

**Sexual socialisation: Young adult women
storying how sexual activities were discussed in
South African cultural contexts**

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by

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Abstract

Epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancy, gender-based violence and homophobia, in South Africa, have focused research on how young people learn about sex. This research has often focused on young girls from risk-saturated areas, and specific agents of socialisation, where they might learn about sex, such as parents, life orientation at schools, peers, media, and traditional cultural approaches. Using a narrative theoretical framework, through memory work, this study explored how black young adult women friends – who were university students – experienced forms of sexual socialisation, through various communication in South African cultural contexts. Findings from the thematic narrative analysis that was conducted demonstrated that sexual socialisation is a complex life-long process. This takes place through a collision of contradictory messages, from different agents of socialisation, in different cultural contexts. Themes were identified and organised to tell an overall sexual socialisation story that progressed through time, moving from a stage of perceived innocent oblivion, mixed messages in primary and high school, “liberal” university stories and the current stage of reauthoring stories.

Dedication

I dedicate this research study to black women. To the powerhouse of a mom that raised me, the colleagues, and mentors that I met along the way, and my amazing participants and friends who trusted me with their narratives. I hope you find a piece of yourself represented here.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This narrative study tells the story of my sexual socialisation journey, and the interconnected sexual socialisation stories narrated by my friends about their own sexual socialisation journeys. These stories will be told within a bigger story of how this research study came about, and other stories of sexual socialisation in South African cultural contexts.

1.1. Backstory

This research project stems from a staff led – by Professor Lindy Wilbraham – group-research project on mother and adult daughter communication about sex and sexuality. In 2018, my Honours in Psychology year, I participated in this project that used written Memory Work (MW) narrative material as the object of a narrative analysis enquiry (Ludidi, 2018) – these frameworks and procedures are explained below, and in Chapters that follow. The broad aim of this group project was to explore storied aspects of young adult women’s conversations with their mothers or maternal/ caregiving figures about, for example, romantic relationship rules, risks to avoid, appearance and self-care, and sex and sexuality.

Thus, according to the MW research design (cf. Willig, 2001), a sample size of four postgraduate students – doing the study as a compulsory component of their Honours in Psychology degree (as students) – served as both researchers and participants in this project. These researchers and participants reflected on their own and other students’ communication experiences with their mothers. This university student sample of young adult women broke with the tradition in risk-related public health research in South Africa of focusing on young adolescent girls in studies on intergenerational communication about sex and sexuality (e.g., Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Pattman & Chege, 2003) – this point is further discussed in the Literature Review chapter that follows. My part of the group-based project focused on storied experiences of the disclosure of sexual activities in mother-daughter communication (Ludidi, 2018). In this study, I explored how sexual practices, events, encounters, and experiences were talked about between mothers and their young adult postgraduate student daughters.

MW narratives of adult daughters’ experiences of mother-daughter communication were collected; and these “written stories” were analysed using a Thematic Narrative Analysis (TNA) (Riessman, 2002) to find and report on the patterns of communication. Thus, following some of the methodological steps provided by Willig (2001) on how to “do” MW,

short narratives were written by each researcher/participant in response to open-ended trigger questions, for each topic of the group project. The question that guided my part of the project was “What conversations about sexual activities did you have with your mother when you were a young girl, and as an older daughter?” The researchers/participants (including myself) wrote about what they could remember of communication about sex, with their mothers, when they were younger girls, alongside a more recent memory from when they were young adult women in university. As per MW guidelines for ‘generating memories’, these storied accounts of experience were written in a particular form: 100-300 words, written in the third person, with as much circumstantial description as possible, but excluding details that identified themselves, or their mothers (cf. Willig, 2001). This study broke with MW tradition in *not* analysing discussions of the stories amongst the group of researcher/participants. Instead, it took the written stories themselves as narrative materials that were analysed using thematic narrative analysis. Thematic narrative analysis is an analytic method that works with the content of narratives or stories; working to identify common themes that draw in narrative dimensions, such as the passage of time, transitions, lessons that were learnt, or tensions between different experiences, memories, and stories (Squire et al., 2014; Riessman, 2008).

