she was bisexual. The interaction in the locker room reveals how spaces in the school are used as sites for the production of sexuality (Allen, 2013a). Mpho's story also highlights the complexities of romance and romantic feelings as children develop romantic feelings from a young age: she was aged 13 in grade 6. Research has shown that children are sexual beings and that they are capable of experiencing romantic feelings as well as experiencing love and that this is not just a domain that is reserved for adults (Bhana, 2017c).

Palesa speaks about being friends with a boy who identifies as bisexual:

Palesa: I treat him like a normal person, but I feel like I view gay people as more feminine, like I view them as "women". Because they are, they are attracted to males. So I feel like I treat them more like women, like I tell them things I would tell girls. I wouldn't treat them as strong males, which is kind of wrong. But I see them, not I see them, but how I feel about them is more feminine, I see them as feminine.

Palesa describes how she is in a compromising position as she treats her bisexual friend as she would anyone else, however, she states that she views gay people as feminine. She subscribes to dominant notions of masculinity which link gay men to femininity (Ranade, 2018). She states that she confides in her bisexual male friend as she would to girls, which assumes that gay men are much more emotionally available and aware than men conforming to dominant forms of masculinity, where emotions are expected to be suppressed. She further states that she does not see her friend as strong, which is another quality that is associated with hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 2020). Therefore, Palesa is complicit in endorsing stereotypes of how heterosexual men behave as opposed to queer men. They are placed in binary positions where gay men are viewed as effeminate whilst heterosexual men are seen as real men. Palesa

acknowledges that she may be incorrect in her assumptions which demonstrates that she is aware of the stereotypes that pervade dominant definitions of masculinity.

Kamogelo describes a time when he discovered that he may be bisexual:

Kamogelo: Once I've gone through a phase of being bisexual, so I, I love, I, I love women, I admire them a lot, I'll always love women. But once I've had feelings for a male, feelings that I've never felt before, but it was just a phase. So I was scared that maybe I'll do something wrong, but it was just a phase, and now I'm straight. And I've discovered that I've admired women so much, that I hang out – I, I uhm, I communicate with women better. So myself, I, I'm a woman on the inside, but with a man's body.

Throughout this extract, Kamogelo continuously defends his position as a heterosexual male by reiterating that he loves women. Therefore, his masculine identity is constructed through his good relationship with women. However, he confesses that he had feelings for men which suggests that his identity as a heterosexual man is not as rigid as stated in his defence. His revelation is tied to the fear that he may do something wrong which suggests his awareness that queer identity is associated with being powerless and subject to ridicule, thus restricting him from exploring his sexuality (Warner, 1993). He also toys with the idea of his gender and states that he is actually a woman, which implies that his beliefs are tied to notions that demarcate the qualities that are associated with men and women. Therefore, Kamogelo finds himself in a bind where on the one hand he feels that he needs to demonstrate that he is straight by embodying the characteristics that make him masculine and, on the other, that he may actually be queer but fear holds him back. His performance of gender is tied to his ability to connect with women. This could be construed as misogynistic or sexist as it is assumed that one needs to be a woman or have feminine qualities and characteristics in order to understand women, which forces him to comply with being a hegemonic male.

Mpho further goes on to discuss the dynamics of her revealing her sexuality to the rest of the girls in her year group:

Mpho: When I see these girls, I basically feel like I can learn so much from them. 'Cos they are not really afraid to say going on and say hey, I'm bisexual, I don't care what you say. And I've learned from them that it's okay to like girls I mean, why not like girls, you know? So yeah. There's actually quite a lot.

Mpho speaks about how other girls in her grade also identify as bisexual and are unafraid of expressing their sexuality. She draws comfort and inspiration from their experiences as well as a sense of liberation. Teenagers are highly influenced and affected by their peers and this incidence suggests that Mpho's experience of being bisexual is validated by her peers. By being in a similar peer group, a sense of empowerment is achieved (Porta et al., 2017). Mpho chooses to own her identity and displays her agency by declaring her sexuality and standing by it rather than concealing it from others. Thus, a sense of solidarity is achieved.

In the next extract, Lerato speaks about her experience of being a straight girl who lives in a boarding house that is comprised mostly of girls who identify with alternative sexualities:

Lerato: Uhm, I don't know – at some point I was curious, like – uhm, I think they call it bi-curious, I was curious whether I was bisexual or straight, but I think I like boys, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you ever feel pressured to be bisexual or bi-curious because of the other girls around you?

Lerato: Yeah, I do feel a lot of pressure – 'Cause most of my friends are not – are part of the LGBTQ – it's like only maybe me and Lesego out of everyone else, that's straight.

Interviewer: So do you get mocked for being straight?

Lerato: Ya, they'll be like "you're straight", "ah, straight people are so boring oooh", yeah. I feel kind of uncomfortable when people say, "Ha, just try kissing a girl" or "try look[ing] at a girl like this". Yeah, just makes me feel so – I feel judged for who I am.

Lerato reveals how she was once at a stage in which she was exploring her sexual orientation and labels herself as being bi-curious. This confirms the notions that gender and sexuality are fluid concepts (Bhana, 2016a). Her willingness and openness towards exploring her sexuality suggest that she acknowledges that she may not identify with heterosexual norms and is open to experimentation. However, her confirmation of being straight comes with a paradoxical complication as she is pressured into having to conform to the sexual orientation choices of the rest of the girls. Even though the girls are empowered in terms of their sexuality, there is still an expectation that all girls will have the same type of sexual orientation. This means that the hierarchies of power are overturned and the dominant sexuality of being bisexual or bi-curious is elevated. The element of coercion also comes into play as Lerato is bullied into having sexual

relations with other girls. The girls are quoted as describing being straight as “boring” which suggests that exploring with sexuality is much more desirable and powerful and gives one a higher status and more popularity than someone who is straight. This confession also demonstrates that new forms of sexuality are starting to be accepted by young people, especially girls. Lerato is encouraged to attempt kissing a girl which implies that girls are in a state of experimentation and are participating in sexual acts without necessarily having emotional investments. It also implies that one’s sexuality is tied to desire, as kissing is a physical act of intimacy and the girls suggest that once a physical connection is established, then it has the power to change one’s sexuality. Lerato’s identity as a straight, black young woman is then marginalised for the cause of experimentation and exploration.

Boys and Sexuality

Hegemonic masculinity dictates that boys display homophobic attitudes and distance themselves from any form of behaviour that may be considered gay or effeminate (Connell, 2020). This section demonstrates that the boys in this context have similar values which promotes gender inequality and subordinates alternative forms of masculinity.

The dynamics amongst the boys in the boarding house are quite pronounced, as elaborated on by the participant below:

These boys ... they don’t literally mean like rape like that. They mean like, they’ll be fully dressed then they’ll be busy humping each other. (Kabelo: FGD 14, grade 9)

The close proximity to each other in the boarding house gives boys the leeway to express themselves in gendered and sexual ways (Fredrick et al., 2022). The above participant reveals the ways in which boys behave in the boarding house away from the observation of the girls and adults. Boys harass each other by humping each other in the houses as a way to sexually please themselves. It is argued that the boys are experimenting with each other in ways which may not be permitted by the outside world as it is viewed as a stain on their masculinity. This ambush is also a demonstration of their sexual prowess. Even though heterosexuality is the norm amongst the boys at school, behaviour associated with queer sexuality is exhibited when the boys feel that they cannot control their sexual urges. The participant goes on to describe this as “rape” which suggests that this may not be consensual and that boys take advantage of one another’s weaknesses in order to pleasure themselves. This suggests that there is a

hierarchical imbalance of power amongst the boys as sexual violence is administered as a way to bolster masculinity (Morrell, 1993).

Boys are also restricted in the ways they express themselves, as narrated by Bafana:

Bafana: Okay. Uhm, so one time I was at home, and my mom just put a little bit of nail polish on my fingers. And then my dad was talking with my uncles, so his brothers. And I came there and then I wanted to ask him a question, I forgot what it was. And then everyone started laughing at me when my dad pointed out there was nail polish on my fingers. He just told my uncles to look at me and then they all started laughing, he also laughed. I was quite young, so I was embarrassed. I just ran away. [I removed the polish] immediately.

Bafana recalls an earlier childhood incident in which he was shamed into behaving in a manner that was perceived to be fitting of a boy. Painting nails is a way of expressing femininity and this suggests that Bafana was curious and experimenting with the ways in which he could make himself look and feel good. However, this behaviour is shamed out him by his parent and other figures of authority in his life as they attempt to correct his behaviour. This ensures that he does not grow up to be someone who identifies as an alternative gender. Nail polish is associated with femininity and traditionally used by females and by stopping him from using nail polish, Bafana's father is restricting his son's gender to someone who is masculine and strong and ensuring that his behaviour is not associated with anything that is feminine (Zaslow, 2018).

Furthermore, by publicly laughing at and humiliating him, his father is emulating the behaviours of how hegemonic men may react to men whom they deem to be feminine in nature. This is a demonstration of hegemonic masculinity and sends the message that being feminine is not a desired trait in a real man. Hence, Bafana's exploration of his gender and sexuality is restricted and curtailed by the significant figures in his life: his father and uncles. As parents are role models to children, especially at younger ages, their behaviour becomes the norm that children quickly adopt and emulate. Bafana states that he immediately removed the polish which means that the message that was passed by his father about what it means to be masculine was successfully ingrained into him (Hunter et al., 2017).

Larona further goes on to describe the homophobic attitudes of the boys:

Moroka: Uhm, there was an LGBTQ flag in the dining hall and one of my friends was like, "Ah, why's this flag here?", "I'm not going to eat in this dining hall if that flag is

there”, “I hate the gays you know, screw them, fuck them” and stuff like that. So he refused to eat in the dining hall for like that week or two, yea.

Larona makes reference to the hoisting of the flag in the dining hall as described previously in the methodology chapter. The reactions to the LGBTQ flag are quite intense and the dining hall becomes a space that is associated with supporting the LGBTQ community which some boys do not want to occupy for fear of being labelled in the same way. Their homophobic attitudes are clearly depicted by the ways in which they use vulgar language to denigrate gay people and openly express their hatred for them (Manago, 2013). Despite the flag being up in the dining hall for a maximum of approximately three days, the refusal to eat in the dining hall for an entire week or two is indicative of the strong hatred the boys possess for the LGBTQ community. This is in line with hegemonic attitudes of masculinity as the boys’ attitudes serves to alienate and other those who do not comply to homophobic constructions of masculinity. By walking out of the dining hall and refusing to eat, the boys were choosing to exercise their agency and resist conforming to the values of the school as these go against their definition of masculinity.

Larona, however, expresses his thoughts on their reactions:

Larona: I was definitely shocked because I thought at this point in time, people wouldn’t be so closed-minded. I thought people would be woke because like, a lot of people are finding themselves, so I thought it would be proportional to people accepting them.

Larona’s response suggests a more progressive mindset towards the LGBTQ community and thus implies that he is accepting of those who do not conform to traditional constructions of sexuality. He demonstrates an understanding of the struggles of the LGBTQ community and is therefore much more empathetic towards them. His refusal to subscribe to hegemonic forms of masculinity suggests that he is involved in the production of a protest masculinity that is more liberal and accepting of those who identify as queer (Connell, 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how learners go beyond heterosexual scripts and explore their queer identities. It began by showing the diverse attitudes and curiosity that learners have towards queer identities. Girls are eager to learn about and accept different forms of sexuality. However, some learners express confusion as to what constitutes gender identity, sexual orientation and the operation of sex within queer relationships. Girls and boys show how they explore lesbian,

gay and bisexual identities and the ways in which they express them. However, boys largely display homophobic attitudes at school and reinforce hegemonic masculinity, which does not allow for alternative forms of masculinity to be explored. The next chapter will focus on how hegemonic masculinity prevails at the school.

Chapter 7: Hegemonic Masculinity and Subordination

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the ways in which learners expand their sexuality through their negotiation of queer identities. It was also shown how boys who embody alternative forms of masculinity are marginalised. This chapter will argue that the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity subordinates girls and fosters gender inequality. The uses and applications of the terms “hoe” and “slut” will be discussed, followed by a discussion on the gendered connotations of the words “sneaky links”, “simsps” and “homie hoppers” as used by the learners. It will then go on to discuss the ways in which learners are sexually harassed at school and how these behaviours are resisted. Furthermore, it is shown how social media is used as a tool to subordinate girls and to coerce them into sharing pornified images. Boys and girls also objectify each other’s bodies and this manifests into untoward behaviour. Finally, this chapter will explore the trend of “No Nut November” and how this reinforces hegemonic masculinity.

Many researchers have theorised about the unequal power relations that exist between boys and girls (Connell, 2020). This is especially pronounced in parts of Africa in which cultural norms further contribute to the ways in which women are subordinated. It has been shown that the school context is a dangerous space for girls and that it serves to reinforce hegemonic masculine ideals (Morrell et al., 2013). Girls bear the brunt of this as they are subordinated and have to find ways to negotiate the constraints that are placed upon them. Girls are subject to a double standard in which their gender and sexuality are restricted to what are deemed acceptable by boys, whilst boys enjoy the freedoms of engaging in heterosexual relationships without being held accountable for any of their misdemeanours.

Girls also show resistance towards hegemonic norms and are not always passive and accepting of gender norms. However, this is met with resistance as they are acting outside what is normalised and thus they are called names as well as being ostracised by males as well as by other girls. This leads to unequal gender dynamics which makes girls vulnerable to abuse and victimisation, as will be shown in this chapter.

Sluts and Hoes

“Slut-shaming” is a common occurrence in schools as it serves to regulate girls’ behaviour to ensure that they conform to the traditional passive stereotypes of femininity (Miller, 2017). It

is also a vehicle or discourse to perpetuate gender inequality and strengthen hegemonic masculinity. There are double standards that are attached to girls' sexuality and this serves to subordinate girls in the long term as girls are expected to conform to certain gender norms. This section outlines how the term "slut" and "hoe" are used against girls to regulate their sexuality.

Palesa exposes the different expectations of boys and girls at the school:

Palesa: Play sports, drink, vape, get girls, play with girls' feelings. Just everything, make sure that you ruin someone's life in some type of way to be a cool boy.

Interviewer: Yeah. And a girl? What are the expectations of a girl?

Palesa: I feel like a girl is to always be perfect. And to always stay away from boys or to always just focus on books and studying and never like care about boys, just to focus on books and their education. And also that they must be clean, they should yeah, basically just be perfect, yeah.

