In a Privileged World: The Psychosocial Experiences of Underprivileged Adolescent Girls in a High Fee Independent Gauteng Private School

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Abstract

To overcome the effects of socioeconomic barriers on education, many independent schools offer financial aid in the way of scholarships and bursaries. This financial aid is intended to offer access to quality education for underprivileged youth; however, positive school experiences rely on more than just physical access. This study explored the psychosocial experiences of underprivileged adolescent girls attending an independent affluent school. By using Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Model, gender differences in development, as well as the Students Multiple Worlds Model, an understanding is created of how moving between worlds of affluence and poverty may influence the identity formation of the female adolescent learner. This phenomenological study was conducted using the qualitative, interpretative method of interpretative phenomenological analysis. Using a series of unstructured interviews with each participant, information was gathered that provided insight into the psychosocial experiences of each of these girls. Findings were focused on areas of cultural identity, value formation, feelings of belonging, social comparison and perceptions of support. These findings contribute to the improved functioning of bursary programmes in independent schools and will enhance the well-being of adolescent girls in navigating between the worlds of affluence and poverty.

Introduction and Background of the Study

Poverty is often understood as one of the greatest challenges facing education in South Africa today (Nelson Mandela Fund 2004; Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert 2012). The inability to pay school fees, along with the rising expenses of school uniforms, transport, stationery and equipment, increases the difficulty in accessing education, regardless of the quality (Fleisch & Woolman 2004). While the South African government aims to alleviate the impact of poverty on education through the introduction of school fee-exemptions as outlined in various legislation - The South African Schools Act of 1996, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature's School Education Act 6 of 1995; the No-fee School Policy in the Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding of 2006 (Hall & Giese 2009); Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001). However, the issues experienced in the public education sector are still numerous with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources and infrastructure as well as minimally trained teachers (Timaeus, Simelane & Letsaolo 2013). In contrast to the perceptions about public education, the independent or private education system is perceived as providing smaller classes, greater accountability and better-quality schooling (Hofmeyr & Lee 2004). From this viewpoint, the appeal of private schooling for everyone is obvious. However, as independent schools rely on school fees reaching as high as R80 500 per annum (Discovery Inves n.d.), they are generally inaccessible to the poor (Dieltiens & Motala 2008). This means that there is a problem in as far as equitable access to schooling is concerned.

While little information exists in the South African legislation that dictates the expectations of independent school regarding inclusion and its roles in overcoming learning barriers of poverty, many independent schools have taken on the responsibility of inclusive education (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller 2009). This paper, outlines the department's goal to provide educational opportunities for all, focusing on learners who experience learning difficulties and environmental barriers and who have had difficulty in continuing in the education system because of the inability of the education and training system

to accommodate the diversity of learning needs, as well as to provide for those learners who are frequently excluded from the system.

To meet the above goals, several independent schools offer financial aid for learners in way of scholarships and bursaries in an attempt to foster an inclusive education environment and in an attempt to facilitate better access to quality education for those who cannot afford it (Campbell 2013). While these bursaries and scholarships are offered to learners who excel in certain fields, there are schools who also award these financial aids to motivated learners in exceptional circumstances. In this way, these independent schools are taking steps towards eliminating certain environmental barriers, such as poverty, in the private education system (Hofmeyr & McCay 2010).

However, for adolescent girls that come from low socio-economic backgrounds, these scholarships and bursaries place them in a vastly different environment of higher socioeconomic culture. For many of these girls, the social environments of home and school differ greatly and each of these girls are expected to adapt to the different socio-economic climates, cultures and values that the school, that the majority of its learners, uphold. Although these adolescent girls have been given physical access to a high fee independent school, it is possible that the girls do not feel included in the social life of the school.

As adolescent girls are described as more people-orientated than their male counterparts (Jean Lytle, Bakken & Romig 1997), the underprivileged adolescent girls experience, while attending a high fee independent school, may have a profound influence on their psychosocial development and identity formation, especially where school identity and home identity are contrasting. For this reason, the area of interest of this study was on the psychosocial experiences of underprivileged adolescent girls attending a high-fee independent school.