Contrary to public health literature that reports intergenerational silences on issues around sex in some households and communities in South Africa (e.g., Aggleton & Crewe, 2005; Bastien, Kajula & Muhwezi, 2011; Preston-Whyte, 2003), the researchers/participants in my study reported that they *did* communicate with their biological mothers about sex (Ludidi, 2018). This communication with mothers was described in both earlier (girlhood) and later (young adult) written memories. This communication, however, was not perceived as “formal talk”. Participants, instead, wrote that questioning or the use of external narrative events (e.g., a pregnant neighbour or menstruation problems) were used by mothers and daughters themselves, at different times, to initiate conversations about sex, or issues related to sexual experience or sexual activities. Sometimes these conversations would produce somewhat surprising or awkward disclosures (of sexual experience) between mothers and daughters; but sometimes these conversations would produce strategic deception from the daughters to maintain “innocence” in the eyes of the mothers, and/or evasiveness and embarrassment from mothers.

Narratively, these themes cropped up similarly in both earlier (girlhood) and later (young adult) stories of communications with mothers about sex. Researchers/participants described

these conversations as flooded with rules and warnings to protect them from risk and danger. There was little narrative evidence in these written memories of conversations of transitions towards autonomy as (possibly) sexually active and responsible young adult women at university, within a very different, so-called 'liberal institutional culture' about sex (e.g., Mbotho, Cilliers, & Akintola, 2013; Shefer & Strebel, 2001). This presumably suggests that the researchers/participants had limited independence as postgraduate students from their mothers, parents, caregivers, or guardians. The young adult women, as postgraduate students, were still financially dependent on these figures who had made sacrifices to afford their education, and who would have to take care of any consequence that could result from sexual activities, such as unplanned pregnancy. As young adult daughters, they thus (mostly) continued to position themselves as sexually inactive/inexperienced or sexually 'disinterested', when chatting with their mothers, even if they had had short or long-term intimate relationships with women or men they met at university.

Some interesting ethical dilemmas appeared once the thematic narrative analysis was completed. The MW researchers/participants considered the implications of presenting this research project to an audience of student-peers, lecturers and invited friends and family members in a compulsory colloquium. Of particular concern was the anonymity of the student researchers/participants as stated in the ethics protocol; an aspect which now seemed hard to honour in this context. The thematic narrative analysis analysed actual written stories of personal experiences, where the participants had sometimes described intimate revealing issues about themselves, and/or their mothers. If, for example, there was a story/extract about a "cultural practice" of communication about sex mentioned by an isiXhosa speaking researcher/participant, the audience of familiars, knowing who the isiXhosa speaking person in the group project was, would be able to trace the story back to the author.

Following ethical precautions offered by Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger (2015) on managing anonymity in special, situated contexts where mentioning any characteristics of participants or events would identify participants (and any third parties they referred to) to familiars/others, any consistently used pseudonyms in the research report or presentation would also be traceable (e.g., weaving together all quoted extracts from "Zanele"). This would potentially expose the postgraduate student as researcher/participant, and her mother, who was mentioned in the story of communication-experience; but whose side of the story was not represented in the project. It was decided as a group of MW researchers/participants that any researcher/participant's cultural, racial, or sexual identities would not be used in the

research reports or the colloquium presentation. Thus, the ethics protocols that needed to be observed to protect postgraduate students' and participants' identities, shaped what we could ethically report in this research context. In particular, the TNA themes that emerged did not exist in a cultural vacuum, although it was impossible to report on and unpack the intricate stories of 'cultural sexual socialisation' that threaded through the researcher/participants' narratives.

1.2. A new narrative study

This new narrative study pursues these “cultural” issues around communication about sex, and sexual socialisation, within an approach that holds constant some aspects of the previous study (e.g., narrative framework, MW, sampling of university-aged young adult women as participants) but incorporates some differences. These similarities and shifts in focus, with rationales, are set out below. This new narrative study acknowledges that these “conversations”, through which young women are sexually socialised, happen in different cultural contexts in South Africa, with not only biological mothers, but various figures who may or may not be kin, and interactive engagements with various other sources of information and formative experience – for example, youth-consumption of various media (Nuttall, 2004); discussions with friends about media-campaigns about safer sex (Thomas, 2004); traditional practices of sexual socialisation with peers and community elders (Delius & Glaser, 2002) or through Life Orientation sexuality education at schools (Shefer & Macleod, 2015); conversations with sisters (Ndabula, Macleod & Saville Young, 2020); or negotiating consensual heterosexual sexual encounters with fellow university students (Shefer & Foster, 2009). This focus deliberately tries to widen the lens on mother-daughter communication, to explore the multiplicity of sites of instruction/communication and messaging about sex and sexuality that girls and women might interact with; and also, how they are able to negotiate the many contradictions and tensions within and between the different cultural narratives, they encounter as they grow up. The concepts of “culture” and “sexual socialisation” are introduced below, and various socialising “conversations” about sex and sexualities are reviewed in the Literature Review that follows.