Palesa's vehement response to what it takes to be considered a real boy at the school is indicative of the destructive forms of masculinity that are prevalent at the school. She highlights how boys engage in substance abuse and risky forms of behaviour in order to be accepted by their peer groups. She further relates this to how boys treat girls as sexual objects in order to be popular. She raises a point about feelings which resonates with research that shows that girls form romantic attachments when they are in relationships whereas boys seek pleasure (Singh, 2013). This suggests that a common ground is not reached and therefore boys take advantage of girls' vulnerabilities in order to be perceived as popular. Forming emotional attachments as a boy is not desirable behaviour, as it is seen as weak and compared to being like a girl, which is not the goal (Tolman et al., 2004). The strength and power of a boy lies in being able to begin and end relationships quickly.

Palesa goes on to elaborate on the expectations of a girl. She states that there are high expectations placed on girls to be perfect in every way, even though this is idealistic. They must aspire for perfection in their academic, social and romantic pursuits in order to be respected and admired. This exposes the double standard that exists for boys and girls. Being imperfect is desirable for boys whilst being perfect is desired for girls (Holland & Harpin, 2015). This is linked to notions of hyperfemininity, as being a girl is defined as being meek and quiet. Palesa points out how girls are expected to stay away from boys and this relates to

the idea that girls need to be seen as innocent and not tainted by the pressures they face from boys. Being associated with boys places a girl at risk of being slut-shamed, and therefore a girl's dignity and respectability is linked to her ability to restrain herself from having romantic relationships (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). These expectations are imposed on girls by boys who desire women who are "clean" and modest whereas for men having many partners is a sign of their virility and masculinity.

You guys are romantically attracted to each other, but you are slowly getting to that point where you guys are going to end up dating. The fact that you are both romantically attracted to each other, that doesn't mean that you have the right to go to someone else and do same thing. Because then it's like the thing that you are a hoe. Hoe. Hoe.
(Kabelo, FGD 14, grade 9)

Kabelo, a boy, states that once one is at the talking stage, one cannot be involved with others and calls those who engage in such behaviour whores. This view confines the meaning of a relationship to one that is monogamous and based on trust. This rigid perspective constrains the ways in which a relationship is negotiated to one that is based on loyalty despite the feelings one might have for others. Using a derogatory term such as "hoe" positions girls as inferior and relegates their sexuality to feminine ideals of romance, trust and loyalty. It assumes that romantic relationships are linear and that they will end in dating. It restricts girls' sexuality and places pressure on them to conform to monogamous relationships. Being with more than one partner is viewed as a promiscuous form of behaviour which is not tolerated for girls (Allison & Risman, 2013).

Onkabetse explains how girls manipulate boys' feelings and become known as "players" in the process:

Onkabetse: Yes, yes, there would, especially if it's like a boy who is not used to female attention or a boy who is like hurt in a way, who doesn't have like... I don't know, like for example I've heard the boys talk. Those who aren't very present, whose mothers aren't present in their lives. They tend to seek a lot of like female validation and those females they'd use that against them and like you know, sort of manipulate the guy say "Oh no, I really like you" and then just leave them and then do the same to the next boy. Basically like treat that boy like he's the only boy, like uhm, how can I say it, nurture him in a way, not nurture him, but like just obsess over him, yeah. Because I think they like that of, "Oh, wow, she loves me completely, wholeheartedly". Then out

of the, like out of the blue, she just drops him and then go to the next guy, does the same thing.

Onkabetse describes girls who play on boys' feelings and use them in order to gain sexual gratification. She describes the types of boys who are picked on. These are not boys who subscribe to hegemonic norms, but rather are viewed as weak and vulnerable to being exploited by girls who would like to use them for sex. However, they are complicit in receiving the benefits of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2020). She describes them as needing to have female validation as they were not loved by their mothers. This is a reference to the Oedipus complex where boys desire women who resemble their mothers (Kohon, 2012). Therefore, from Onkabetse's viewpoint, these relationships are formed to be mutually beneficial both psychologically and sexually. The girls move from one partner to the next seeking sexual gratification and are therefore exhibiting their agency as sexual beings. When the girls choose boys who they consider to be weaker, they are placed in a position of power which gives them the freedom to choose what they would like to do with the boys by dismissing their feelings.

However, this type of behaviour is also accompanied by negative judgements:

Onkabetse: Uhm, they say like yeah, they would call her a hoe or something, they call her a hoe. And it would be the same guys who do those things, they'd call her a hoe. Or be like nah, she is not fine for that. But there are some boys who, when their guy friends do play girls, they also like reprimand them say nah, you can't do that, you did that girl so wrong. And even for girls, there are some girls who are like, "You can't do this to that guy, that's so wrong, don't do that".

In the above extract, Onkabetse describes how boys react to girls behaving in sexually promiscuous way by labelling them as "hoes". This is suggestive of the sexual double standards that are prevalent at the school (Miller, 2017). Boys are celebrated for being sexually active and for having multiple partners whilst girls are vilified for doing the same. This is due to the gendered norms that dictate that girls need to be submissive and practise sexual abstinence in order to maintain their respectability. However, for boys the opposite holds true as they need to display their masculinity and one way of doing this is by having multiple partners.

Conversely, Onkabetse explains how some boys do actually hold each other accountable for the hurt that they have caused to the girls. This suggests that some boys embody protest masculinity in which they reject hegemonic masculine norms (Connell, 2020). Girls also do the same and this creates accountability and could potentially lead to the promotion of healthier

and more stable romantic relationships that are rooted in trust, loyalty and honesty. Therefore, peer groups play an important role in creating, and dismantling gender norms.

Sneaky Links, Simps and Homie Hoppers

This section shows the double standards that are applied to girls as opposed to boys in relation to their romantic partnerships. The slang terms that are used connote a legitimization of sexually risky behaviour and female subordination. This is in line with expressions of hegemonic masculinity (Morrell et al., 2013).

Wame talks about the slang term “sneaky link”:

Wame: A sneaky link is someone you do things with on the move, when you're in a relationship. Where you tend to get bored and run to do things with another person, because you see that person sexually, yes ma'am, and you can't pleasure yourself, so you want the sneaky link. And it's someone you sneak around with, kiss and you just must make sure not to get caught. Yes ma'am. I have had a sneaky link. But it doesn't end well ma'am, because people start making rumours about me and yeah, and people love making rumours about me ma'am. I don't know why, but this year there's been three rumours saying I fucked three girls this year ma'am, which hasn't happened, yes ma'am.

Wame defines the term “sneaky link” that is commonly used by learners to describe the clandestine relationships that they engage in. Wame explains that these illicit relationships are founded purely on a sexual basis and used to satisfy sexual urges. He explains how one must ensure that they do not get caught out both by peers and teachers. These relationships are external to their main relationships which is why it is called a sneaky link. This implies that boys and girls are willing to place themselves in perilous situations in order to experience sexual pleasure (Sommer et al., 2015) and highlights the ways in which the rules of normative relationships are flouted and negotiated in order to experience desire. Wame states that one partner sees the other in a sexual manner which suggests that both partners negotiate the terms of their clandestine relationship, thus exercising their agency in the process.

Wame further goes on to discuss the limitations of the relationship as others find out about the sneaky link and start to spread rumours about it. This highlights that having clandestine relationships can be quite dangerous and damaging to one's reputation. His assertion that the rumour is false suggests that by having clandestine relationships, it poses a risk to those

involved and has the potential to damage the public relationship that one has. The rumours can also be greatly exaggerated and thus Wame laments the rumours that have been made up about him. However, instead of reacting with pride, he reacts defensively which suggests that his masculinity is not defined by the number of girls he has had relationships with.

Bonolo defines the meaning of the term “simp” which is often used in a derogatory manner amongst the learners:

Bonolo: Apparently in their eyes, a boy would have to play soccer, basketball, a boy has to wear cologne, a boy has to not be a simp. A boy, a simp meaning, a simp is when a guy is not pushed over, but when he respects a female so much, he does everything to to win her over. And he stays that way. Not because he wants to win her over, but because he has respect for her. Basically, that’s how I would say a simp is. But some people say a simp is a guy that has no respect for himself, like he’s always chasing females. He has nothing better else to do, than to chase a female because he doesn’t know who he is and all that. But I will say a simp is, is a man who respects himself, respects both him and a female, so...

Bonolo explains the type of boy that many girls at the school desire. In order for a male to be desired, he primarily needs to be athletic and with good hygiene. This places pressure on boys to subscribe to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity as being athletic is linked to being strong and enjoying popularity (Swain, 2014). She further goes on to discuss what it means to be a simp and why it is not a desired trait in a male. According to her definition, a simp is someone who is attentive and submissive to women. This makes a boy undesirable because he needs to show less vulnerability and be emotionally distant towards a girl in order to attract them (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). Doing the opposite defines the boy as someone who is effeminate and uninteresting, and therefore undesirable. A boy’s supposed lack of interest makes him more desirable because it indicates that he has other interests and is a well-rounded individual and does not get emotionally tied down, which denotes strength and power. On the other hand, a boy who is considered to be a simp is seen as someone who is subordinate and therefore does not enjoy as much power in the school environment. However, for Bonolo, a simp is someone who is respectable because it is a sign that he respects women which implies that she is not complicit to dominant notions of masculinity and femininity.

Girls can also be called simps as further explained by Bonolo:

Bonolo: Because I mean, if you've had to have a boyfriend for instance, and your friends would say "stop being a simp for him", well just say your female friends are telling you this. Now you have to play hard to get, you have to be rude to him, you have to make sure he notices you, but you don't want his attention, all those things. That's how girls nowadays and boys nowadays want to get into relationships. They want to first play hard to get, they want to be rude and that's how they think they will end up in a stable relationship, but it's very wrong.

Bonolo describes how girls have to "play hard to get" in order to avoid being labelled as simps. This implies that a girl has to lean into a traditional feminine role in order for her to be accepted amongst her peer group. Bonolo states that one has to be rude to the boy and pretend that one has no interest in them in order to be considered desirable. This is a paradoxical expectation as well as a double standard as girls are subordinate in this position and are not allowed to express their true feelings (Ringrose et al., 2013). This requires that they curtail their desire and is also a way for them to safeguard themselves against being rejected or publicly humiliated by both boys and girls.

Tisetso, a male, defines simp behaviour from his point of view:

Tisetso: A simp is like a – like someone who'd do anything for their boyfriend or girlfriend. Let's say like, you make anything, like let's say an account, and then follow just your girlfriend, like you write your girlfriend's name anywhere. Like let's say you playing with your boys and then your girl calls you, like you go immediately. You don't even say bye to your boys, you just go to her. Like, everything's about her. That's a simp. Like to the girl's side it's a good thing, but like to your friends, they feel like you don't care about them, like you always with your girl, you never like make time for them and stuff like that.

The sentiments that are expressed in this extract are similar to what Bonolo stated. However, for Tisetso, loyalty to the male friendship group is more important and one who prioritises his girlfriend over his friendship groups is not viewed in a favourable light. Spending too much time with the girlfriend is frowned upon and discouraged. This links to the idea of masculinity and how a boy is expected not to express any strong emotions within a relationship that would make him seem weak and vulnerable in front of his peers. He is required to have a tough exterior and show that being in a relationship does not have any effect on him and that the relationship should be treated casually (Yeo, 2016). Tisetso acknowledges that girls prefer boys

who are emotionally attached and available as it demonstrates their love and loyalty in the relationship. However, for boys, this is a sign of weakness and should be suppressed.

Karabo provides a definition for the term “homie hopper”, another term that is quite common at the school:

Karabo: A homie hopper is like a girl who like jumps from like different boys. Let’s say, like the girl is in a relationship then they broke up, then she jumps to another person for comfort. And then they came to like an argument and they break up and then she goes to another person for comfort.

Karabo defines a specific term that has been designed by boys to describe girls who seek comfort from boys other than those they are in a relationship with. This suggests the ways in which girls are restricted from having more than one male as a friend as they are judged negatively for this. This viewpoint derives from sexist perceptions of girls in relationships, as when a girl is seen with a boy who is not her boyfriend, it is automatically assumed that she is cheating on him or that she has moved on very quickly. This name-calling is done in a derogatory manner as it positions girls as sexually promiscuous and restricts their capacity for enjoying romantic or platonic relationships for fear that they will be condemned for it (Farvid et al., 2017). Furthermore, the term “homie” refers to boys who are friends and thus positions boys against girls as girls are marginalised for attempting to have romantic relationships with all the boys. This forms part of a “bro code” as boys are expected to protect each other from behaviour that might not be favourable to them or their reputations (Keith, 2020). Hence, the word “hopper” is also exaggerated to imply that the girl is someone who is disloyal to her romantic partner and, by extension, his friends.

Tshepo explains why he disapproves of girls homie hopping:

Tshepo: I would say it’s a bad thing, because you know, as guys, I feel like we should have the conversation that if you like my ex, I feel like it’s only right for you to tell me first, and we have a conversation because this was a girl I once had interest in whether it was emotionally or physically, I once had interest in her.

Tshepo states that according to him, boys should communicate with each other about the girls that they pursue as it is a sign of respect for their peers. Therefore, he places the blame for the cheating and homie hopping on boys and explains that the emotional and physical attraction still lingers even after the relationship has ended. Tshepo’s response has a double meaning, as

on the one hand, he is open to negotiating the rules of engagement when it comes to which girls boys pursue, which suggests that the bro code is adhered to and these discussions are necessary in order to maintain loyalty to the boys (Keith, 2020). On the other hand, girls' agency is curtailed and they are not included in these conversations. This is a limitation to their freedom to choose their romantic partners and stifles and rejects any feelings they may have on the matter. His masculine identity is therefore constructed around his ability to ensure that loyalty to his friends is maintained.

Larona describes a situation that he witnessed with both boys and girls homie hopping:

Larona: It's a girl who gets with your friends. Like I dated this guy, this guy, this guy, and it's actually a situation that's happening right now. The guys are aware of it, but like they – it's like a thing of they – both parties think that they are players. She thinks she's the player, they think they're the players, so it's like, "Oh I'm passing this girl to you, awe, enjoy enjoy", and she's like, "Ah, I'm playing these boys, they are easy".

Larona describes the intricate nuances of homie hopping and how everyone in the situation believes that they are winning at the game that they are playing. He explains the manipulation that goes on in these relationships and the joy that both boys and girls derive from moving between multiple partners and the agreements and arrangements they make to derive pleasure from each other. This is symbolic of the boys' belief that they can have multiple girls at once as it gives them a sense of power (Tolman et al., 2016). Girls also feel a sense of power as they can have multiple partners without needing to justify it. However, there is form of deceit involved which mitigates the sense of power that learners feel as they are unaware that they are being manipulated. The word "easy" is used to describe those who are considered to be sexually promiscuous and sexually active which suggests that it is a derogatory term that is used for both boys and girls. This is in contrast to those who restrain themselves and choose to comply with traditional gender roles where a girl is expected to show restraint in sexual activities in order to be respected. Therefore, the boys' masculinity is defined by their ability to move between different sexual partners.