While this investigation into the psychosocial experiences of adolescent girls from a low socioeconomic background attending a high-fee independent school takes place in one Johannesburg school, the information gathered here provides a starting point in the attempt to answer the question: what are the psychosocial experiences of adolescent girls from a low socio-economic background attending a high-fee independent school? The knowledge generated from this study can be considered an important contribution to the continuing research and knowledge base that currently exists within this field, enabling those in positions of management and leadership to provide

support for those learners as well as to adapt policies and school practices to ensure a more diverse and inclusive environment. The focus of this study was to obtain a comprehensive, reflective and interpretive understanding of the lived experiences of these adolescent girls within the context of their high-fee independent school, and the role that their emotions, thoughts, values, beliefs and behaviours played in their interpretation of experiences.

Identity Development in Adolescence

While adolescence is a general period of development known for its biological, psychological and social changes, these changes differ in terms of pace and gender, and are influenced by structural and environmental factors (United Nations International Children's Education Fund [UNICEF], 2005). According to Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, the successful navigation of this period of growth results in the formation of the adolescent's identity (Erikson 1963; Haggbloom *et al.* 2002). Erikson further noted that individuals could not separate themselves from their social context, thus emphasising how the individual and society are closely interrelated and that the process of identity formation should be seen in consideration of the expectations of the community - its history, culture, traditions and principles (Karkouti 2014). In other words, this implies that there is that relationship between an adolescent's development and his surrounding systems. When considering the above views in relation to underprivileged adolescent girls attending a high fee, independent school, there are a number of factors that may influence the navigation of adolescence for these girls.

Evidence suggests that adolescence psychosocial development tends to move from a focus on group cohesion and group identity towards a more individual identity (Milkman & Wanberg 2012). This early on group cohesion and identity is based on one factor, namely similarity among peers, which includes background, tastes, values and interests (Bradford Brown & Larson 2008). This entails that group belonging is an important milestone towards successful individual identity formation (Côté 2009). For adolescents who may be considered dissimilar to the majority of their peers in terms of background, values and interests, group cohesion may not always be possible. Those that do not fit in with the accepted norms of the group are often discriminated against (Trepte 2011).

Adolescent psychosocial development differs in terms of gender. As female adolescent identity development focuses more on interpersonal identity and interaction with others in comparison to male adolescents (Jean Lytle, Bakken & Romig 1997). In female identity development emphasis is placed on the interrelatedness between peer interaction and identity development (Perry & Pauletti 2011). Other gender differences noted in adolescent development is the risk that female adolescents are more prone to internalising problems of anxiety or depression and that female adolescents tend to have a lower global self-esteem (Galamboous, Berenbaum & McHale 2009).

Along with gender differences, it is also evident that adolescent development is influenced by structural and environmental differences (Bluth, Campo, Futch & Gaylord, 2016). As Erikson stated that identity development should be seen in terms of community expectations, values, traditions and principals (Karkouti 2014), it is necessary to consider the opposing community expectations of home and school. In this study, these underprivileged adolescent girls attending a high fee independent school, the expectations, values and interests of home may be somewhat different to those of the school, creating conflict in the girls' own personal expectations, values and interests, as they attempt to assimilate both the home and school environment. The navigation of these two worlds necessitates an understanding of Bronfenbrenner's Proximal Interactions (David, Lazarus & Lolwana 2014) and the Students Multiple Worlds Model (Phelan, Davidson & Yu 1994).
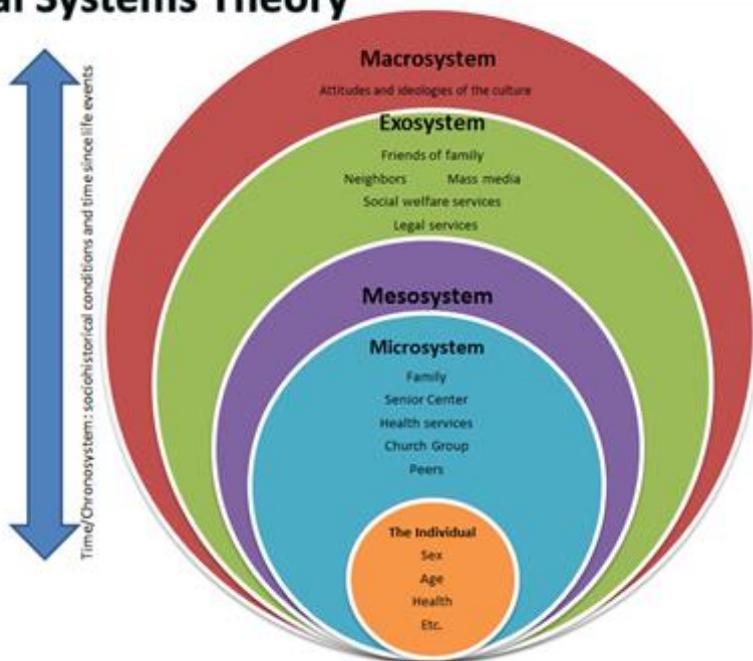
Influence of Context