Narrative research uses, as the object of investigation, narrative material of various kinds (Riessman, 2002). Within this field, “narratives” usually refer to storied accounts of past events which are told to a particular real or imagined audience (Squire et al., 2014); and these stories may be ‘gathered’ from pre-existing public domains (e.g., video games, film, fictional

literature, talk shows), or ‘generated’ for examination through interviews, writing tasks, photographs, or discussions (Riessman, 2008). These storied accounts help storytellers, research participants and audiences make sense of their own and others’ experiences. Their storytelling thus returns to and reflects on ambivalent or transitional experiences; it is organized to progress chronologically through time; it explains the storyteller’s feelings and interpretation of events, and it is often told in relation to a dominant narrative - a shared story that acts as a framework of how the world is to be understood (Riessman, 2002; Squire et al., 2014).

Black women university students were purposefully recruited for this study, to learn about and report on their narratives of sexual socialisation, without prescribing a “Global-North” or “Western” psychological narrative of how this *should* be done or how sexual activities *should* have been discussed by biological mothers of daughters (cf. Wilbraham, 2009). This study does not claim knowledge of a right way to talk about sex, but rather it attempts to embrace the diversity in the various cultural practices around communication about sex and sexuality to which university students might have been exposed or heard about while growing up and while studying at university. In this new narrative study, university students who were friends were sampled, as the people with whom one would normally have conversations about sex. Hollway (1989) explains how qualitative research can locate meaning ‘differently’, ‘subjectively’, and that researching how sex and sexuality are talked about *with friends*, rather than by randomly selected participants who are strangers to the researcher and one another, increases the depth and reflexivity of stories, and dialogical interaction about stories told in interviews and discussions. Hollway (1989) argues that this creates a safe space for sharing stories and conversations, which is facilitated also through trusting the researcher as a familiar.

As part of the ethical considerations of the study, issues of voluntary participation, consent, confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity were thoroughly discussed at different phases of the study. Different to the previous study, the sampled university students were not registered for postgraduate degrees in the Psychology Department; and they were not selected to form a collective group of researcher-participants (see MW guidelines in Methodology chapter: Willig, 2001) which might compromise their anonymity. All participants in the new study identified as “black” (African, with various cultural affiliations), so there was a better chance to protect anonymity through pseudonyms without erasing their cultural/sexual subjectivities.

Within the context of a focus group discussion, the MW procedure was used to firstly produce storied material from participants and myself (as participant-researcher) about how sex was talked about in their various cultural contexts. This was done by writing a brief response to four trigger questions, which would help answer the overall research question: “What stories do young adult women tell about the cultural practices that they were exposed to in communication about sex and sexuality?” Secondly, participants read out and discussed the stories, and offered suggestions for emerging themes. Both the written stories and the discussion of the stories were used as material for analysis (cf. Willig, 2001). A thematic narrative analysis guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) steps to conduct a thematic analysis, with attention to various narrative aspects (Riessman, 2008), was conducted to analyse the content of the narrative material.

1.2. “In my culture”

It is difficult to define what “culture” is. Firstly, the concept of culture has been researched across several disciplines, which have produced several definitions which do not always agree (Idang, 2015). Jahoda (2012) roughly classifies this complexity among definitions by dividing them into categories of whether they present single or multiple definitions of culture. Secondly, within these definitions, across disciplines, “culture” (singular) or “cultures” (plural) refer to values, assumptions, emotions, and practices at different levels of a social system (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). From a Social Identity Theory perspective, this implies different ways in which “belonging” is performed and experienced as part of shared group identity (Stevens, 2004). This belonging can also mean alliance to the counter-narratives of sub-cultures, referring to out-groups whose identity-positions are shaped around resistance to a dominant culture (Squire et al., 2014). Some cultural markers include aspects that are taken-for-granted, but are invisible, e.g., values; and others that might be visible (material), but are hard to decipher, e.g., behaviours or clothes (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Baldwin, Faulkner and Hecht (2008) describe “culture” as ‘a moving target’ which can refer to media cultures around music consumption, ethnic identities, “black culture”, permissive or liberal sex culture, organisational culture, national culture/identity, or gym- and fitness culture.