Larona goes on describe a situation that he witnessed in which a girl was found to be homie hopping:

Larona: There's this girl called Lebo. She's in my class. She started off the year dating my friend, Karabo, who I suspect he's gay – he's that guy from when – Yeah, yeah, so she dated him and then she dated – like it was our friend group – we're our friend group,

we're tight, like this [crosses fingers], so after that, she dates Kwesi. Kwesi's my roommate, and then that lasted a week, that was a crazy relationship. And then maybe a couple days later, like it was almost at the same time, like it was so close, you'd think it was the same time, she went from Kwesi to Ofentse, like this [clicks fingers] fast. That's when people were like, ah, she's a hoe, like guys, she's even ugly, don't go for her, this girl is just trouble. And then she takes her break for the holidays, and now she's with my friend Letsoalo. And those are just my boarder friends, four of them, in between [stutter] each guy, there were probably two other day scholars guy, like, four guys in my class alone have dated her, in my class alone. Yeah, so it's very like weird how one girl can just go from your friend to your friend to your friend, and you guys don't know how to feel about it. Yea, it can ruin relationships.

Larona narrates a story about a girl who dated his entire friendship group and expresses his shock at her ability to do this. He mentions that he suspects his friend Karabo is gay and his assumptions are based on Karabo's behaviour and mannerisms rather than a direct admission that he is gay. This suggests that effeminate behaviour is automatically associated with being gay and thus inferior to those who are heterosexual (Bhana & Mayeza, 2019). When the girl chooses to be with multiple partners in rapid succession, she is making use of her sexual agency (Bay-Cheng, 2015). However, this agency is constrained by the boys labelling her a "hoe" which suggests that she is not to be respected because she is acting outside the expected normative behaviour of a girl. Therefore, this becomes an anomaly and a warning to the boys for them to stay away from her.

The boys go further, to pick on her appearance, as she is described as "ugly" by the same boys who dated her. This shows that a double standard is at play as the boys' pride and egos are bruised when they find out that she is dating their friends (Ford, 2019). Boys construct their masculine identities through their ability to ensure that girls remain loyal to them as this is when they feel most secure. In addition, to them, physicality and attractiveness are important aspects of attraction within sexual relationships and thus they refer to her looks as undesirable because she does not conform to the expected codes of behaviour of a girl, and her actions are perceived as a transgression, which is then transferred to her appearance. This experience also brings the boys closer and the bro code is enforced as the boys seek to alienate her from their group (Keith, 2020). This suggests that even though they may not be loyal to the girls, they still expect girls to be loyal to them which reinforces their power and hegemony over the girls.

Sexual Harassment

The issue of sexual harassment at schools has been widely researched and serves to make the school space uncomfortable and unsafe for girls (Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Similarly, in this study it has also been found that boys sexually harass girls in an effort to assert their dominance and to show off their male prowess.

When asked about sexual harassment at the school, Tshepo has the following to say:

Tshepo: Uhm, summer uniform...when girls are wearing summer uniform and their thighs are revealed, some boys would just come and you know, touch where you not supposed to or yeah, they basically take the opportunity because of how they dressed – Ah, I really don't know what to do, because of a lot of the times it's bigger, older, stronger boys that are doing this and we really just have to stay in your lane like...

Tshepo describes the harassment that girls experience as administered by the boys. He explains how the girls' summer uniforms give the boys an opportunity to touch them inappropriately between their thighs. Even though dress codes and uniforms have been created to protect learners from harassment (Edwards & Marshall, 2020), it is violated by the boys. This shows that even though for girls wearing a short dress is a liberating experience, it still comes with drawbacks where boys feel that they have been given the green light to touch them in an inappropriate manner. Boys assert their power and dominance in a myriad of ways and girls are compelled to resist this unwanted behaviour. The boys' behaviour is an assertion of their masculinity and maleness, and by touching girls, they show their aggression and power. Hence, girls are placed in a powerless position in relation to the boys. Tshepo goes on to state that because this behaviour is engaged in by the senior learners, and he is in a junior position, it becomes difficult for him and his peers to retaliate. This suggests that age and strength play a role in setting norms of behaviour whilst the juniors are in a powerless position to stop this behaviour. Therefore, in the process, they become complicit in what the older boys are doing and would likely do the same.

Thandiwe, in the focus group, adds the following:

What girls, and most girls don't feel comfortable about, is that a lot of boys get attracted by boobs and your bums and start touching them and then it's all touchy, touchy and it's weird. It's sexual harassment basically, what it is, ma'am, yeah. So aye. (Thandiwe: FGD 8, grade 7)

Thandiwe's response is consistent with Tshireletso's comment in the previous chapter, in that she states that boys are generally attracted to girls' genitalia. She further adds that the girls experience harassment by the boys as they are subjected to inappropriate touching. Thandiwe identifies this as sexual harassment and this can be damaging to the girls as their freedoms are limited (Gonick & Conrads, 2022). For the boys, the abuse and harassment give them a sense of power and bolster their masculine identities. This behaviour objectifies girls as they are highly sexualised and seen as nothing more. The girls are placed in a vulnerable position as they continually have to be on the lookout for and aware of these unwanted sexual advances by the boys. Hence, it limits the girls' capacities for expressing themselves freely. The school becomes an unsafe space for the girls.

Girls also experience unwanted sexual advances at school that they have to deflect:

Kagego: Tlotlego, Tapiwa and I, when we were going into a grade 9 class. It was Mr Smit's. And we were going into his class, because he's our tutor, and we had left one of our projects in his storage. We went to go collect it and he had the grade nines in his class. And then I don't know their names, but it was day scholar grade nine boys. And they were busy saying that the other is so pretty, the other one has big bums ahahahaha. And then as we were leaving the class, uhm, two boys came outside, while we were sitting outside. And they were like, "Hey, can we please have your guys' numbers?" and we were like, "No" and then we just walked away.

As Kagego is in grade 8, she and her friends are younger than the grade 9 boys that they encountered. Walking past a group of boys at school becomes a dangerous and risky act for girls as they are subjected to unprovoked wolf whistling and cat calls by the boys. The girls then have to work to resist these advances as they choose to walk away from the situation. Their bodies are also subjected to scrutiny which leads to feelings of insecurity and of being subjected to the male gaze. Boys behave in this manner to impress each other as they are encouraged by the group and feel a sense of bravado. By catcalling and commenting on girls' bodies they are signalling their power and sexual prowess as young sexually virile boys (Jewell & Brown, 2013). However, this places girls in a vulnerable position as they lose their power and have to devise ways in which to resist the boys' advances.

Boys also interpret girls' behaviour sexually as explained by one of the participants:

When you do certain things, us girls we are seducing the boys. So, ma'am, in class, you'll be standing and when you'll be helping someone standing like this [bends over].

And they'll be like, "Tshenolo, you're seducing us" or some of them they might come and then they just - . Yes just like come and then they slap your butt. And then I'd be like, "Okay, you don't have the right to do that. or you can't say we are seducing you. We're trying to help someone here, or this is the comfortable way to write whilst learning". (Tshenolo: FGD 4, grade 7)

Tshenolo demonstrates how girls are subject to sexual harassment when they are in the classroom. She explains how even the seemingly innocent act of a girl bending over their desk in the classroom is seen by the boys as an opportunity to harass the girls and to also admonish the girls for attempting to seduce them. This implies the patriarchal and sexist mindsets that are held by the boys which restrict the girls from learning and being comfortable with themselves in the classroom. The boys accuse the girls of seducing them, which again, places the responsibility on the girls and blaming them for any sexualisation that may occur. Furthermore, girls' bodies continue to be sexualised in the classroom which restricts their agency and is used as a distraction by the boys to tease them (Neville-Shepard, 2019). However, the girls choose to resist these advances by clearly stating their intentions to show their defiance. The boys exhibit traits of hegemonic masculinity as they view girls as sexual objects to be dominated rather than as equals. It therefore is an indictment of their ability to control their reactions to girls and their bodies.

Harassment is also administered by the girls.

Interviewer: Do you think girls harass boys as well?

Lerato: I think they do because most of the time, especially the quiet boys, I think. If they get with a girl who's popular, that girl, maybe she likes one of the popular boys who obviously have sex and stuff or just wants to get pleasure. And then she'll force the quiet boy to, uhm, do things with her even if the quiet boy doesn't want to. And if the quiet boy says no and she tells his friends, his friends are gonna judge him and be like, "Ha! You should've went for it, wah wah".

In the above extract, Lerato states that boys are also pressured into engaging in sexual activities even though they may be reluctant to do so. It is interesting to note the types of boys who girls choose to pressure into intimate relationships. These are the quiet boys who are not as confident as those who subscribe to hegemonic masculine norms but benefit from it (Connell, 2020). By picking this type of boy, the girl is placed in a position of power over the boys and therefore feels that she can do anything to get them to comply with her orders. This is a clear form of

bullying and intimidation and goes against prevalent discourses that portray girls as vulnerable victims and as innocent beings who are victims of violence rather than perpetrators (Bhana, 2016a). This example demonstrates that girls are able to exert their power over boys in order to derive sexual pleasure. Popularity plays a big role in this dynamic, as mentioned by the participant. It is considered an honour for the popular girl to be interested in a quiet boy which is why, according to this participant, it is easier for her to manipulate him into having intimate relations with her. This popularity is then taken advantage of by the girl to gain pleasure and to initiate sexual relations.

Furthermore, the power dynamics work in nuanced ways in this forced relationship. According to Lerato, in order to get the boy to comply with her demands, she threatens to disclose his refusal to his friends. This suggests that she is fully aware of the expectations that boys have in terms of what it means to be a “real man” and therefore wields this to her benefit. By reporting his refusal to his friends, she is assured that he is embarrassed by the rest of the boys as it is understood that boys desire to have intimate relations with girls, and refusing this offer makes his masculinity questionable. She is aware of the predominant culture of the boys and is aware they will tease the boy for refusing to be with the girl. In this way, her pride as a girl is also preserved. Hence, he is compelled to comply.

Social Media

Although in the previous chapters it was shown how social media allows learners to invest in relationships and demonstrate their sexuality, social media also serves to restrict self-expression and places learners in compromising positions (Ringrose et al., 2022). The requesting and sharing of nude sexual images, as well as sexual coercion via social media positions girls as vulnerable victims. Furthermore, boys use social media to exhibit their masculinity.

Kago describes situations in which girls are coerced into sending nude sexual images.

Kago: Yes. This year I didn't see anything, I haven't heard anything like that. But I know last year, one of my friends was in a relationship and her boyfriend asked her for nudes. And she didn't send them, because she was uncomfortable sending them. And then he ended up, uhm, breaking up with her just because she didn't send nudes.

Kago discusses the compromising positions girls get into because of being pressured by boys to send nude sexual images. She describes a situation her friend found herself in where her

boyfriend tried to force into sending nude sexual images and she refused, which resulted in him breaking up with her. This is suggestive of the power that boys wield in their relationships and the manipulative tactics that they employ in order to satisfy their sexual appetites. By threatening the girl with breaking up, she is placed in a position where she has to comply in order to continue the relationship or to resist and end the relationship, which limits her agency (Thomas, 2018). In this case, the girl chooses to resist the threats and frees herself of the manipulation but at the cost of losing the relationship. This creates an imbalance of power in the relationship as it is clearly evident that boy got entered the relationship with the hope that his physical needs would be met (Ricciardelli & Adorjan, 2019). When he is unsatisfied, he resorts to threats to get his way, which is significant of the violent and misogynistic attitude he has towards women and girls. The girl resisting, however, signifies that girls are not simply innocent, vulnerable victims and can stand up for themselves and resist patriarchal norms.

Learners were asked about the kinds of images that were sent via social media. Lerato speaks about the nude sexual images that are sent online:

Lerato: It's everyone I know, most people I know. And most of the time if a girl sends it to a boy, it gets sent to their group chat and then from their group chat, everyone in that group chat knows, even though she sent it to her boyfriend only, and it got sent to the whole group chat.

Lerato states that sending nude sexual images is quite common amongst the learners. She goes on to say that although girls send nude sexual images to their boyfriends in private, they are shared on the boys' group chats for everyone to access and view. This is a clear violation of the girls' privacy and what is intended to be private becomes public. This manifests by placing the girls at risk of being shamed and ridiculed for their actions and their bodies which curtails their freedom and agency (Thorburn et al., 2021). When boys are in their private group chats, the conversations can quickly become demeaning and derogatory to the girls. It is also an exhibition of the boyfriend's power, as by passing on this image, he is declaring that he is able to gain access to a girl's most intimate parts which increases his popularity amongst the rest of the boys and strengthens his masculinity.

Tshegofatso goes on to describe another situation that also involved the requesting of nude sexual images.

Tshegofatso: And then there's this girl, she's in grade 6 now and during term one holidays, there's this boy. I think he's 16, and she's in grade 6 and she's 11. She was

telling me how she sent him nudes, because it was peer pressure and she just didn't know what to do. And then she sent them and then the situation that I heard was that, he posted them online. So like everyone saw them, well not everyone, but like a lot of people saw them. So then she ended up having to tell her mum, and her mum was disappointed, but her mum helped her through it. Even my mum, because like we are friends, and like we are family friends. And then I was with her that holiday, term one holiday. I was with her, and I was just telling her that it was gonna be okay. And yeah.

Tshegofatso explains how boys take advantage of the vulnerability of younger girls in order to satiate their sexual appetites. The romantic relationship that has been described is one that is illegal in South Africa, yet boys are aware that young, impressionable girls are more susceptible to complying to their demands. By sending the nude sexual image, she signals that she is interested in keeping the relationship but her uncertainty suggests that young children are not adequately prepared and educated about cyber safety and negotiating sexual and romantic advances online. This plays into dominant ideas that young girls are sexually innocent and are too young to enter into conversations about relationships and coercion. However, this case proves otherwise, as due to being unarmed with the knowledge of what to do and being pressured by an older boy, she was forced to send him the nude sexual images. This demonstrates young girls' vulnerability to online predators and that stringent measures need to be put in place to ensure that the internet is a safe space for them to freely express themselves (Bindesbøl Holm Johansen et al., 2019). Having support structures in place, like the mother and friend in the above scenario, is vital in ensuring that young people are not continually traumatised by these incidents.

The boy in the above case chooses to not only view the images himself, but to post the pictures on public platforms online. This is a depiction of his masculinity as he is showing everyone that he is able to garner sexual images of girls without much effort. This is indicative of the power imbalance in the relationship as the girl is taken advantage of by a much older male and her trust is then broken because of the publishing of the images online.