When considering the impact community has in the development of individuals' identity, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a framework in which to look at the influence environment has on individual development. This theoretical perspective regards a person's environment as a set of nested subsystems along four different dimensions: person factors, process factors, contexts and time (David *et al.* 2014). In the context of this study, person factors look at how factors such as appearance, age and gender influences interaction (David *et al.* 2014). Context factors look at each of the systems (Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem), their interrelatedness and bidirectional nature (David *et al.* 2014). Process factors entail that interactions that occur directly between

people, objects and symbols are the most important in development, calling this interaction proximal interactions' (David *et al.* 2014).

The diagram below is therefore included, for the sake of indicating how each system influence each other:

Adapted from ecological system theory of Brofenbrenner (1979)

While similar in its focus on interaction, the Students Multiple Worlds Model, is a model of interrelations between the learner's peer, school and family worlds and how the meanings and understandings derived from each of these worlds influences the learner's engagement with school and learning (Cooper 2011; Cooper, Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira & Gullat 2002). This model looks at learners' interactions in their sociocultural worlds and directs attention to the nature of boundaries and borders between these worlds, as well as the processes of movement between these worlds (Duran & Ubaldo 2016). While successful

navigation is termed smooth or consistent, unsuccessful navigation is described as difficult or resisted border crossing (Ferrante 2017).

When using the Students Multiple Worlds Model (Cooper 2011) in attempting to understand the psychosocial experiences of underprivileged adolescent girls in an affluent independent school environment, one looks at the ease with which the girls cross the borders between the different socio-economic environments of their home and school contexts. While congruent worlds and smooth transitions imply that the learner experiences congruency among the values, beliefs, expectations and normative ways of behaving between worlds, patterns of transition that look at different worlds imply that the learner needs to learn to adjust and adapt between contexts owing to ethnic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic differences (Phelan, Davidson & Cao 1991). Learners can either manage this border crossing, find it difficult or are unable to cross these world borders effectively (Phelan, Yu & Davidson 1994). This theory is thus relevant in this study, and its relevance is seen when inter-relations between the learner's peer, school and family worlds and how the meanings and understandings derived from each of these worlds influence the learner's engagement with school and learning as stated in the previous section.

Navigating Multiple Contexts

The Students Multiple World's Model was used to investigate one woman's resilience in managing the difficulties she encountered within her community, family, school and peer experiences (Abbott 2014). The results indicated that the social idea of schooling presented unique contexts for the ways in which education plays a role in either mediating or aggravating the gaps between socioeconomic classes. Schools must be prepared to ease the transitions between students' home and school environments and that 'the ways in which an adolescent navigates in her home environment and the values and beliefs of her family may differ dramatically from the values and beliefs of her peer group and, yet again, from the values and expectations of the school' (Abbott 2014:57). In this study, this implies that there should be a smooth transition between the school and the adolescent's home.