Idang (2015) asserts that “African culture” (singular) might refer to shared features or characteristics between various African societies and cultural practices around metaphysical explanations, language, customs and so on. He argues that a common understanding of “culture” refers to a “way of life” (p.99) shared by a group of people or society. This

includes, but is not limited to values, religion, health, a belief system, customs, and social norms of what is acceptable behaviour. He argues that this is socially transmitted, or socially learnt (Idang, 2015).

Alongside the definitional complexities of “culture,” there are also cautions about pitfalls and abuses of the concept. Spencer-Oatey (2012) provides an interesting review of these concerns. Firstly, “culture” may be represented as a “thing” or feature of human existence that may be different to other objects/cultures. It could thus be perceived as though it were homogenous, without contestation, and can be attributed to all members of a particular social group (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). This holds the risk of stereotyping (Dickinson, 2014). Secondly, an individual may be seen as “having one culture” (or a single cultural identity) instead of various degrees of influence at different times (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Lastly, culture might be seen as a “tradition”, a set of rules and values that are “inherited” and passed down from generation to generation, and are thus unchangeable (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Vincent (2008) finds a more complex picture, in her exploration of ritual male circumcision practised by AmaXhosa in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, as a form of sexual socialisation for boys into manhood. She argues that while many of the physical aspects of the rite of passage have not changed, some of the teachings about the meaning of sex and manhood have changed (Vincent, 2008).

Within a contextually responsive approach, Macleod (2009) discusses three ways in which culture has been conceptualised in developmental psychology research with children and caregivers in South Africa. In her review, Macleod (2009) is exploring definitions of culture along with assumptions of universalism and relativism. First, she reviews cross-cultural studies that view culture as a “variable” in a comparative design. Sampled individuals from different cultural groups (or community contexts) are understood to have an essential set of features (“a culture”) that a researcher can observe, measure and compare to come up with similarities and differences between them. The problem with this approach is that “differences” appear more interesting than “similarities”; and generalizations are frequently made from a small sample to a wider culture/country, and then wildly across cultures/countries (Macleod, 2009).

Secondly, Macleod (2009) reports that some studies understand culture as a static, overarching system that is not open to adaptation or change, and as an essential feature of human existence. This can include traditions and rules to which a group of people are

believed to ascribe, or to underlying assumptions of shared thinking- and value-systems, e.g., “all Africans” inherently believe in a metaphysical ontology or *ubuntu* ideals (e.g., Idang, 2005; Nwoye, 2017). Examples might also include patriarchy and heteronormativity, as taken-for-granted power relations and ‘ways of life’ in many South African contexts (e.g., Shefer & Foster, 2009). This approach to culture underlies much of what a public health approach might see as “drivers of risk” and “obstacles to change” which is reviewed in detail in the next chapter.

Lastly, Macleod (2009) reports on cultural psychology or emic approaches. These approaches attempt to counter the essentialist and universalist approaches and understand cultures (plural) to be dynamic. Knowledge is believed to be a product of day-to-day interactions in particular contexts and is responsive to issues encountered there and other knowledge encountered elsewhere; and so is constantly being re-constructed. Ratele’s (2017) arguments about African Psychologies are similar to Macleod’s (2009) here. Ratele (2017) resists definitions of “African culture” as features shared by *all* Africans (as an overarching or underlying system of customs, assumptions, and beliefs, e.g., Idang, 2015; Nwoye, 2017); and he draws on a postcolonial, politicized view of African cultural practices and identities as multiple, hybrid, intersectional, complex, and shifting – thus, “cultures” (plural).

In this narrative study on cultural sexual socialisation, the definition of “culture” will be left fairly open, to allow the complex meanings and storied uses of the phenomenon to emerge from the participant narratives. The different ways in which cultural narratives have been conceptualised by participants will be picked up in the Thematic Narrative Analysis and Discussion chapters below.