Lerato also discusses how boys send phallic images to each other:

Interviewer: Do boys ever send dick pics?

Lerato: Yeah, they do. To their – to girls or to their friends. They'll be like, my dick is bigger than yours and then they send them. Yeah, so they compete about whose penis is bigger.

Lerato's response reveals that boys send phallic images to each other to show off the size of their penises. This suggests that boys are always in competition to prove their masculinity. Having a big penis equates to being more manly and thus more powerful. Using images of the phallus becomes a sign of their sexuality and their virility (Ringrose et al., 2022). It symbolises their male prowess. This is also linked to their ability to have heterosexual relationships as they are perceived as boys who can garner the attention of any girls they wish.

Objectification of Bodies

The objectification of women's bodies is another way in which girls are subordinated and hegemonic masculinity promoted. Breasts and bottoms are viewed as commodities that are sought to be possessed by boys (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). Similarly, girls are increasingly objectifying boys' bodies. Boys also compare phallic images as a show of their masculinity.

When asked about the comments that boys make about girl's bodies, Tsholofelo has the following to say:

Tsholofelo: Uhm, with me I had one case with that, I don't know if [other] girls experience the same thing. So like, a boy would always comment on my bum and I have a belly piercing and he'd be like,, "Oh, that's very attractive". And it would make me feel uncomfortable, because it's like I didn't get this belly piercing to come off as attractive for you, but I got it for spiritual reasons as well. And he would just make me feel uncomfortable and they will say, "Oh, your lips" . They say DSL, dick sucking lips and I'm like, yoh.

Tsholofelo discusses how she receives unsolicited comments from her male counterparts based on her body. She explains how boys make comments on her behind as well as her belly piercings. This suggests that girls are highly sexualised by the boys and their bodies are viewed as objects of desire (Ringrose et al., 2019). She further explains how the boys refer to her lips as capable of administering oral sex. This suggests that female bodies are viewed in relation to the sexual benefits that they can have for the boys. These derogatory comments place girls in subordinate positions and as sex objects as boys exhibit behaviour that is considered to be masculine that would portray them as sexually virile.

Lerato elaborates on the way girls objectify boys' bodies.

Lerato: Not really, I – okay, they do. Most of the time they talk about their private parts. They'll be like, "Oh, he has a very long uhm penis" and the other one will be like, "No

his is small, it won't satisfy me" and I'll just be like why are they worrying about it now, because they still young.

Interviewer: How do they know about the size of their penises and so on?

Lerato: Most of the time, during swimming. Or some people – most girls assume because of how a boy acts, they'll be like, "Oh, he acts like this, so he has a small penis" or, "He gives off big dick energy", yeah.

Lerato explains how girls discuss boys' bodies and specifically their sexual organs. She explains how they watch boys' bodies during swimming and make comments based on their penis size. Her observation reveals that girls also objectify boys' bodies and in a very intimate manner. The size of boys' penises is associated with the amount of pleasure that would be able to receive if they were to have sexual relations with them. The perception is that the bigger the penis the greater the sexual pleasure will be. This indicates that girls fantasise about boys in sexual ways and are also involved in constructing their sexual identities through the physicality of others and the imagined sexual pleasure that they will derive from it (Cassar, 2017).

The certainty with which they say that a small penis will not satisfy them suggests that they too have been influenced by pornified culture and are aware of the norms that dictate that larger phalluses are more desirable than those that are small as they are a symbol of masculine strength and virility (Renold & Ringrose, 2017). Lerato then goes on to explain how girls attach meanings to boys' behaviour to define whether they have big or small penises. This implies that the girls too are complicit in constructing their ideas around masculinity through common stereotypes that are held about men.

Lerato elaborates on what "big dick energy" refers to:

Interviewer: How does a boy have to act for him to be classified as someone who has a small penis?

Lerato: They have to act childish. Like if someone acts childish and like is annoying, that's how some people will be like, "Yea, he has a small dick".

Interviewer: Okay. And then if someone is popular, then is that –

Lerato: That's big dick energy, if he's confident, that's what people say.

According to Lerato's explanation, big dick energy refers to boys who have stereotypically masculine traits and give off a confident and assertive demeanour. Whereas boys who are

perceived to be immature would be classified as having “small dick energy”. These derogatory terms are directly linked to one’s masculinity, as being described as having a big penis becomes a compliment and boys would behave in such a manner so as to fit into that category. It is associated with hegemonic forms of masculinity and limits the ways in which boys can express themselves through other forms of masculinity as they would be afraid of being called out for having small penises. This extract therefore shows how girls are also complicit in promoting hegemonic forms of masculinity as boys construct their identities to best fit the terminology that is allocated to them (Connell, 2020). Hence, in order to be considered attractive, boys are compelled to fit into particular norms that are dictated and popularised by both boys and girls.

No Nut November

Burnett (2022) argues that online masculinities play a role in promoting misogyny. Men and boys have begun to engage in the “meninist” movement which is anti-feminist in nature. “No Nut November” is one such trend in which men are told to control their sexual urges by abstaining from pornography, masturbation and ejaculation for the month of November. Despite men claiming that these movements serve to advance the feminist movement by enabling men to control their sexual urges, Terry (2012) argues that they actually enforce hegemonic masculinity. The boys in this study also participated in the No Nut November challenge as shown below:

Kabo: It’s where you can’t, you can’t masturbate for the whole month. They say you become mentally stronger. you just feel accomplished. Everyone has to [participate]. You are shamed [if you don’t take up the challenge or fail the challenge].

Kabo describes the No Nut November challenge in which all the boys, especially in boarding, are compelled to participate. Boys are forbidden from experiencing an orgasm throughout the month of November and are thus encouraged to abstain from sexual activities. Kabo states that this is a testament to boys’ mental strength. This behaviour is designed through a bro code where boys decide which kinds of behaviour are acceptable and which are not (Keith, 2020). By touting the mental strengthening capabilities of undertaking this challenge, it is suggestive of a toxic form of masculinity in which all boys must participate in order to prove that they are mentally strong. Sex becomes something that is vilified and taboo and thus boys develop an unhealthy relationship with sex. It also promotes misogyny, as by being able to endure a challenge one is considered to be a man, while one who does not is considered to be weak and unworthy of being called a man. This behaviour is rooted in sexism and misogyny as it

denigrates women as being solely sexual objects who need to be avoided in order to be successful in the challenge. By exercising self-control and restraint, a boy is seen as being able to exert control over any other challenging situations that he may experience.

Kabo states that participating No Nut November is not a choice and therefore, the boarding houses become a space in which hegemonic forms of masculinity are fostered and encouraged. Those boys who protest are at risk of being shunned and othered and are, therefore, forced to become complicit in promoting a harmful masculine culture in the boarding house. Kabo further tells of how boys are shamed if they fail the challenge, suggesting that boys are vulnerable to being exposed to bullying and other forms of intimidation in order to force them to comply to these rules. No Nut November is an internet challenge and this shows how boys are influenced by social media trends in order to prove their masculinity.

Olebogeng offers his understanding of No Nut November:

Olebogeng: It's like for boys, you shouldn't like nut, like don't masturbate and nut. You can masturbate but just don't nut. And it's because you are saving for like December children or something like that.

Olebogeng's description of No Nut November is slightly different to Kabo's definition. Olebogeng states that one is allowed to masturbate but is not allowed to ejaculate, otherwise one loses the challenge, which gives him room to negotiate the boundaries of the forbidden action. However, he further alludes to the reward that will be earned if one successfully completes the challenge which he refers to as "December children". This implies that by being disciplined in November, a boy can actively participate in vigorous sexual activities in December, to the extent that they may be able to produce children. This is indicative of the rampant misogyny that is produced through these internet challenges as they promote toxic forms of masculinity that are harmful to women and promote competitiveness amongst boys (Morrell, 1993).

Yes ma'am, it's tempting. But then I feel like if I do masturbate, I could...I'm bruising my pride. (Kagiso: FGD 3, grade 8)

The above participant describes his temptation to masturbate during the month of November. However, he links completing the challenge to his pride. A hegemonic form of masculinity is being cultivated as boys experience feelings of power and male pride at being able to

successfully complete this challenge. Therefore, stopping himself from masturbating is not only a matter of being able to resist temptation, but also about proving himself as a real man.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it was shown how girls are subordinated by being called names such as hoes and sluts. It further explored how girls and boys engage in illicit relationship in order to gain pleasure and satisfy their desire. Boys use social media to coerce girls into sharing sexually explicit images which are then shared with the broader community. Girls and boys objectify each other's bodies and clearly demarcate what is perceived as desirable and acceptable whilst those who do not comply with these norms are marginalised. Boys also participate in No Nut November which promotes hegemonic forms of masculinity. The next chapter will show how learners' gender and sexuality are regulated and under surveillance through institutional norms.

Chapter 8: Regulation, Resistance and Surveillance

Introduction

This chapter discusses the ways in which the gender regime of the school serves to regulate and surveil the learners and their negotiation of gender and sexuality. The first aspect to be discussed will be the school dress code and the ways in which it creates freedoms and constraints that are gendered in nature. The chapter will then go on to explore the ways in which the body is policed by peers in order to ensure that learners conform with gender norms. Next, the ways in which gender norms are resisted will be discussed. Finally, the concept of “matric season” will be discussed, as well as the ways in which the school culture is designed by learners to silence illicit activities.

Research has shown how school gender regimes constantly serve to reinforce gender binaries and how this usually tends to restrict girls and privileges boys (Connell, 1987). The school culture is one that mirrors society and a gender unequal society is reinforced within the school system. The school dress code is one way in which gender binaries are visible and this links to the notion that girls and boys are required to exhibit their masculinity and femininity (Happel, 2013). Although school uniforms are instituted to create equality, it rarely achieves this between the sexes. Rather, it divides them further as girls are expected to behave in particular ways which the school dress code reinforces. In the process, boys become aware of the inequalities that exist and they then become the agents who reinforce these rules.

Furthermore, the body is policed in a myriad of ways, from the classroom to the sports field. Traditional gender norms are entrenched in the system and any learners who do not conform to them are ostracised (Phipps & Blackall, 2023). The school environment is also a space for risky behaviour and this is done away from the gaze of authority figures. By being silent on and complicit in these ideas, learners help to foster an environment that is unequal and privileges one sex over the other.

Dress Codes

Dress codes are instituted at schools to ensure uniformity and to promote a sense of equality. However, dress codes are highly gendered and linked to Butler's (1990) theory on the performance of gender. Thus, the school promotes a particular gender regime (Connell, 1987). According to Happel (2013), uniform codes that require girls to wear skirts or dresses are

referred to as “ritualised girling” in which girls’ behaviour is guided through the wearing of the dress, preventing behaviour that is not considered to be feminine. This section will show how the uniforms and dress codes at the school under study lead to gender inequalities.

Girls have many complaints against the dress code imposed at boarding:

Tshegofatso: We’re not allowed to show our shoulders, can’t show our tummy, can’t show our thighs, our collar bones, because apparently its seductive. With the hair kind of, I don’t really get it because they say it’s distracting whatever, colours and what, what, what, but as long as we do our work its fine. And I know with the boys, they’re not supposed to have piercings and that’s okay. But in terms of dress code, they can show their thighs. Literally the only part that they are covering is their dick and their bums and that’s it, but the rest can be showed off to the world. Yes, they can walk out shirtless and they can walk out in sports bras, training bras and um, crop tops and even just a regular tank top that just shows. We’re not allowed to, we are told to cover up.

Tshegofatso points out the gendered disparities that are apparent in the boarding dress code and it is evident from her vehement response that she finds this unfair. She outlines the ways in which girls are restricted in terms of the dress code, going as far as to state that even collar bones are not allowed to be visible. The reasoning behind this is that these are parts of the female body that are considered to be seductive by the teachers and the boys. It is argued by Wah (2016) that gendered dress codes at schools promote rape culture. In contrast, boys have freedom over what they wear with the belief that their bodies are not sexualised. These data show a clear disparity between the way in which girls’ bodies are regulated as opposed to boys’ bodies. This is in line with the literature which suggests that girls’ bodies are highly policed in society and that this is mirrored at schools (Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017). Girls’ bodies are covered because they are seen as seductive to boys therefore the responsibility is placed on the young women. There is a double standard that is inherent in this as boys are not held responsible for any behaviour that may seem to be sexually suggestive and, rather, girls are blamed for being too seductive.

Tshegofatso also mentions hairstyles and how they are restricted and this suggests that schools are not spaces in which learners can freely express themselves but rather a space in which their individual identities are restrained in order to form a collective identity that is associated with the school. This is seen as more socially acceptable and viewed as grooming girls for the workplace rather than focusing on their individuality. These ideas also draw on essentialist

views where women are expected to cover up and to have a sense of modesty while men are free. This suggests that patriarchal attitudes are deeply embedded in educational institutions which tend to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than challenge them (Harbach, 2015). Authority figures control the ways in which learners are allowed to express themselves and this strips learners of any agency in this situation, which benefits one sex over the other.

Tshegofatso goes on further to explain how boys enforce these rules:

Tshegofatso: And like the boys ma'am, they will literally be telling you to cover up, 'cause like why would they be like, "Oh, I like you" if you're wearing short shorts? They're gonna be like, uh, uh, uh and then they're there, especially my grade mates. They just be like uh, uh why she dressing like that, she should go cover up, and the school doesn't allow that. They don't be like, "Oh I like her, I like her thighs, uh, I wanna go bang her", something like that.

Tshegofatso explains how boys wield the school rules to their advantage. The boys become authoritarian figures and victimise girls for wearing clothes that are too revealing for them and then use this in order to shame girls into covering up. This suggests that the school rules that are imposed by adults have unintended consequences for gender relations between boys and girls as they are used as a tool for more oppression rather than liberation of the girls. The boys use this as a chance to exercise patriarchal norms and to become authority figures to the girls. Tshegofatso also questions why boys would be attracted to girls showing their thighs, which suggests that she is unaware of the ways in which girls are viewed sexually by boys. The boys demonstrate a misogynistic mindset in which they believe that it is their duty to tell girls how to dress. It is an expression of power on their part which in turn leads them to feeling much more masculine (Aghasaleh, 2018). This also curries favour with the teachers and could be used as a threat or a form of intimidation. Therefore, the school authority figures and the boys work in tandem to foster unequal gender relations.