Other research into the mental and emotional views of both males and females receiving scholarships at high fee independent schools found key issues of inclusive education such as access, participation and financial demands and belonging. Issues were focused around admission to the school

as well as epistemological access, a lack of access to information, and that the participants were shy, secretive and withdrawn about their backgrounds (Geyer 2014). African American girls in an 'elite' school were often marked by the desire to fit into the predominantly white, upper class practices (Horvat & Antonino 1999).

Another study investigating the adolescent identity experiences of previously disadvantaged scholarship recipients attending independent high schools yielded findings of increased pressure and expectations from schools and teachers, racial stereotyping at school, financial pressures and the need to 'adapt' to suit the predominant culture of the school (Simpson 2012). There may be a lack of understanding and appreciation of African culture and its traditions in high fee independent schools (Idang 2015). To fit in and avoid being seen as different, some learners often adapt to suit the dominant culture of the school (Simpson 2012). This poses the risk of these learners further alienating themselves from their own community. Simpson found that there was a difference between how black learners and white learners treated adults. The participants reported that while they felt that white learners still showed respect, they felt they had more respect for elders which they indicated came from the way they were raised (Simpson 2012).

Felton (2010) investigated the advantages and disadvantages of a scholarship programme in an inclusive school and found that inadequately formulated and maintained policies as well as a variety of social issues impacted on the experiences of the scholarship recipients. Social issues that arose from the study include social comparison and alienation from the home community (Felton 2010). However, it was noted in her results that the participants felt they were privileged to receive the quality of education they did, and that the quality of education they received at other schools was not as good (Felton 2010).

Research Methodology

A qualitative, interpretivistic research paradigm was selected for this study as the aim was to produce a descriptive analysis that emphasised a deep and interpretive understanding of the adolescent girls' perceived experience in a school and peer environment that differs culturally and socially from their home environment (Creswell & Poth 2017). A research design of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was utilised in an attempt to make sense of the

participants' experiences as they themselves make sense of their experiences (Smith 2011). The setting for this study was a high-fee independent school located in a suburb of Johannesburg. This school is a single sex school that describes itself as an inclusive and nurturing environment. Due to the vulnerability of the participants, the use of a gatekeeper was necessary to initiate contact with potential participants.

Acting as the gatekeeper for this study the Head of School identified 6 potential participants with which she made initial contact. The participants were selected according to specific criteria which dictated that all participants should be female and between 12 and 18 years of age and that they were enrolled in a high-fee independent school, through means of a bursary. Within this school context, six learners were identified as meeting the criteria for participant selection, however, only 5 participants were willing to partake in the study. It is important to note that while these criteria were based on age and gender no distinction was made on the basis of race and/or religion.

This study made use of in-depth, phenomenological interview, with an unstructured interview technique that involved conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant, lasting 30 minutes each. This interviewing technique was based on the belief that behaviour becomes meaningful when considered within the context of their lives and of those around them (Smith, Flower & Larkin 2009). The interviewer's task in the interviews was to put the participant's experience in context by asking her to tell as much as possible about herself and her experiences in a high-fee independent school. As each interview was audio recorded, the information was transcribed by the researcher (Seidman 2015).

Data analysis was prescribed by the requirements of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith *et al.* 2009). This is outlined as a six-step process. The first is the reading and re-reading stage which involves repeatedly engaging with the transcriptions of each interview. The second step entailed a process of writing descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments in which the meaning and language were analysed systematically. Next, emerging themes were identified through the written comments. The fourth step involved searching for connections across themes and entailed interpreting each of the themes and how they were related to each other. Once this was completed, the process started all over again for each interview. The last step involved identifying common themes and patterns across each of the participants' interview transcripts.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Before commencing with the research process, permission was obtained from the University's Faculty Ethics Committee. Strict ethical guidelines as indicated in the General Ethical Guidelines for Health Researchers (2016) developed by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) were maintained during this study, which involved acting in the best interests of the participant; respect for participants; informed consent; and maintaining confidentiality. Due to the vulnerability of the information needed in order to identify participants, the use of a gatekeeper allowed for information to remain confidential, even to an extent from the researcher. The nature of the research design allowed for respect of the participants diverse cultural practices and beliefs and attempted to eliminate any potential bias or prejudice. Furthermore, the use of member checks allowed for each participant to supply additional information or to correct misunderstandings in the interpretation of the information to ensures credibility.