1.3. Sexual socialisation

Shtarkshall, Santelli and Hirsh (2007) assert that socialization is the process through which individuals acquire ideas, values, shared cultural symbols, and codes of conduct necessary to participate in their societies. Their American-based arguments about “sexual socialisation” are an attempt to disentangle the many influential sources of sexual knowledge to which individuals may be exposed through so-called formal and informal experiences of learning about sex and sexuality. “Sex education” is seen as “an intentional, structured process to impart knowledge and skills, and to influence an individual’s developmental course” (Shtarkshall et al., 2007, p. 116); and this is situated in liberal versus conservative politics of whether parents or schools should be primary sex educators, and what the content of that

curriculum should be (e.g., to include gender equality and safer sex responsibility, or insist on abstinence). Within a South African context, this sexuality education would be incorporated into the age-appropriate, compulsory *Life Orientation* curriculum in State schools – as one source of sexual knowledge for children and youth.

Against this schools-based curriculum, sexual socialisation is more broadly defined as the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, values, and attitudes about sex and sexuality (Delius & Glaser, 2002; Shtarkshall et al., 2007). This process takes place at different levels of society, at different times in a child's, young person's, or adult's life. Shtarkshall et al. (2007) argue that from an early age, children are exposed to family or household members who implicitly and explicitly share messages about modesty, nudity, privacy, and gender-specific knowledge about appropriate conduct. They further argue that sexual socialisation extends beyond the home, through individuals observing community norms and values, consuming mass media and participating in cultural and religious activities. It is commonly assumed that young people are powerfully influenced by the sexual norms of their peers and by participation with various media (e.g., Macleod, Moodley & Saville Young, 2015; Nuttall, 2003; Wilbraham, 2009); and schools-based and parental inputs are commonly positioned as 'correctives' to the misinformation young people get from unreliable sources of sexual knowledge elsewhere (Wilbraham, 2009). Sexual behaviours are thus largely based on cultural narratives that determine what can be understood as "appropriate" (Anarfi and Owusu, 2011).

However, one advantage in upholding a 'cultural psychology' approach to multiplicity, hybridity, and intersectionality – in seeing many 'cultures' operating at various levels simultaneously (cf. Ratele, 2017) – is that it allows one to see sexual socialisation in a more complex and storied way. This is not the seamless transmission of a dominant, unitary, agreed-upon and 'appropriate' cultural script about sex and sexuality.

1.5. Chapter guide

This narrative study has six chapters.

Chapter 2 is a literature review, where I review how sexual socialisation has been researched in South Africa. This chapter mainly discusses public health research, research with culture and sexual socialisation in South Africa, and parents and extended family, Life Orientation

sexuality education, and peers and media as commonly researched agents of sexual socialisation.

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter, which seeks to situate this study within a narrative theoretical framework, through MW, and the purposive convenient sampling strategy that was used to invite friend participants to take part in the focus group, through which sexual socialisation narratives were collected and discussed.

Chapter 4 is the thematic narrative analysis chapter, which reported the material that was collected as themes.

Chapter 5 is the discussion chapter, which uses the literature that was reviewed to interpret the findings of the study.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion chapter, which discusses the limitations, contributions, and recommendations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a review of how sexual socialisation has previously been researched in South Africa. First, an overview of public health research on sexual socialisation will be provided, to contextualise sexual socialisation research in South Africa. Secondly, literature on sexual socialisation and culture will be reviewed. This will be done by looking at a historical perspective of sexual socialisation in black communities, and how some of these “cultural practices” - that played a crucial role in the process - have adapted in a changing South African context. Other subcultures which influenced sex and sexuality will also be explored. Lastly, this chapter will review sexual socialisation literature with parents and extended family, Life Orientation sexuality education at schools, peers, and media. This part of the review particularly focused on the lessons that are taught by these different agents of sexual socialisation and other themes that emerged from this literature.

Following the work of Frigga Haug in the 1970s, feminist research in the Global North have used MW to critically explore the sexual socialisation of girls, women, and boys – but not in the South African context. A broad narrative framework has been used in South African qualitative scholarship on youth socialisation (e.g., Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Gumede, Young-Hauser & Coetzee, 2017; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). They have focused on stories, but not within a MW frame.