Reabetswe has more to add on the school dress code:

Reabetswe: Uh, with the dress code, it's definitely not fair. Because girls, basically what we can wear is sweatpants. And that's basically it. You know, we can't show our shoulders, if we do wear tights, we have to wear a long t-shirt that will cover our bum. And also, it's a thing of different body types like someone will be allowed to wear something, but I won't be allowed to wear the exact same thing, because my body is different or whatever. Our knees, we can barely show our knees. They're being more

lenient now, maybe because it starting to get hot and stuff. But other than that, the dress code is unfair. 'Cause boys can go out in the short shorts and be allowed, they can go out shirtless, they can do whatever. But girls, as soon as they want to show one bit of their shoulder, it's not okay. yeah.

Reabetswe's sentiments echo Tshegofatso's in that the girls are required to cover up as much as they can with loose, baggy clothes. This suggests that girls are treated as sexual objects. The dress code is therefore intended to prevent them from being sexualised which backfires on the girls as they are restricted from expressing themselves, and need to be covered from shoulders to knees. This suggests that the dress code is used to hide girls' bodies rather than for girls to take pride in their bodies. This leads to issues with self-esteem and self-worth as young girls are made to feel more self-conscious of their bodies in order to ensure that they are covered up. Thus, the female body is continually perceived as seductive rather than as an entity that is functional (Neville-Shepard, 2019).

Reabetswe brings in another element which is that girls with different body types are treated discriminately even though they may be wearing the same article of clothing. For example, a relatively thin, lanky girl and a curvaceous girl may wear a similar pair of tights, however, the girl with the curvaceous body will be told to change out of her clothes as her bottom is much more prominent than that of a skinny girl's. This is an example of how girls' bodies are sexualised domains as curvier black girls are seen to as deliberately attempting to be seductive and flirtatious (Ringrose et al., 2019). This perspective contributes to hegemonic norms as boys have stated in previous chapters that they prefer curvaceous bodies. Therefore, by stopping these girls from showing off their bodies, it sends the message that sexualised bodies are not appropriate for the school context. This leads to feelings of shame, embarrassment and self-consciousness.

This is in contrast to the clothing that boys wear as they enjoy many more freedoms. Even though girls do in fact sexualise boys' bodies, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is not taken as seriously, as boys are seen as being able to ward off any unwanted attention and defend against any behaviour that may be considered too forward. However, for girls, these policies are in place because they are viewed as vulnerable and defenceless and in need of protection from sexual harm, therefore the school steps in to create these rules. Further, it is implied that girls' bodies will always be seen as sexual by boys and society and must be covered in order to be protected. Also, a girl's respectability is tied to their clothing choices. It is assumed that

if a girl wears clothing that is too revealing, then she must be sexually promiscuous, while a girl who covers herself is one who is self-respecting and modest and therefore deserves more respect (Aghasaleh, 2018).

Research also shows how elite schools are sites in which a certain type of hyperfemininity is cultivated (Allan & Charles, 2014). It is in these types of schools that girls are taught to be modest and presentable to society. Therefore, class differences are accentuated and a girl from a higher class is defined as someone who dresses in a modest manner and is able to present herself in a non-sexualised manner. Hence, according to the dress codes at this school, girls are expected to cover up in order to cultivate a classy femininity that is associated with the elite and the wealthy. This is in opposition to poor and trashy femininity which schools work to remove to ensure that all girls are instilled with the same values so that they grow up to live, work and socialise in similar circles later on.

Maipelo elaborates on how the school dress code has a negative impact on her self-expression:

Maipelo: I think the dress code favours men. Because the boys can play basketball shirtless and they can go out in shorts that show their whole thighs and all of their legs, but when a girl does it, it's wrong because she's gonna get assaulted and she must cover up. Half the clothes, like in summer – it's summer right now, we want to wear shorts and our crop tops, or like a tank top, but we can't do that because our shoulders arouse boys and our collarbones arouse boys, and we must always cover up. I don't really understand the concept of that, yeah.

Maipelo discusses how the boarding dress code limits her in various ways. She points out the glaring contradictions in the dress code where boys can wear what they like but girls' clothes are heavily controlled and policed. This suggests that girls' bodies continue to be regulated and that a more conservative form of dressing for girls is favoured by the school, while claiming that it is in place to protect them. The participant identifies the dress code as a way to protect girls from being assaulted which points out the double standard that is inherent in the school rules. This explanation by authority figures implies that girls are responsible for being assaulted if their clothes are too revealing or seductive. This ties in to hegemonic ideologies as men have the tendency to blame women for being provocative as an excuse to sexually assault them (Aghasaleh, 2018). This suggests that instead of protecting girls, the dress code is teaching them that they are solely responsible for looking after their bodies and protecting themselves. It gives boys complete freedom to dress how they want whilst also denying them any liability

from behaving inappropriately towards a girl as the policy hints that she will be blamed for the assault and that she will be judged on her clothes before the boy is questioned. This places girls in subordinate positions and reduces their power and agency in self-expression.

Maipelo: But I mean I think we should teach men that how to respect women's bodies. You have a sister, you have a mother, you respect them, why can't you respect us the same?

Furthermore, the participant equates herself to the boys' mothers and sisters and questions why she cannot be respected in a similar way. This is a flawed argument as it places conditions on why women and girls should be respected. The condition is that if a boy is respectful towards his mother and his sister, then he should be respectful towards other women. However, what is hinted at here is that if a boy does not respect his female family members, then he does not need to respect other women. Rather, in order to attain true gender equality, women and girls should be respected by men regardless of whether they have female relatives or not and whether they are respected or not. Maipelo making a comparison with boys' mothers and sisters is an emotive appeal which is a tactic employed by women in order to reason with men as to why they should be treated as equals. However, this further places women in a subordinate position and relegates them to positions that are in the service of men.

Maipelo: We're supposed to feel at home, and how am I going to feel at home if I don't feel uncomfortable showing my shoulders because of the school's dress code?

Maipelo calls out the school's claims that the boarding space is a "home away from home" and points out that the learners are restricted from dressing in the way they would at home; this suggests that this motto is contradictory as the experience is quite different. Instead of the girls dressing as they would at home, the school instils conservative values in the girls which ensure uniformity and compliance (Neville-Shepard, 2019). Therefore, all girls are expected to dress in a similar manner regardless of their backgrounds and self-expression; individuality and self-identity fall to the wayside. Maipelo's discomfort at exposing her shoulders hints at the ways in which girls are made to feel self-conscious about their bodies, which promotes the opposite of what a boarding school intends to do. Rather than encouraging confidence and self-assuredness the creates insecurity and limitations that girls have to comply with or risk being in trouble.

Maipelo describes the long-term effects of conforming to the dress code:

Maipelo: And I feel like it also just lowers a lot of the girls' self-esteem 'cause when they get home they don't even wanna dress comfortably walking around the house, like in shorts and a crop top. Because at school they say you're gonna get assaulted and stuff, so I don't really like – I understand that the dress code is in place to help us, but also at the same time it's unrealistic.

Maipelo explains how the school dress code extends into the home during school holidays. This is an indication that the dress code has a negative impact on the girls' self-esteem as they are almost indoctrinated into thinking that their bodies will cause arousal in men; thus, they need to protect themselves at all times, even in the comfort of their own homes. These young girls are at an impressionable age and instilling these types of ideologies into them aids increasing the gender inequality gap rather than decreasing it. These policies limit girls' agency and ensure that they conform to conservative dressing at all times (Bragg & Ringrose, 2023). Resistance results in trouble because of the power imbalance between the authority figures at school and the learners themselves. Maipelo states that these rules are unrealistic, which is thought-provoking because dress codes are present in working life and are put in place to ensure a sense of decorum and to convey a sense of professionalism. Likewise, culture also dictates particular dress codes which are often different for men and women. However, dress codes based on whether men will prey on women become problematic and troubling as they limit women's confidence in their bodies.

Katlego speaks about the way in which the rules are resisted by the senior girls even though they are also required to comply to the same rules:

Interviewer: So do you feel there's a difference between the way senior girls and junior girls dress?

Yes and with their short dresses. Senior girls have more freedom than junior girls. Even though they are much older, they have more freedom. Yes and they shouldn't have that freedom, then the school should be fair with us, like ai (Katlego: FGD 14, grade 9)

The extract demonstrates how the senior girls resist the rules of the school dress code. The younger girls feel that it is unfair and would like for them to conform to and be subject to the same rules. The above extract suggests that by girls wearing shorter school dresses, they are resisting the conservative norms that are set by the school in a bid to protect them and are instead expressing their sexuality and sexiness. The senior girls demonstrate their agency against authority by choosing to flout the rules in a bid to express themselves. Thus, their

identity is constructed around their ability to not let go of their individuality. This is perceived as having more freedom by the junior girls. However, the junior girls are hesitant to resist the rules and choose to conform to them to avoid getting into trouble.

Policing the Body

In addition to school uniforms, gender norms are also enforced through the regulation of behaviour. Girls' bodies and behaviour are especially under scrutiny as traditional feminine behaviour is continually reinforced in an attempt to create gender binaries (Murphy et al., 2013). This section will show how girls' bodies and behaviour are regulated by boys as well as the school system.

Boys regulate girls' behaviour based on gender norms, as narrated by Tshenolo:

Tshenolo: Ma'am, when I'm sitting with my legs open and then the guys say that they can see everything. But then my dress is like in between, where you can't even see anything. And they'll be like, "No Tshenolo, you're not supposed to sit like this. Sit like a lady."

Tshenolo explains how she is admonished by boys for the way in which she sits. The boys feel entitled in their role as male protectors. This draws on essentialist and gendered notions of the ways in which boys' and girls' behaviour should be differentiated. The boys subscribe to the notion that girls should present themselves in a modest manner. Therefore, Tshenolo is tasked with the responsibility of concealing her body for fear that she may expose her genitalia. Furthermore, boys state that she should sit like a lady, which suggests that the way she sits is associated with men and therefore, undesirable. In doing so, the boys draw clear boundaries between the sexes which gives boys the power to have freedom with their bodies whilst girls are meant to be conservative and restrictive with their bodies. The research shows that when a girl sits with her legs open it is perceived as a sign that she is being promiscuous and slutty, which is seen as a stain on their reputation (Bartky, 2020). Correcting her behaviour suggests that, in order to gain respectability, a girl needs to sit with her legs closed. Thus, body language is associated with gender and restricts girls' freedoms.

Boys have an explanation for why they believe girls should sit with their legs crossed:

Interviewer: So how should girls sit and act and behave?

Lerato: Ma'am, boys have eyes. So like mostly when I see a girl sitting like this [opens legs], I just be like, I will tell the friend that's sitting next to me, I'm like, "I'm uncomfortable with your friend sitting like this," because it's like when a girl's legs are open it's like you can see, but you can't see. It's like an invitation for you to imagine, yeah.

Neo: I wouldn't say anything because it's what they're comfortable with. But, like, sometimes they should like consider their safety, because they might get raped because they're showing off their body parts. (FGD 4, grade 8)

The above participants explain why they caution girls to sit with their legs closed. They state that it activates their imaginations to see what is between their legs and view it as an invitation for sexual intimacy. This suggests that adolescent boys are engaged in thinking about sex even in situations where it may not be appropriate and implies that girls need to be responsible for the boys' overactive imaginations (Bartky, 2020). Thus, girls are told to close their legs. Furthermore, the boy chooses to confide in his friend rather than the girl herself which implies that he is uncomfortable with discussing private issues directly with girls. This is indicative of the ways in which boys are embarrassed about talking to girls about their bodies and would rather pass on the responsibility. Thus, girls' bodies are seen as a taboo topic and seen as the domain of girls to discuss hence it is shrouded in privacy and secrecy.

Neo goes on to make a contradictory statement. On the one hand, he acknowledges how girls have agency and should be able to determine for themselves what they choose to do with their bodies. However, he contradicts himself by stating that girls should also be responsible for the behaviour of men and should ensure that they cover up so that they do not arouse men. This is a double standard which removes responsibility from men for their behaviour and makes women responsible for the behaviour of men. It also implies that women's bodies are to blame for men raping women. This attitude enables the fostering of rape culture at school (Keller et al., 2018). These essentialist understandings of why men rape and how women provoke men pose a danger for women and girls as they tend to subjugate them rather than empowering them.

Boys police girls and their dressing in other ways as described in the extract below:

Bonolo: Eh, the way you dress, your school dress has to be short. If it's long, you're an outcast. The boys say to your face. They're like, "Why is your dress so long? They're like ah, you have lost your minds, bruh?" I'm using an example. Maybe it's just not

short, but it's the perfect length. Like, they look at you, they point, they say, "Bonolo with the short dress". Well, I have a short dress. Yeah.

Bonolo describes how her experience of dress coding is different as she is pressured into wearing shorter dresses by the boys. She alludes to how wearing long dresses equates to being an outcast. This suggests that it is really common for girls to exhibit their sexuality and to ensure that their bodies are on display. The boys take the onus to outright bully girls into wearing shorter dresses. By making demands on the girls, they are gratifying their own desires and the teasing is an effective tool that is employed to shame girls into conforming to their fantasies. This is misogynist behaviour that, instead of protecting girls, ensures that they are treated like sexual objects who are there for boys' pleasure (Neville-Shepard, 2019).

Ayanda cites the language that is used to describe girls who are deemed attractive as opposed to those who are not:

Ayanda: I don't really know, but I feel like boys comment on girls' bodies. Like some boys only go for girls with a big bum and big boobs and stuff like that. Or, if you're ugly, then they'll call you clapped and stuff like that. Clapped basically means that you look ugly to them, that [pause] yeah, you look ugly to them and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Okay. And what do they call beautiful girls?

Ayanda: Peng. It means that you're like beautiful to them and stuff like that.

The boys have developed specific vocabulary that they use to describe girls as beautiful or as unattractive. Girls who are seen as unattractive are called "clapped" and girls who are deemed beautiful are called "peng", which is a British slang term. Therefore, when girls hear these terms, they are subject to being demoralised and it is an attack on their self-esteem and their attractiveness. Furthermore, it makes girls seek boys' approval as they are at risk of only seeing themselves as beautiful if boys deem them to be so, which makes their beauty subjective and relational (Slater & Tiggemann, 2016). Ayanda reiterates other girls' concerns as she states that boys prefer to be with girls who have big bottoms and breasts. Boys' preferences suggest that they are influenced by pornified culture which exaggerates women's bodies and treats them as sexual objects (Mulholland, 2015).

Below are some responses from the boys relating to what parts of girls' bodies they find attractive:

Siya: Like collarbones are too much...they are so nice ma'am.

Anele: Are you attracted to our knees?

Siya: Yeah, I feel like, yeah...

Neo: Like I mean you see, girl's legs like they are so attractive.

Thabo: Yeah some legs are too nice.