FINDINGS

Understanding One's Cultural Identity

One of the most predominant themes that emerged in all the interviews was related to the participants' understanding of cultural identity. In this study, most participants had difficulty defining what their culture entailed. The girls experienced uncertainty linked to female initiation rites and often encountered cultural ignorance from their peers and teachers. This theme is further divided into three subthemes: difficulty defining culture, uncertainty linked to initiation rites, cultural ignorance on behalf of the teachers and peers. From this study, it can be stated that more research should be conducted on female initiation in order to make them aware of the importance of cultural diversity.

When looking at the subtheme of difficulty defining culture, it appeared to be a difficult topic during the interviews. While each of the participants attempted to describe and define their culture and its practices, it appeared that the majority of the participants did not fully understand what the traditions and practices of their culture were or what they involved. One participant frequently responded with '*I don't know*' and another *'No, I don't know'* *[about any cultural practices]* when asked to talk about anything culture related. These participants could, however, give descriptions in context, almost as though they were unaware that these everyday activities were culture specific.

There also appeared to be an overlap between culture and religion, as several participants felt that religious practices related to church, as well as prayers, were part of their family's culture. This is evident in the statement by Participant Four *'I think the girls, they like, have to take their culture, like my mom goes to ZCC (Zion Christian Church), I think I have to become one as well'*. Participant five appeared not to understand the term culture and mentioned that she was not sure if culture is important in her family as her '*granny doesn't tell [her] anymore*'.

Another subtheme related to the participants understanding of cultural identity was that of uncertainty related to initiation rites and practices. The participants who spoke of initiation expressed an uncertainty and hesitancy to-wards this practice which was attributed to the secrecy surrounding the process. While both stated that they would like to experience it, they used contradicting statements when explaining why they were not able to. The secrecy surround-ing these rituals appears to contribute to their fear. For example, participant one stated that *'I can't go and like force [mother] to take me somewhere where she knows I won't even survive'*. This statement indicates that she was aware of the potential dangers of initiation and appears a little relieved at being denied this cultural rite. When participant four was asked about being excited about initiation she responded *'No, I'm not. It's a bit scary though. It's like you don't know what they're going to do and stuff'*. Neither participant could give a description of what would be expected of them for this rite of passage.

The third notable subtheme falling under cultural identity was the cultural ignorance experienced both at school and in the community. Participant one indicated that cultural ignorance was a feature during her time at the school; however she did describe it as unintentional cultural ignorance. Also, she explained that she felt there was limited effort from teachers and peers in pronouncing her name and her friends' names correctly. This, she felt, reflected her peers' and teachers' lack of interest in learning about 'black cultures'. Furthermore, one participant experienced cultural ignorance from a peer through social media and felt that *'[the girls] don't understand that black people have come from such a long way'* and that there was a sense that '*when [they] come to such an environment, [they] are able to adjust to it, and [they] are able to think like the other girls*'. This participant also indicated that she often experienced cultural ignorance from her peers. Even though she felt that her peers from another racial group did not intend any harm, they were not aware that some of the things they would say could be considered racist.

Establishing Individual Values

In conjunction with establishing and understanding individual cultural identity, another theme that became evident involves the discussion of the participants' individual values in light of those of their peers, parents and families. Noted as a common theme throughout the interviews is the diffusion of cultural and social values.