2.2. Public health research in South Africa

Due to epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and other co-epidemics such as gender-based violence in South Africa, research has focused on youth sexual practices (Delius & Glaser, 2002). It is understood that to respond accordingly, there should be an understanding of how youth learn about sex (Delius & Glaser, 2002; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Shefer & Macleod, 2015). Today, homophobia, coercive sexual practices, and gender and sexual violence remain an issue for South African youth (Bhana, Crewe & Aggleton, 2019; Gumede, Young-Houser & Coetzee, 2017). Literature on this topic has revealed a failure of communication between parents and young people on sexual issues, which lead to these young people turning to their peers (Lesch & Kruger, 2004; 2005; Bastien, Kajula & Muhwezi, 2011). Public health literature has

attributed this inter-generational silence around the topic of sex and sexuality to culture (Delius & Glaser, 2002).

Generally, the public health approach aims to expand the definition of health beyond the individual, targeting all the points in which information is shared between people and their environment, to determine individual and group health (Macleod, 2009). This approach seeks to identify factors that put groups at risk, to develop an intervention or prevention plan (Macleod, 2009). So, to respond to the risk of HIV (by sexually active youth) one of the public health interventions in South Africa, used media to instruct parents on how to talk to their youth about sex, to risk-proof them (Wilbraham, 2009). These parent-child conversations, it was suggested, were to be open, continuous, and as conflict-free as possible.

Wilbraham (2009) argued that these conversations were assumed to reproduce the desired risk-safe results of white, middle-classed nuclear families. This model then found black or poor families lacking in these expert parenting skills. The youth, which was positioned by LoveLife campaigns as wanting to learn about sex from their parents, were seen to be on the receiving end of such parental failure, to which one of the solutions was to install parental sex talks (Wilbraham, 2009). Wilbraham (2009) argued that this neglected the wider social and economic conditions that perpetuated these risks, and other alternative ways in which parents, siblings, peers, and elders managed sexual socialisation. Furthermore, she asserts that these communication techniques were rooted in Western psychological assumptions about parenting, heterosexuality, gender differences, the value of emotional intimacy, and buy-in to fictions about risk freedom (Wilbraham, 2009). Wilbraham (2008) found that even though these expert-mothering techniques remained inaccessible to many resource-poor mothers in South Africa, they were seen as enlightened and progressive by the black middle-classed mothers.

Most public health research has often featured vulnerable adolescent groups and has often neglected stories of young people's sexual agency, desire and responsibility (Bhana, Crewe & Aggleton, 2019).

2.3. South African research with culture and sexual socialisation

Prevalent in the literature that discusses traditional and cultural approaches to sex education in South Africa, is the assertion that sexual socialisation was often embedded in cultural practices and traditions such as initiation ceremonies (Green et al., 2009; Delius & Glaser,

2002; Paruk et al., 2005). These are believed to have been pre-existing traditional channels of educating and communicating with the youth, which broke down following the disapproval of these approaches by Christian missionaries in colonial times (Green et al., 2009; Delius & Glaser, 2002) and modernisation, which caused a breakdown in traditional leadership (Paruk et al., 2005).

In their review of pre-colonial sexual socialisation traditional practices in South Africa, Delius and Glaser (2002) found that even though public health literature presents a culturally embedded inter-generational silence around the topic of sex, this is not supported by the literature on earlier African communities. Delius and Glaser's (2002) review discusses various groups in South Africa where sexuality, even that of adolescents, was handled without shame or embarrassment. There is evidence of sexuality being acknowledged, and adolescents receiving guidance with regards to how to navigate their sexuality in the context of family, kin groups and peer groups. The involvement of peer groups would be formalized during initiation periods which could also serve as rites of passage. Sexuality was thus not a private matter and could be celebrated and acknowledged openly. In Zulu societies, for example, after a boy had their first nocturnal emission, they would wake up early and drive the cattle far from their homestead. The boys who had already reached puberty, understanding what this meant, would go find him. This began their transition to their new status as an adolescent. Girls had a similar routine, triggered by their first period. Girls who had already reached puberty would go find her, and this would be followed by a period of seclusion, followed by her being included in the group of women who were eligible for marriage (Delius & Glaser, 2002).

Delius and Glaser (2002) report that with urbanization, these practices were understood as old fashioned, and the rise in Christian values stigmatised traditional ways of restraint without managing to put up boundaries that would control the sexual impulses of the youth. Delius and Glaser's (2002) review shows that this stigmatisation and undermining of pre-existing forms of sexual socialisation led to the youth groups and youth organisations, which played a crucial role in the sexual socialisation process, being dismantled. Although there are different roles played by different forms of Christian beliefs and practices, it is argued that this influence of Christian values played a significant role in shaping inter-generational silence around matters concerning sex and sexuality (Delius & Glaser, 2002).