Anele: Didn't you just say that, didn't you say about the shorts being a problem, now you are saying you are attracted to our knees?

Neo: Some legs are actually too nice.

Anele: Even the toes?

Neo: If your toes are white, ma'am.

Thabo: Like white, white toe nails ma'am, they are so attractive.

Anele: So are fingers also an attraction?

Siya: The legs and like how they are, they attract us.

Neo: Yeah, they shouldn't be too long and you shouldn't bite your nails for a girl. (FGD 15, grades 8 and 9)

From the above extract, it can be deduced that boys sexualise girls based on many parts of the body including collarbones, knees, legs, fingers and toes. The boys' responses prove that, regardless of the dress code policies that the school puts in place that claim to protect girls from being sexualised, the data shows that the boys do tend to sexualise girls. This is reflective of the sexist and misogynistic attitudes that prevail as boys objectify girls and fetishize the way they look. The instruction that girls should not bite their nails reflects a gendered belief whereby girls are expected to be neat and tidy in order to be viewed as attractive and worthy of being loved (Happel, 2013). By stating their preferences, the boys are showing that they are cognisant of girls and their looks and therefore make girls self-conscious in the process. From this perspective, one can understand girls' frustrations with the school rules, as covering up does not equate to being protected from the male gaze. Thus, it is implied that for boys, girls' sexual identities are constructed through their perceived attractiveness to boys.

In contrast to boys stating their physical preferences, they are also very clear about what they do not find attractive:

Gogontle: Boys particularly look at either small or big bodies. Like if there was a small girl to walk by, a group of boys will be like, “She has no bum, she has no boobs, she’s flat, she looks like a stick, she doesn’t have enough thighs”.

The participant above states that boys also make derogatory remarks about bodies which they consider to be unattractive. Having a thin, flat body is undesirable as it is not as sexually appealing when compared to girls who have big bottoms, breasts and thighs (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). These are attributes of older women which boys fantasise about, and by having these preferences, it suggests that they are playing into the fantasy that they are dating someone who is much more mature. Culturally, a woman who is more curvaceous is seen as someone who is fertile able to bear children and this is also a reason why curvaceous women are preferred (Hunter et al., 2021). By making derogatory remarks about the girls, the boys are hinting at what they do prefer so that girls work to achieve this stereotype in order to fit into a masculine version of what it means to be a desirable woman. This can then make them feel insecure and uncomfortable with their bodies.

Tomboys

Tomboy femininities are a marginalised form of femininity in that they go against prescribed notions of femininity that require girls to exhibit sedentary and passive forms of behaviour (Kostas, 2022). The term “tomboys” is a derogatory word that serves to show disapproval of girls who engage in behaviour that is considered to be masculine, for instance, participating in sports that are usually reserved for boys and men. This section will show how and why girls are classified as tomboys and the ways in which they resist against this form of discrimination.

Gender binaries are made evident in the activities that learners engage in, as described by Paballo:

Paballo: I wanted to play soccer so bad with the boys. But I couldn’t because, “Nah, it’s a girl sport. I was like, “Nothing is a girl sport.” “It’s a boy sport and you’re a girl, you can’t play soccer.” So like, “Oh, okay.” Then me and my friends started like making fun of them, and taking the ball away from them, and teasing them with it. We’re like, “Okay, you don’t want me to play soccer, then we gonna tease you guys.” So I wasn’t allowed to play soccer. ‘Cause I’m a girl.

Paballo explains how she was not allowed to play soccer due to the fact that she was a girl. Boys are possessive of the sport and draw clear boundaries between what she is and is not allowed to do based on her gender. This implies that boys are complicit in reinforcing gender norms and take it upon themselves to caution and admonish young girls to refrain from participating in certain activities. Sports have long been divided according to gender and this is usually due to the different strengths of men and women, but this does not imply that girls are forbidden from playing soccer. However, in this case, the boys make soccer a male domain and so forbid the girls from playing, based on the assumption that they would not know the rules of the game or have any skills. Furthermore, girls are viewed as weak and fragile and thus it is assumed that they cannot be as competitive and aggressive as their male counterparts (Mayeza, 2017). This is indicative of a regressive mindset and boys' inability to expand their beliefs into understanding that women can also play soccer.

However, the girls in the above scenario do not accept the status quo and rather choose to resist against these hegemonic norms by taking away the ball and standing up for themselves. This is a demonstration of their agency and their ability not to be oppressed by regressive mindsets but rather to correct this by ensuring that no one can play. The teasing, mocking and name-calling shows that the girls are able to challenge hegemonic mindsets in order to get what they want and to indicate that they would like to be treated as equals.

Interviewer: So when you see a girl acting like a “tomboy” as you say, what do you think? Is it normal?

Laone: It's funny. Because most girls' walk is a stereotype walk. They think when boys walk they hold their crotch, just like, they walk like this like [holds crotch]. When girls imitate boys' walk, like, they usually do that. And ma'am I find that very wrong, because boys don't walk like that. Then they complain when we do this [flaps hands and walks] but that's the one thing that they do. (FGD 4: grade 8)

Laone identifies the double standard that is prevalent when girls imitate the ways in which boys walk and argues that it is not an accurate representation. Thus, he feels that girls have no right to complain when the boys imitate girls' style of walking. What is made evident here is that boys are unaware of the ways in which their actions place girls in a subordinate position and thus believe that their imitation of girls is not is not denigrating. However, they are insulted by the behaviour of the girls as they deem it inappropriate and inaccurate. They are able to identify the stereotypes that dominate in terms of the ways in which girls and boys walk. They also

deem girls who walk in a similar manner to boys to be tomboys thus divesting them of their femininity (Holland & Harpin, 2015).

This thing where we girls do this tomboyish thing, uhm, it started with hip hop ma'am. When hip hop came around, guys liked wearing very, very big pants and the reason they always kept holding themselves over there, was because the pants were big and they were falling. And we girls started copying that thing and then it just became a normal thing. Now guys find it wrong, because now there are still people who keep that hip hop type of style, but then they kind of find it weird, because they're holding it there [the crotch], but they don't know why. Because they think, "This girl doesn't have a penis, and why is she holding herself, you know? That's the thing about that ma'am. (Ore: FGD 4, grade 7)

In the above extract, the double standard that is prevalent in terms of girls and boys walking is also projected by girls as well. The girls nickname those who choose to hold their crotches when they walk as tomboys especially as they do not have penises. This implies certain behaviours are reserved for males whilst others are reserved for females. Having a penis denotes power and masculinity and this is a prized possession that needs to be amplified by boys holding their crotches as a symbol of their masculinity (Emig, 2013). When girls imitate similar behaviour they are nicknamed tomboys by boys, which suggests that they are not fully feminine and thus must be categorised as male. This is a double standard that is applied as it suggests that being a girl is associated with a hegemonic form of femininity that is different from male behaviour. This attitude further subordinates girls and positions them as inferior to boys, and these attitudes are reinforced by both boys and girls.

The participant goes on to acknowledge the ways in which hip hop culture has liberated women to act and behave in ways that would be traditionally frowned upon. This alludes to the influence of music and media in portraying girls in ways that are not traditionally approved of. By emulating this behaviour, the girls are normalising and adapting the ways in which girls behave and showing that they can resist patriarchal norms which serve to restrict women and girls (LaVouille & Lewis Ellison, 2018). When musicians behave in this manner, it gives girls the freedom to do the same without any fear, thus disrupting traditional gender norms.

Matric Season

The predominant culture of a school is usually determined by the older learners with the younger learners carrying on these traditions long after those who started these trends leave. The participants in this study refer to the phenomenon of “matric season” which takes place every year, where grade 12 learners choose to have casual relationships with younger learners in a last-ditch attempt to have fun at school before they leave.

Onalenna explains the phenomenon of matric season that is common at the school:

Onalenna: Ma’am, matric season is where like...so matrics will like go... they don’t date seniors. Instead, they go and look for juniors, ma’am, yes. They go and look for juniors to date, yes.

Onalenna describes how matric season refers to when matric learners form casual romantic relationships with grade 8 and 9 learners in an effort to have sex or engage in sexual behaviour during the examination period. The term “matric season” has agricultural connotations where there are particular seasons in which crops are ripe for picking. Similarly, there are particular times in the year during which matric learners look for younger partners. This works both ways as matric boys seek young girls and matric girls seek younger boys. These relationships can also be queer in nature. The prevalence of this trend is reflective of the unequal balance of power where older learners manipulate younger learners into relationships for the sake of their own pleasure. Younger learners feel privileged to be seen dating a senior as this gives them a sense of superiority over their peers as well as popularity. Hook-up culture is rife at the school as it is understood that these relationships are based on sexual pleasure and are viewed as having less emotional entanglement than a more committed relationship (Pascoe & Herrera, 2018).

Onalenna goes on to describe a relationship that she witnessed during matric season:

Onalenna: I feel that last year there was one successful like matric season thing that I knew about. But it wasn’t a boy going for a junior girl. It was a senior girl going for a junior boy, yes. I feel that the boy, since he was used to like – he already dated before and all that and the boy liked people older than him. But not too old. So like when that matric came, I feel that the boy did date that matric but it wasn’t for long. That’s why I’m saying, like, matric season, it’s not about like feelings, its till a certain point and then it’s over. So the boy, after the relationship with him and the matric ended, he didn’t really care because he knew that it was matric season.

Onalenna describes a relationship that took place between a matric girl and a boy who was in the junior grades. From this extract, it is clear that this relationship is transactional and mutually beneficial in nature (Ranganathan et al., 2017). This also points out the power imbalance that is evident in this relationship and is fuelled by an older learner preying on a vulnerable young learner, despite it being consensual. The boy is motivated by his desire to be seen dating an older girl as it gives him status and power amongst his peer group whilst, for the girl, participating in this trend gives her the freedom to derive sexual pleasure from the relationship with no conditions attached, as she is about to leave school.

Furthermore, Onalenna goes on to mention how these relationships are not based on feelings and last only for a short period. This implies that these relationships are mutually beneficial and for matric learners, the intention is to have as many partners as possible in a short space of time. This is different to many teenage relationships that are based on emotional attachments, as learners are aware of the fleeting nature of these relationships (Currier, 2013). By placing sex at the forefront of relationships, it is an indication that teenagers are driven by their sexual desires and act upon these urges by engaging in relationships that are beneficial to them. Onalenna states that the boy was aware of the short-term nature of the relationship, which suggests that learners enter into agreements as agentic entities who have a full understanding of the terms and conditions of these relationships.

Snitches Get Stitches

In addition to the culture of matric season, a culture of silence is also predominant at the school. This section shows how learners engage in risky behaviour at school which is then shrouded in silence and veiled threats. Lui et al. (2022) argue that bullying is underreported at schools due to fear and that other strategies need to be employed in order to address learners' concerns.

Onalenna explains how senior learners take advantage of the junior learners:

Onalenna: Like one of my friends, I think they got suspended. They almost got suspended because a senior had come and asked them to hide their vape for them, since the senior thought that that boy wouldn't get searched. So that boy took the vape for the senior boy, ma'am. And then when there was a search, the vape was found, ma'am. The boy, he had strict parents. But because the senior who came to him, was like big and intimidating, he thought, "Okay, I'd rather get suspended, than get in trouble with

the senior because the senior is going to beat me if I do report and say yeah this vape is his.”

Onalenna describes how senior boys intimidate junior boys into hiding contraband for them. She explains how the senior learner avoided being searched by the teachers by abusing his position as someone older to intimidate a junior learner into hiding the vape for him. Onalenna uses the word “big” to describe him which suggests that boys are aware of the unequal power dynamics that exist between older and younger boys. The senior learner therefore wields his masculinity to his advantage to bully and threaten younger boys into doing what he wants. The junior boy chooses to get into trouble with the authority figures at the school and his parents rather than confess who the vape belongs to. This suggests that age and size are a major factor when it comes to who holds power in the school, as those who are bigger and older are given respect while those who are younger and smaller are bullied into doing chores for the older ones. Aggression, violence and intimidation are tools that are used to ensure that other boys comply; this suggests that hegemonic notions of masculinity prevail at the school and those who do not choose to comply will suffer (Basterfield et al., 2014).

Further, the item that was hidden was a vape pen or e-cigarette which shows that boys are also involved in risky behaviours that demonstrate that they are resistant to conforming to the rules and show off their male prowess. The senior learner allowing the victim to get into trouble for this rather than owning up suggests that someone who tells tales is not someone who belongs at the school as this would be resisting the dominant culture. By engaging in risky behaviour, they are subscribing to toxic forms of masculinity and showing that they are men rather than boys as it is illegal for children under the age of 18 to be smoking in South Africa (Govender & Bhana, 2023b). Therefore, the perpetrator’s masculine identity is constructed on his ability to incite violence as well as to engage in risky behaviour.

Upon being asked about whether learners report illegal acts such as vaping, that they witness at school, Tiro has the following to say:

Tiro: I don’t do anything. If they wanna kill themselves, they wanna kill themselves.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, what happens to snitches?

Tiro: [laughs] They get stitches.

Tiro’s response sums up the general culture that prevails around school about telling on others. Hence, reporting on someone is not an option and the refrain “snitches get stitches” is repeated

often by many learners in different contexts. This phrase is a clear threat that aims to intimidate anyone who tries to report on illicit behaviour. This suggests that learners are compelled to avoid reporting any issues that may arise and fosters a culture in which undesirable behaviours continue to prevail, often without the knowledge of the authority figures at the school (Lui et al., 2022). The wry laughter that accompanies Tiro's response is indicative of the way in which this culture is ubiquitous at the school, which may be harmful to learners in the long run. Thus, risky behaviours are condoned and continue to be promoted. This keeps those who engage in illicit behaviour in power whilst those who are bystanders are forced to comply, thereby normalising undesirable behaviour. Tiro's dismissive attitude towards those who want to engage in vaping suggests the lackadaisical manner in which these behaviours are perceived to the point where there is a lack of care and concern. This can be dangerous, especially for boys, who are expected to be strong, tough, stoic and indifferent in the face of any challenges that they may face (Way et al., 2014). Ignoring the problem is a means of protecting oneself, as one does not want to be confronted later on.

Bonolo speaks about how she handled a situation in which she was caught vaping with a group of other girls:

Bonolo: And then because I was involved, the teachers asked me where's the person that brought vapes. So the person that brought the vapes had to confess. And luckily, the person that got suspended didn't [reveal who the supplier was], because they sold it to many people, so they couldn't guess who it was. Even though they asked us, we had to lie about it and we were like, "We didn't do anything". Because if they found out about it, we would be probably the most hated people in school, 'cause people love vaping. And if they have someone, if one of their best suppliers got caught and expelled, probably that won't be good.