The participants found that they have moved from their parents' more traditional and strict social and cultural values to a more integrated form of social and cultural values. During the interview, the participants' views on their cultural values changed as the interviews progressed. Initially, all the girls indicated that they valued culture; however, over the course of the other two interviews they expressed contradictory views and statements regarding their family's social values. For example, most of the participants verbalised that culture was precious to their parents, and that, while they valued their culture, they also tended to find it both a hindrance and limiting. Participant three indicated that '*tradition is kind of really like, [the] thing you have to go through and [I] think, but, I don't find it like, I cherish [it] and like, [my] favourite*'. Participant two indicated that culture was important to her father as he grew up that way but indicated she felt differently about it and stated that '*[she] just doesn't understand it*'. She appeared to be a lot more critical of some of the family's beliefs as indicated by her description of their visit to a traditional healer as it '*plays with her head'*. Participant Four appeared quite undecided about the level of influence culture has on her life and often used phrases such as '*I suppose so*' when describing her wish to follow in the cultural footsteps of her mother.

Linked to social values, participant one felt that her family was not as open-minded as her and considered them serious, uptight and conservative in their social values. The example she gave to support her statement included homosexuality and her grandfather's views in contradiction to hers. She also attributed her open-mindedness to the school context which allowed her to be more '*free*' (Transcription line 75). Also evident was the differing principles related to community service, as one participant indicated that her father was not supportive of her involvement in fund-raising initiatives, indicating that her father '*didn't want her to be in it*'.

A subtheme under establishing individual values includes the differences among peers. All the participants indicated, either directly or

indirectly, that there were differences between their values and those of their school and community peers. Their thoughts conveyed that they valued respect, manners and education more than their peers. Participant one stated that she felt she valued respect for teachers in comparison to those that live in her neighbourhood, who lack respect and discipline for authority. She mentioned that she is more '*goal oriented*' than those from her neighbourhood and attributes this to attending this school. During her interview, she stated that *'students who go to schools in [her] neighbourhood aren't as goal driven as [she is] and that they don't want the same things that [she does])*'. This participant also expressed her annoyance when seeing couples in her neighbourhood. She indicated that she valued her education more than attending a co-educational school and often referred to neighbourhood peers who were more concerned with boys.

Participant three echoed this sentiment, indicating that she did not have the same values as her school peers and explained this in terms of not wanting to go to socials while her friends all wanted to. She also mentioned that she felt good manners were important and she attributed this value to her parents. Participant one felt there were boundary issues in public schools which '*we don't cross with teachers but there they [public school learners] don't really care anymore about whether you're a teacher or what not, they just, they just feel like you're one of them and I feel that is not right*'.

Feelings of Belonging and Exclusion

During the interview process was a variety of ways in which the participants described feeling excluded and these were evident in both community and school settings. Each participant, in one way or another, mentioned exclusion whether by peers, parents or the community. There were three categories of exclusion, namely, community exclusion based on school affiliation, exclusion from school activities based on favouritism and financial contribution, and exclusion because of parent beliefs.

A subtheme of exclusion based on school affiliation, was only directly mentioned by one participant. Another participant felt excluded based on her living circumstances as she felt she had no immediate community in which to belong. Participant one mentioned feeling excluded by those who lived in her community and indicated that this exclusion was based on the school she attended. She reported that she had been labelled as the '*black girl who think[s]*

they're white'. She reported that in her community, '*there is a stereotype that people in her neighbourhood automatically think just cause you go to a white school, now you think you're white*') and indicated that she was '*almost excluded from the community*'.

Self-Comparison in Both School and Home Communities

The fifth theme that emerged during the thematic analysis is that of comparison. This occurred in three noticeable ways, namely, comparison based on economic status and material possessions, comparison based on academic achievement, and comparison of the message of home versus the message of school.

Throughout the interview process, it was quite evident that the participants often engaged in social comparison. The participants reported comparing themselves in two areas, namely, financial comparison and material possessions. Participant five was quite concerned about her financial position and appeared to have had difficulty understanding the reason for the financial gap between herself and her peers. She refers to her financial status as '*blocking her*' from becoming rich. She also reported instances where friends and peers had to share food with her as she hadn't eaten.

Participant four frequently mentioned that she wished she could get what she wanted, when she wanted it and expressed frustration in having to justify her reasons to her parents. She stated that '*you can't just get things whenever you want and like, go to the shops and go there and be like, ooh can I have this? You have to get things that you need now*'. Later, she reported that she would like to have a cell phone or tablet to complete her school work and, further on, mentioned that while most of the girls in her grade have a cell phone, she does not. She directly links this need to being able to complete her school work.