Similarly, Green et al. (2009) speak to this idea of lost or abandoned cultural practices of sexual socialisation, due to the influence of Western modernisation. In their qualitative study, which sampled traditional leaders and ritual specialists, using focus group discussions and interviews, they have argued that the public health literature on HIV/AIDS prevention has little or no involvement of culture. Green et al. (2009) assert that this was because public health literature had often seen culture as non-existent or as an obstacle to achieving effective interventions, following their (public health literature) negatively stereotyped understanding of “culture” which referred to practices such as raping virgin girls and African men acting without constraints in their pursuit of sex with multiple partners. African culture was thus seen as “exotic”, and a barrier to the enlightened, modern, Western rights-based approach to HIV prevention based on biomedical knowledge about viral contagion.

Green et al. (2009) found that traditional leaders were unhappy with this abandonment of traditional practices concerning sexual behaviour, such as initiation rites for males and females. These traditional leaders believed that traditional customs and practices were central to the culture and that recommitting to them would have a positive effect on sexual socialisation and was important for positive behaviour change. The abandonment of these practices was often blamed for promiscuity, with some participants in Green et al.’s (2009) study believing that the call to abstinence that was being advocated for by Western modernization and Christian values would only cause young people to be secretive about their sexual activities. These participants argued that chaperones and traditional courtships were a risk-safer system. This is also seen in Delius and Glaser’s (2002) review, where they report a perceived high rate of promiscuity among urban women. The traditional leaders also argued that African cultures were not rigid or immutable and that they were able to adapt to the evolving health needs (Green et al., 2009).

In their study with parents/ caregivers and key community members in a semi-rural area outside of Durban, South Africa, Paruk et al. (2005) found that caregivers of youth complained of a void that was left by this breakdown of traditional customs relating to the education and upbringing of adolescents. In the past, the initiation of adolescents into adults was not a parental role, but with the breakdown of traditional customs, sexual socialisation then fell onto parents who were ill-equipped to cope with the modern contexts of sexual risk, violence, and disease contagion (Paruk et al., 2005). The authors reported that without renegotiated acceptable ways of adolescent upbringing, these parents often felt confused and

helpless, resorting to telling their youth misinformation and myths. For example, parents would tell girls that touching boys would get them pregnant (Paruk et al., 2005).

Although Vincent's (2008) paper on Xhosa male circumcision rites reports a shift in the role that is played by traditional initiation schools in the sexual socialisation of Xhosa young men, it is interesting for this study because it shows how some traditional cultural practices of sexual socialisation were not completely abandoned or lost, even though they have changed over time. Vincent (2008) reported that although circumcision schools used to play a huge role in the sexual socialisation of young men, by teaching them responsibility and control, the focus has now become the right of access to sex as primary to what makes one a man. Overall, she argues that the role that these schools once played in the sexual socialisation of young men has eroded, leaving the teaching that initiation gives men unlimited and unquestionable right to access sex. So, while the biomedical aspects of the rite of passage have stayed the same, the teachings have changed (Vincent, 2008).

Interesting, in South African research with culture and sexual socialisation, is Delius and Glaser's (2002) report on the emergence of other sub-cultures following the decline of traditional cultural practices. These sub-cultures are argued to have also played a significant role in sexual socialisation. Delius and Glaser (2002) report that with urbanisation, there was an emergence of "gang culture" perpetuated by youth gangs in the township. This gang culture was associated with high levels of promiscuity. Having abandoned the traditional route of being initiated into adulthood, male gang members would compensate by an over-assertion of manhood (or hyper-masculinity) and violence. In this sub-culture, the youth in the city was still learning from peers, but this was not supervised by elders or parents, and so instilled problematic messages, such as the message that women in the territory of these young men were their property. In this gang culture, there were high levels of sexual coercion, and men were awarded status for having multiple partners. Contrary to the traditional practices of limited sexual exploration, and the Christian values of abstinence, young men now expected full intercourse with women partners.