Bonolo explains how she lied in order to protect the learner who was the main supplier of the vapes. This situation exposes the power dynamics that exist amongst the learners and the ways in which the mantra "snitches get stitches" are adopted and enacted by the learners. In this situation, Bonolo is under the threat that she will be the "most hated learner" in the school if she confesses who the supplier of the vapes is. She considers herself to be lucky because the learner who brought the vapes to the girls confesses, thus avoiding a difficult situation. The learners band together to protect the supplier, which suggest that those who engage in illicit behaviour are protected from harm by others. Hence, these learners hold power over the rest of

the learners. This extract shows how girls engage in risky behaviour at school and go against norms which portray girls as innocent victims. It also goes against the one of the core reasons that private schools exist, one of which is to raise girls who are acceptable and presentable in society (Allan & Charles, 2014). These girls show how they go against these norms and by smoking they show that, even though they may be in a private school that emphasises class differences, they are still capable of engaging in behaviour that may be considered trashy femininity (Kovac & Trussell, 2015). Therefore, class lines are blurred as girls who engage in this behaviour continue to be protected and encouraged.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the prevalent school culture has allowed for gender inequality to flourish. This is done through the implementation of dress codes, policing of the body, participation in matric season and engaging in risky behaviour. However, this is also circumvented through the embodiment of alternative forms of masculinity and femininity which resist heterosexual gender norms. The next chapter will conclude the study by summarising the main arguments and providing recommendations for steps that can be taken to mitigate the effects of inequality experienced by learners in terms of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Introduction

The previous chapters analysed the data that were collected in this study. This chapter aims to conclude the study by recapping the research questions and providing a summary of the chapters and the findings, as well as providing recommendations for interventions and further study. Gender inequality and homophobia continue to be problematic and lead to women and those with queer identities being subordinated. My study has found that the school is a site that serves to reproduce inequalities and continues to place girls in subordinate positions. The study has sought to understand this phenomenon through the voices of the learners in the hope that these inequalities can be disrupted before it is too late.

Research Questions

This study investigates how girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 15 negotiate gender and sexuality at a private school in the North West province of South Africa. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do learners negotiate gender and sexuality at school?
2. How does the school environment contribute to the construction of gender and sexuality?
3. What factors promote unequal power relations amongst learners at school?

Through my study, it has been found that boys and girls exhibit progressive and fluid understandings of gender and sexuality. However, this co-exists with the embodiment of problematic notions of hegemonic masculinity and gender subordination. The study has found that boys and girls are in constant negotiation of power and that even though boys strive to uphold the standards of hegemonic masculinity, girls are constantly resisting the norms and attempt to move beyond binary ideas of gender and sexuality. This is a positive finding but is also coupled with ways in which those who embrace queer identities are marginalised. However, it has been found that girls are much more willing to experiment with and explore their gendered identities and are also willing to support each other in the process. For boys, hegemonic forms of masculinity continue to prevail and experimentation and exploration of one's gender identity is suppressed. Thus, meeting the UN's goals for gender equality remain

elusive as these attitudes constantly infringe on girls' ability to be in a school that is safe and accepting of all forms of gender and sexuality.

This research study was also located primarily within the boarding school context and sought to understand how the boarding context is used as a space to negotiate gender and sexuality. It has been found that the boarding space is highly sexualised and is a space that allows for the expression of sexuality without interference, as it is, to a large extent, unregulated. Boarding provides avenues for the regulation as well as the expansion of gender and sexuality. However, the gender regime of the wider school, as well as the boarding space, also serves to reinforce gender inequalities. Therefore, learners' capacities for self-expression are restricted and this affects the girls more than the boys. The boys, however, abuse the gender regime of the school for their own benefit in order to reinforce hegemonic norms.

Summary of Findings

Through this study, it has been found that learners pursue and express desire in a multitude of ways. These experiences can be both constricting and liberating. Some girls demonstrated a liberal outlook towards the construct of virginity and suggested that the preservation of virginity was not as important as choosing the right partner and enjoying respectful heterosexual relationships. Other learners had questions and curiosity about the myths that were perpetuated around losing their virginity, suggesting that they were fearful of doing so and also referring to biblical understandings of virginity. This suggests that their access to information and education was limited and that there needs to be more education around this issue to dispel the myths that surround it. They also indicated that sex before marriage was not something they aspired to and that they would rather enjoy having sexual relationships that are fulfilling and fun. These findings suggest that young women are beginning to understand that sexuality is not something needs to be repressed but is fluid and not only a domain for men to express themselves. Thus, girls are placed on an equal footing to boys as they demonstrate desire and agency in their sexual decisions.

It was also revealed that girls were involved in masturbation and openly discussed this around their friends. They also encouraged each other to masturbate and supported each other through their relationship dilemmas. Girls also openly watched pornographic materials and had discussions about what they watched. This revealed that the boarding space is one that allows for freedom of expression and bonding between the girls without adult or parental regulations. It gives them the freedom to explore their sexuality as well as a support system that allows

them to be comfortable in who they are as girls. Girls also have conversations around contraception and advise each other on how to navigate their romantic relationships. This is in line with the literature on boarding that suggests that the boarding space is one that allows for close connections which facilitate the expression of gender and sexuality (Zhu, 2022).

The meanings that learners attached to dating and relationships differed between participants as well as age groups and grades. Learners are involved in relationships that range from mainly texting all the way to those involving sex. Thus, learners may find themselves in risky situations and having to negotiate which dating activities they would like to experience. Through this study, it has been found that learners are involved in having sex at young ages, especially in the age group under study, ages 12 to 15. This suggests that learners are sexually active and making these decisions at young ages and thus guidance is critical when they negotiate these decisions. Section 15 (1) (a) of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007 in South Africa allows for people between the ages of 12 and 16 to have consensual sex provided that the age gap between the partners is not more than two years (Criminal Law Amendment Act No. 32 of 2007, 2007). Girls and boys also enter into casual relationships that involve sexual activities such as oral sex, and this is done without emotional attachments. This is contradictory to the literature which suggests that girls are passive victims and do not have sexual agency in relationships. The data presented in this study show how girls especially are willing to enter into casual relationships in order to pursue pleasure rather than to have emotional entanglements that last a long time. This shows that girls are transgressing gender norms that suggest that girls should be meek, docile and submissive to sexual activity, as they are actively pursuing pleasure and this is also accepted by their peers.

The girls in this study also clearly highlighted the kinds of relationships that they would like to enter into, what kinds of relationships they envision for themselves and what attitudes and behaviours they will not accept. They were vocal in expressing that they would like to be treated with respect and dignity. However, this was contradicted by the actual relationships that they entered into, many of which subordinated the girls in the process. This suggests that there is a gap between what girls imagine for themselves and the types of relationships that are available to them within their environment, and thus girls have to compromise on these ideals in their pursuit of enjoying romantic relationships. Other girls in the study resisted being involved in relationships because they did not want to be complicit in their own subordination. This suggests that girls are able to recognise the ways in which heterosexual relationships can be constraining and use their agency in an attempt to disrupt the cycle.

Girls also expressed the ways in which they idealise boys' physical bodies and have a preference for six packs and muscular men. This makes them complicit in allowing hegemonic forms of masculinity to thrive as six packs and muscles are some of the markers of a hegemonic male. Thus, their attraction remains rooted in bodies that are viewed as idealised versions of masculinity. Girls also have racial preferences as they explained that they prefer light skinned boys and are also conflicted about inter-racial dating. This implies that race and skin colour still play a big role in the relationships that they pursue. These are the legacies of apartheid South Africa despite the learners being born after 1994 and not having personally experienced apartheid.

Similar to girls, boys also have preferences in the partners that they choose to pursue. Both girls and boys stated that boys prefer girls who have large breasts and bottoms as they find these parts of the body the most attractive. Thus, girls are often sexualised in this regard and are compelled to live up to these ideals. Girls and boys also discussed how flirting operates at school and how much of it takes place online on social media. Social media is a realm that is unrestricted for the learners and thus they are able to date across age, grade, gender and location boundaries. These limitless freedoms give learners the ability to exhibit their relationships online as well to claim partners as their own. Thus, there are contests that also take place online where learners can exhibit violent and bullying forms of behaviour in order to protect their relationships. However, it is also a domain that allows for cheating and disloyalty in relationship. Girls and boys also invest in open relationships in which they agree to see multiple partners. Casual relationships become the norm which allows for the fluidity of sexuality. They also move from one relationship to another, which suggests that learners are not interested in long-term relationships and are open to experimentation and having multiple relationships until they find partners that they would like to remain with in the long term. Social media is also used for promoting body positivity and for girls to be supportive towards each other.

Hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity are also exhibited by learners as they prepare for sexual activity by enhancing their pubic areas in order to be seen as more attractive. Girls will shorten their dresses and boys will wear tight pants in order to enhance their desirability and show off their bodies. The body features greatly in this study as it is used to exhibit and express one's sexuality across the school space. Girls tend to bully other girls who to show off their prowess and confidence. Participants also described a form of flirtation known by the learners as "rizzing", which is defined by certain boys as an aggressive form of flirtation in which a boy goes up to someone he like and declares that they have a romantic interest in them by making

sexually suggestive motions. This can be restricting to girls as it is quite aggressive in nature and is a show of boys' masculinity and dominance.

The school space is an important factor in girls and boys negotiating their gender and sexuality. As the school under study is expansive and is comprised of the school buildings, facilities and grounds, as well as the boarding space, the learners have access to many spaces in which they can engage in sexual activity. This study has found that spaces such as the school hall and bathrooms are used for sexual activity and that boys sneak into the girls' boarding houses at night in order to engage in sexual acts. This suggests that the intention under which the school space is meant to be used is in direct contradiction with how the school space is actually utilised by the learners themselves.

In addition to enjoying heterosexual relationships at school, learners also feel comfortable entering into queer relationships. Some learners displayed confusion as to how queer people have sex as well as the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity. This suggests that learners are interested in exploring other forms of sexuality and seek to have more knowledge about this. My study found that girls are more likely to be invested in queer relationships and identify as lesbian, bisexual and gay identities. This is especially relevant to girls as they feel much more free than their male peers to express different forms of sexuality at school. However, this is done to the point where learners who identify as straight are coerced into becoming bi-curious in order to have similar experiences as the other girls. Thus, for the girls, it seems that bi-curiosity is viewed as desirable and acceptable whilst heterosexuality is seen as dated. This demonstrates a reversal of gender norms and resistance towards traditional forms of sexuality.

Despite girls enjoying freedoms related to exploring their sexuality, boys have the opposite experience. Boys are pressured into conforming to hegemonic forms of masculinity and thus cannot explore queer sexuality for fear of being ridiculed. In this study it was found that boys choose to confide in girls when it comes to revealing that they are gay, experimentation is suppressed, and that they secretly engage in sexual acts within the boarding house so that their reputation as a hegemonic male remains intact outside the boarding house. The prevalence of hegemonic masculinity and homophobia is a major finding in this study as it leads to the subordination of girls in the process. Boys also use name-calling techniques, using terms such as "gay", to call out the behaviour of boys that they find to be effeminate. This creates a culture of homophobia around the school. Girls are also complicit in creating this culture as some

recognised queer sex between males but not between females. This is tied to normative understandings of sexuality and works to ensure that heterosexuality remains the norm.

This study also found that hegemonic masculinity is fostered and nurtured within the school space. Girls are expected to behave in a manner that is traditionally feminine by ensuring that they do not have multiple partners and do not show disloyalty to their boyfriends. They are subjected to name-calling such as “hoe” and “slut” which means that shaming is part of the culture at school. There is a double standard that is applied in most aspects of the girls’ sexual lives as boys are lauded for having multiple partners and for not committing to relationships. The learners use specific terminology that serves to subordinate learners. The term “sneaky links” refers to the illicit relationships that learners engage in while they have public relationships. This suggests that loyalty is not something that learners aspire to have in relationships and this kind of behaviour undermines the values of a loyal and committed relationship. The term “simp” is used to refer to boys and girls who are perceived to show too much commitment and investment in their heterosexual relationships. According to hegemonic norms, boys are expected to be aloof and restrained in relationships to show that they are not as invested and have other interests, for fear of being perceived as feminine. The term also applies to female learners who are expected not to spend too much of time with their boyfriends otherwise they are viewed as needy and clingy. The term “homie hoppers” is applied to girls by boys to show their disrespect for girls who have relationships with different boys within their friendship circle. In the context, the “bro code” is applied and boys are protected over the girls.

Girls in this study also reported various forms of sexual harassment in the form of boys catcalling and touching girls inappropriately. Boys make derogatory comments about girls’ bodies which makes them insecure about the way they look and pressures them into changing their bodies to suit the desires of the boys. These behaviours foster a culture of fear and girls are burdened with the responsibility of protecting themselves from harmful behaviour whilst boys’ egos are bolstered. Social media is also used as a tool to further subordinate girls by boys coercing them into sharing nude sexual images and then distributing them to wider audiences. Boys use social media to share phallic images with each other in order to compete about their sexual prowess. Girls are also complicit in this as they sexualise boys by referring to the phallus and associating it with masculinity. This puts hegemonic masculinity on a pedestal and subordinates boys who demonstrate alternative forms of masculinity. Boys participate in the trend of “No Nut November” which bolsters their masculinity and male egos.

The policing of the body is a predominant finding in this study. Girls' bodies are policed and controlled through the enforcement of the school uniform which limits girls' ability to express themselves freely. Boys use this to their advantage and also participate in regulating the girls' uniforms as a form of control. However, boys enjoy the freedom of wearing whatever they like and do not face any restrictions and controls from authority figures at the school. Boys also regulate the way in which girls walk and sit, which restrains them from having agency. Girls are also complicit in this as they mock girls whom they deem to be "tomboys" for exhibiting behaviour that is typically associated with masculinity.

Girls and boys also willingly participate in "matric season" in which older learners prey on younger learners for casual sexual relationships. This suggests that there are unequal relationship dynamics at play and makes younger learners vulnerable to predatory behaviour. There is also a culture of risk-taking at school and the learners engage in substance abuse. This behaviour is protected by the learners themselves as there is a culture of silence that is promoted which protects the perpetrators and the participants in this behaviour. This leads to the manifestation and continuation of risk-taking behaviour without any interventions.

Overall, this study has argued that although boys and girls have sexual desires, pursue pleasure and enjoy having relationships that go beyond the heterosexual, this is mitigated by the prevalence of homophobic attitudes, complicity with hegemonic masculinity and the policing and regulation of girls' bodies, as well as through participation in risky behaviour and illicit acts being shrouded in silence. Therefore, this does not allow for true gender equality to prevail at school.