In addition to social comparison based on economic status is social comparison based on school achievement. Initially, only two participants indicated engaging in social comparison based on school achievement but by means of member checking, another two participants indicated that they also engaged in this kind of self-comparison. This kind of comparison entails that the learners compare themselves to their peers based on their marks or performance in certain academic-related areas achievement.

During the interview process participant two expressed a desire to do better in her school marks, commenting to her friend about another classmate. This participant admitted to asking herself *'how she does it, how does she pull that off?'*, and saying to herself '*oh no, you're stupid, why can't you be there, like the other pupils that are much better'* when referring to a fellow classmate.

Expectations of Home versus School

Evident in the data collected is the differing views between the message from home and the message from school. When the participants spoke of home, they were referring to their extended family or their parent's birthplace; the general idea was the same whenever mentioned. These participants felt that their home circumstances sent the message that it was important to survive and get a job. In contrast, participants felt that the message they got from the school was that they could be successful and succeed in whatever they chose to do; they felt that the school motivated them. The following evidence is extracted from participant one's and Participant Four's interview transcripts. *'The difference is that my school world is more motivating than my home world'* and *'here you have high goals and [home] there isn't, just like the basic things, that you need to live'.*

Discussion and Interpretation of the Results

This study was under taken in order to provide a platform in which the psychosocial experiences of underprivileged adolescent girls attending a high fee independent school could be explored. Ideally, the findings from this study could guide continuing research as well as to enable those in positions of power to better school policies and practices, moving towards a more inclusive environment. When comparing the findings from previous studies, one can see how the information gathered in these studies may equip schools to provide better support for learners in similar positions.

While the participants in this study had difficulty defining their culture, there is the possibility that this could be attributed to a lack of understanding of their own culture in the school. Simpson's study found that there was a lack of understanding and appreciation of black culture and its traditions in independent schools. She was found that to fit in and avoid being seen as different, some learners often adapt to suit the dominant culture of the

school (Simpson 2012). These findings could also be tied directly with the diffusion of social and cultural values as noted in this study. The need to feel a sense of belonging in school could lead to a diffusion of traditional African culture with a more Westernised ideal of the school. This phenomenon could possibly explain why the participants had difficulty defining and describing their culture.

The link between culture and identity formation is highlighted. Culture is not the single defining factor in identity formation and does not entirely form someone's social identity, however, it does provide 'a tool kit of resources' (Côté & Levine 2002: 122) that an individual can use to attach meaning and to apply in their community and the formation of their identity. It is possible to infer from this that it is one's perception of culture and the meaning one attaches to it that influences one's identity formation; hence the ability to define culture and practice does not play much of a role in the formation of identity. Furthermore, the findings of cultural ignorance experienced by the participants correlated with a previous study whose findings indicated that black girls in an 'elite' school were marked by the desire to fit into the predominantly white, upper class practices (Horvat & Antonio 1999). This notion, along with the idea that black culture and tradition are not valued in these schools, may be able to explain the limited role that culture plays in the lives of the participants of this study and how this has influenced the way they view their culture.

When considering the uncertainty related to initiation rites experienced by the participants in this study, there were no similar findings in any other studies. However, Van Rooyen, Potgieter, and Mtezuka (2006) found that the information that does exist focuses entirely on the negative aspects of initiation - sickness, isolation and potentially death. This, along with the secrecy that accompanies these rites, could possibly contribute to the uncertainty and fear experienced by the participants in this study.

The larger theme of establishing individual values also has strong ties to the cultural and value diffusion discussed above. While Simpson (2012) found that there appeared to be an expectation of how learners are required to act in a private school environment, the participants in this study did not indicate outward that they had a similar experience, however, the diffusion of cultural and social values could be attributed to the need to assimilate to the culture of the school. Although it appears that the participants in this study are moving closer to the dominant values of the school, they appeared to still view

their family's traditional values as important, and found that these values often from to those of their peers.

This integration between the value systems of school, home and community seemed to influence the participants' psychosocial experiences and there appeared to be distinct and specific differences experienced by each participant. As values tend to be a core feature of culture, Sheifer Mollering and Daniel (2012) use the term 'cultural fit' to explain this process. Cultural fit looks at the degree of correspondence between the values of one individual with those of another (Sheifer *et al.* 2012). The more congruence there is, the more likely the individual's wellbeing is to be supported. This could result in internal conflict among adolescents crossing cultural borders who tend to be exposed to varying value systems. Congruence in one value system could lead to non-congruence in the other. Strong communication between the school based support team, family and community at micro- and meso-levels of the system should be encouraged to support all learners to feel included in the school (Fourie 2017).

Participants in both this study as well as the participants in Simpson's study reported that while they felt that white learners still showed respect, they felt they had more respect for elders which they indicated came from the way they were raised (Simpson 2012). This is clear in the descriptions given by the participants, as their observations tended to be linked to respect for elders which stems from traditional child rearing practices. Linked to Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic perspective, Trommsdorff (2012) states that an important aspect of an adolescent's development is related to their values within their cultural context. The adolescent process of identity development is framed by individual and cultural values in relation to the world. They state that during this period, the individual is in the process of determining which values to adopt to guide their individual development.

While the findings indicate a movement or assimilation from traditional to western values, this is not necessarily considered a favourable outcome. Both Felton (2010) and Simpson (2012) reported findings were similar to the exclusion from community based on school affiliation as reported in this study. Participants in all three studies indicated that they had felt labelled and judged by their community based on their attendance at a private school. These findings comment on the negative perceptions that peers who were not attending an independent school have of those that are attending independent schools.

In the attempt to fit in to the predominant culture of the school, it was also found that the participants engaged in forms of social comparison. While comparisons were based on academics, comparison based on material possessions as well general ability were common. Findings in this study mirrored findings in Simpson (2012) that participants felt a longing for material possessions and often felt left out for not owning a cell phone or computer. Felton (2010) highlighted concerns that arise later in school careers when the individuals start to notice that they do not have access to the same materials. Both statements support the idea that individuals who come from an underprivileged background may engage in social comparison. Further research into the social comparison phenomenon by Dijkstra, Kuyper, Buunk, Van der Werf, and Van der Zee (2008) found that this kind of upward comparison can lower self-esteem and produce negative self-evaluation in emotional and cognitive areas. Cultural comparisons can further result in elevated levels of anxiety (Dijkstra *et al.* 2008).

Conclusion

The underprivileged adolescent girls attending this high-fee independent school appeared to have difficulty understanding their own individual cultural identity. While they had difficulty defining what their culture was, it was still clearly an important part of their identity. Some indicated that they experienced hesitancy and uncertainty related to cultural initiation expectations on account of the secrecy involved. Coming from an underprivileged background, the girls found that their social values differed from their peers, both at school and in their home community. They also felt that their values had integrated some of the characteristics of the cultural majority of the school, thus diffusing their cultural values from home. These learners also felt excluded by their home community for attending a 'white school'. Each of the participants engaged in a form of social comparison, comparing themselves to others based on financial and material belongings or school achievement.

Taking the above findings into account, there is reason to believe that the need to adapt to a vastly different cultural and economic environment on a daily basis may influence psychosocial development and the development in both positive and negative ways. This study provides a starting point in which to address the above statement. In order to further investigate this possibility, the study could be recreated on a larger scale, including multiple schools and

educational environments in which to determine any trends. Further, the inclusion of both parents and educators may also benefit further studies into the investigation into the psychosocial experiences of underprivileged adolescent girls attending a high fee independent school.

The benefits of this study, along with others similar in nature, fall within the theory, policy and practice of both public and private education. The findings may assist in management, practice and policy on a national and international level. Furthermore, this study may also contribute to the application and expansion of existing theories such Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, the Students Multiple Worlds Model, as well as to the policy formulation practices of schools and regulatory bodies such as the Independent Schools Association of South Africa.

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