Recommendations

This study has found that unequal relationships are fostered between boys and girls and these influenced by hegemonic forms of masculinity. This points towards a need for more comprehensive sexuality education for boys that is inclusive and attempts to redress gender inequality (Haberland & Rogow, 2015). Girls' experiences and voices need to be brought to the fore and their questions, concerns and myths around gender and sexuality need to be addressed further. The learners in this study showed how they are able to access information on the internet. However, there needs to be a focus on the ways in which learners use the internet so that they are safe from harm and also are not misled by misinformation. Learners have a wealth of knowledge on gender and sexuality, and this should be harnessed by educators in order to facilitate conversations around gender and sexuality and to give learners a voice in

demonstrating what they know (DePalma & Francis, 2014a). This allows for teachers to correct any myths and to ensure that accurate information can be conveyed.

The overall Life Orientation curriculum needs to be overhauled to have a larger focus on gender and sexuality (Bhana et al., 2019). Devoting more time and attention to this will encourage learners to take the subject more seriously. Learners need to be involved in the lessons and their voices and perspectives need to be heard in order to deliver quality lessons. As this study is situated particularly in a private school, there are plenty of opportunities to address these issues, including at camps, grade assemblies and in the boarding house, as the one of the goals of the school that has been identified is to ensure a holistic education. The culture of silence around the reporting of illicit activities also needs to be discouraged as it allows for participation in risky behaviours that could pose a risk to learners in the long term. Thus, safe spaces need to be created for learners to report issues without being targeted. Furthermore, gender and sexuality education cannot simply be reserved for Life Orientation but should be a school-wide undertaking that involves all stakeholders including parents. This would create open channels of communication between learners and teachers and the topic would be destigmatised and no longer a taboo but rather a generally accepted topic of conversation. This is supported by my own observations where I found learners regularly and confidently discussing topics that have been previously considered taboo.

Research shows that teacher education in South Africa is lacking in relation to delivering the Life Orientation curriculum (Smith & Harrison, 2013). Teachers bring their own perspectives and biases into the classroom which skew learners' understandings of gender and sexuality. Rather than lessons being based on facts and sharing the burgeoning amount of research on gender and sexuality that is available, teachers tend to focus on morality and bring their own value systems into the classroom and choose to pass these on to the learners. Teachers need to be taught how to address their own biases and to be empowered and equipped with tools that assist them in delivering quality lessons on gender and sexuality. These could be in the form of detailed lesson plans and workshops that guide teachers on the latest trends amongst teenagers and how they could better equip learners with tools to assist in them making informed choices about gender and sexuality. Furthermore, continuous teacher education programmes need to be designed that educate teachers on gender equity policies and how these could be implemented in the classroom.

In the current format of sexuality education, learners are cautioned against participating in sexual activity and are therefore given abstinence-only directions that serve to perpetuate fear and harm (Francis & DePalma, 2014). Rather sexuality education needs to be a balanced discussion that focuses on making wise choices, allowing for girls and boys to exercise their agency. This study has shown how learners are involved in sexual activity at young ages and, without guidance, girls and boys are positioned in a vulnerable situation. The focus of sexuality education needs to be on pleasure and the joy that being in a committed relationship brings, but also balanced with awareness of the risks of early sexual debut. The negotiation of relationship dynamics also needs to be highlighted as this study has found that learners are placed in compromising positions that include the lack of loyalty and care in relationships. The recurrence of casual relationships, having multiple sexual partners and preying on younger learners for sexual pleasure needs to be problematised and learners should be cautioned against such behaviour and the ways in which this leads to unequal gender dynamics.

The prevalence of harmful forms of masculinity was a major finding in this study and this needs to be addressed and disrupted at young ages. This means that in-depth conversations need to be had with boys in order to unpack their notions of masculinity and why and how these attitudes are problematic and harmful in the long term. The issues of homophobia, sexism, sexual assault, and sexual double standards need to be troubled, and this should be done in tandem with discussions with girls and include gaining understanding of the ways in which these issues affect those who identify as queer and how to be more accepting and embracing of these types of sexuality (Francis, 2019). Boys and girls who embody queer forms of sexuality also need their voices to be amplified and their concerns to be addressed in an inclusive and non-judgemental manner.

Girls in this study have revealed how they are sexually harassed and this needs to be given much more attention by school stakeholders. Schools are meant to be safe spaces and learners who are in contravention of these rules need to be dealt with in a serious manner that is also rehabilitative. Investigations need to be undertaken to understand the culture of harmful masculinity that is prevalent and how this could be mitigated. The boarding space provides the perfect platform under which these projects can be undertaken in order to facilitate healthier relationships between boys and girls that are mutually respectful. Substance abuse was another issue that was flagged through this study and the reliance on these substances can be harmful to teenagers in the long run. Therefore, discussions need to be had with learners as to how they could channel their energies in alternative ways that do not pose a risk to themselves.

The issues of gender and sexuality should be addressed with those who are queer in mind. This study has revealed that many learners are experimenting with and expanding their sexual repertoires and thus conversations cannot be had under the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm. Bi-curiosity needs to be taken into account and there needs to be much more discussion around how learners navigate these relationships as this is a relatively new domain that has not been explored adequately by teachers (Ngabaza et al., 2016). This will also serve to quell any myths that surround learners' ideas around queer sexuality and also influence learners into accepting other forms of sexuality.

This study has found that learners in the boarding space are in constant construction of their sexual identities. Thus, in the absence of parents, the boarding learners need to have more guidance and education as well as space to freely discuss issues around gender and sexuality. Forums should be created, for example, on weekends, in which boarding masters and learners gather to discuss pertinent issues. These should not be used to admonish but rather to understand how learners are evolving and to guide them on issues that are raised and their struggles in the boarding house. Ignoring or dismissing their issues as childish behaviour they will grow out of is counterintuitive and results in silence and fear. Dress codes needs to be re-examined and the policing and regulation of girls' bodies should be addressed so that learners are free to express themselves in a way that fits with their unique identities. If authority figures stop sexualising and policing girls' bodies, then it is hoped that boys would stop doing it too and that the expression of the female body would be normalised instead of shrouded in secrecy.

It is recommended that private schools and boarding schools in South Africa be researched much more than they are at this point, as much of the research is based on public schools. There is little research on boarding schools in South Africa and how they enable the construction of gender and sexuality. This study has revealed that the boarding school is a unique space that allows for alternative forms of gender and sexuality, but the regimes also serve to restrict the learners in other ways. In the absence of parents, the responsibility is greater on school administrators to create an environment that is equal and tolerant. More research would allow for better interventions to be put in place. This study has shown that some learners who are in the private school space hold much more progressive ideologies than their public-school counterparts due to their privilege and access to resources and are therefore much more knowledgeable around issues of gender and sexuality. This should be documented to provide a more balanced view of the state of how learners negotiate gender and sexuality in schools in South Africa.

Conclusion

The United Nations (2023) states that gender equality needs to be achieved in order for the world to be a safe space for individuals to grow and to allow them to enjoy the freedoms that they wish to pursue. Schools are spaces in which these goals need to be met in order for learners to enjoy these freedoms in the future. This study has shown that the school is a space in which gender inequality is fostered and there needs to be active work to ensure that this does not continue into future generations. This study has shown how boys enact hegemonic norms whilst girls are subordinated within the school space. This needs to change and teachers and all stakeholders in the school have an important role to play in ensuring that this happens. Girls and those with queer identities need to be protected and become normalised so that they are able to be themselves freely, without any discrimination. This study has provided recommendations that can be enacted to ensure that schools can become gender equal spaces. While not comprehensive, it is a step in the right direction.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



01 November 2017

Ms Rabia K Rizvi 211520356
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Rizvi

Protocol reference number: HSS/1680/017D linked to HSS/0852/014CA
Project title: From 12 to 15: Girls, Boys, Gender and Sexuality at a High School In the North West Province"

Expedited Approval – Class Application

In response to your application dated 11 September 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have 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.

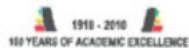
Yours faithfully


Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Deevia Bhana
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc School Administrators: Ms T Khumalo and Ms P Ncayiyana

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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Fostering Curiosity:  Edgewood  Howick College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter to Principal

The Principal

Dinaledi Academy



Dear Principal

5 June 2017

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

I am writing to request your permission to conduct a study of the ways in which boys and girls learn gender in and out of the classroom at your school. The project, '**Learning from the Learners**', seeks to explore how boys and girls across school sites in high schools in South Africa 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 importance 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 in the classroom and in the playground as well as gender discrimination amongst learners is a cause for concern.

My study will fall under this project and the title of my study is: "**From 12 to 15: Girls, Boys, Gender and Sexuality at a High School in the North West Province**". My supervisor's name is **Professor Deevia Bhana**. The study aims to examine how grade seven, eight and nine learners give meaning to learning about gender and the ways in which boys and girls relate to each other. It will involve observations, interviews and focus groups with the learners.

All participants in the school and the name of the school will be anonymised. In the various publications that will result from this study I will not use participants' real names or the names 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 to confidentiality. Participants will be informed that should there be a disclosure/s which indicate 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 co-operation.

Sincerely,

Rabia Khatoon Rizvi

Signature:

Contact:

Project Leader: Prof. Deevia Bhana

Signature:

Contact:

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Mariette Snyman

HSSREC Research Office

Tel: 031 260 8350

E-mail:

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. 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 is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time.

.....
SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL

.....
DATE

SCHOOL STAMP

Appendix C: Informed Consent Letter to Parents/Guardians



Dear Parent/Guardian

31 May 2017

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

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. The project, '**Learning from the Learners**', seeks to explore how boys and girls across school sites in high schools in South Africa 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 importance 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.

My study will fall under this project and the title of my study is: "**From 12 to 15: Girls, Boys, Gender and Sexuality at a High School in the North West Province**". My supervisor's name is **Professor Deevia Bhana**.

In order for the study to be a success, I require thirty learners from grades seven, eight and nine to participate in the research. I would be grateful if you would consent to your child/ward participating in the study.

If you choose to allow your child/ward to participate in this research, he/she will be invited to participate in a focus group, and later in an individual interview. The completion of the process will take about one hour for the focus group discussion and about thirty minutes for the individual interview. This will be done during times when the learner is available to participate in the study, without interfering with his/her learning in any way. The focus group and interview will be audio-taped with you and your child/ward's permission. The data collected will then be transcribed and made available to your child/ward to ensure

that all information has been captured correctly. The data will be kept in a secure location, and destroyed after a period of five years.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your child/ward and your child/ward has the right to withdraw him/herself at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times, in the analysis of the data and the completion of the dissertation. Universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect will direct my research.

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.

If you would like further details pertaining to the validity of the study then you are most welcome to contact Professor Deevia Bhana, my supervisor of the study on _____.

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Mariette Snyman

HSSREC Research Office

Tel: 031 260 8350

E-mail:

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Rabia Khatoon Rizvi

Signature:

Cell:

Email:

PARENT'S INFORMED CONSENT REPLY SLIP

I,.....,in the capacity of parent/guardian of
 in grade.....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	<input type="checkbox"/>
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix D: Informed Assent Letter to Learners



Dear Participant

31 May 2017

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

I am writing to request your permission to conduct a study of the ways in which boys and girls learn gender in and out of the classroom. The project, '**Learning from the Learners**', seeks to explore how boys and girls across school sites in high schools in South Africa 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 importance 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 in the classroom and in the playground as well as gender discrimination amongst learners is a cause for concern.

My study will fall under this project and the title of my study is: "**From 12 to 15: Girls, Boys, Gender and Sexuality at a High School in the North West Province**". My supervisor's name is **Professor Deevia Bhana**.

I will require you to participate in a focus group which will take approximately one hour, and an individual interview which will take approximately thirty minutes.

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.

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.

If you would like further details pertaining to the validity of the study then you are most welcome to contact Professor Deevia Bhana, my supervisor of the study on _____.

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Mariette Snyman
HSSREC Research Office
Tel: 031 260 8350
E-mail:

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Rabia Khatoon Rizvi
Signature:
Cell:
Email:

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT REPLY SLIP

I (full names of participant) in grade
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.

.....

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

Additional consent, where applicable:

I hereby provide assent to:	Please tick	
Audio-record my interview	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

1. What does it mean to be a boy? What does it mean to be a girl?
2. What makes a boy and a girl different?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of a boy and a girl?
4. Tell me a story of when you were not allowed to do something because of your gender. How did you feel?
5. Can you discuss ways that you think boys and girls enter into contests?
6. Can you tell me about your experiences of and observations of boy and girl relationships that involve some kind of power? Do you see this in your community?
7. Some people say that culture makes people believe in the power of a man? Do you agree? What kinds of cultural values do you think puts women in a lesser role?
8. Some people say that boys are a problem in the homes and school. Why do you think they say that? What do boys do in schools?
9. Do you experience or have you witnessed violence in the school classroom or playground? Do you see such violence at home?
10. Do you think boys should hit girls? Do you think girls should hit boys?
11. How do boys and girls treat each other at school?
12. How do the teachers treat boys and girls at school? Do they treat the boys and girls differently or the same?
13. Do you see gender inequalities in your community?
14. Who does the chores at home? Who do you think should do the chores at home?
15. How much of power do you think a woman has in society currently?
16. What do you think of a boy who dresses like a girl or a girl who dresses like a boy?
17. Which teachers do you think command more respect at school? The male or the female? Why do you think this is so?

18. What does your religion say about the roles of men and women? Do you believe in this? Why?
19. Do you have friends? What value do friendships have for you? Can you be friends with people who are not the same sex? Why?
20. If you could change one thing about being a girl or a boy, what would it be?
21. Do young people of your age have or imagine having girlfriends and boyfriends? What do you think?
22. If you had a boyfriend/girlfriend, what would you expect him/her to do? What kind of boyfriend/girlfriend would you like to have?
23. What do you think of learners who are gays and lesbians? Will you accept such learners?
24. What do you know of HIV? Do you think learners of your age know about the disease? What is the role of boys and girls in this?
25. Does Life Orientation discuss issues about boys, girls, sexism, boyfriends and girlfriends? Do you think teachers should?

Appendix F: Turn It In Originality Report

Full Thesis

ORIGINALITY REPORT

1 %	1 %	0 %	0 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	hsag.co.za Internet Source	<1 %
2	archiveofourown.org Internet Source	<1 %
3	newdiscourses.com Internet Source	<1 %
4	www.researchgate.net Internet Source	<1 %
5	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
6	Birzer, Michael L.. "In Their Own Words", Oxford University Press Publication	<1 %
7	idoc.pub Internet Source	<1 %
8	ulspace.ul.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
9	mars.gmu.edu Internet Source	<1 %