Secondly, Delius and Glaser (2002) reported on a "culture of learning" (p. 48) that was prevalent in school. This school culture provided safety for girls, who could otherwise be victims to members of the youth gangs. This space offered adult supervision from the teachers and taught forms of masculinity that were less aggressive and respectful of women's sexual choices. Thirdly, Delius and Glaser (2002) discussed a political youth culture. This is explained to have been a hybrid of the school culture and the gang culture, in practice. These political youth activists were highly influenced by the school system but were also

masculinist and could (in extreme cases) feel entitled to sexual favours from women as if this were their political duty. Lastly, Delius and Glaser (2002) discuss a culture of materialism and consumerism, which was linked to the commodification of sex and young men seeing and treating women as though they were their possessions.

It is worth mentioning that these cultures were not homogeneous (Delius & Glaser, 2002). This means that not *all* young men subscribed to gang culture sexuality, not *all* young comrades felt entitled to sex, and not *all* young women believed it to be their political duty to grant sexual favours to the young comrades (Delius & Glaser, 2002).

2.4. Parents and extended family

Literature has shown that family plays a significant role in the process of sexual socialisation (Gumede, Young-Hauser & Coetzee, 2017). Parental responses to infant masturbation, physical displays of affection between parents, and the instructions that young children receive about what is deemed appropriate contact with others are argued to influence child understanding of sexuality (Shtarkshall et al., 2007). In addition, Gumede et al. (2017) assert that parental *conversations* about intimate relationships with young people are also important because they contribute to positive or negative reproductive health. They argue that parents are uniquely positioned in a way that allows them to be able to guide and educate on a variety of topics, including sex and sexuality. In their review of parent-child communication in Sub-Saharan Africa, Bastien et al. (2011) have argued that the timing and frequency of this communication are important. Taking place at the right time, this communication is believed to delay early sexual debut and guard against dangerous sexual behaviour.

Although research has reported on these benefits of parent-child communication about sex and sexuality, a study conducted by Gumede et al. (2017) in a resource-poor area in Bloemfontein, South Africa, reported that mothers *and* daughters find it difficult to initiate these conversations with each other. The Gumede et al. (2017) study, like this one, was situated within an interpretivist paradigm, looking at how people make meaning from their experiences (Brinkman, 2012, as cited in Gumede, 2017). The study sampled four mothers and five daughters, who were between the ages of 18 and 22 because it was believed that these older daughter participants would have more experiences of communication (Gumede et al., 2017).

In their literature review, Gumede et al. (2017) found that parent-child conversations about sex were usually covered in shame, secrecy, embarrassment, and awkwardness. As a result,

these conversations were usually triggered by external triggers such as a television show, the first menstrual bleeding, pregnancy, or warnings about HIV/AIDS. This was also seen in Ludidi's (2018) study with university student participants. The young women participants reported that they *did* have conversations about sexual activities with their mothers, but these were usually a result of external triggers such as books or television shows, where sex was a subject. Sometimes, these conversations would take the form of shared jokes between mothers and daughters (Ludidi, 2018).

From the thematically analysed semi-structured interviews conducted by Gumede et al. (2017), it was found that mother-daughter conversations about intimacy were usually not reciprocal. Instead, mothers were reported to talk *at* their daughters, instead of engaging *with* them. These conversations were described as monologues, covering topics such as sexual violence and pregnancy. Mothers were said to be afraid of their daughters repeating their mistakes, such as unwanted pregnancy, so this fear shaped the conversation. Gumede et al. (2017) further reported that the conversations that mothers had with their daughters about intimacy remained superficial, failing to discuss emotions, the meaning of love, and commitment.

In their narrative studies that explored female adolescent sexuality in a South African low-income coloured community, Lesch and Kruger (2004; 2005) reported that the mothers of the adolescent participants played an important role in how they constructed their sexuality and that they unintentionally contributed to their limited sense of sexual agency. Lesch and Kruger (2005) reported that mothers presented sex to their daughters as dangerous, because of risks such as pregnancy, which were seen as inevitable consequences of having unprotected penetrative sexual intercourse. This message of danger contributed to the belief that sex should not be talked about (Lesch & Kruger, 2005). The authors found that daughters would deceive their mothers about their involvement in sexual activities, so that they could maintain mother-daughter connections. These daughters believed that their having sex would be disappointing to their parents, so they could not talk about it (Lesch & Kruger, 2004). Participants reported that their mothers viewed both talking about sex and an open expression of sexuality to be sinful or indecent. They were encouraged to postpone sex for marriage, as part of an attempt to live a clean life according to religious values (Lesch & Kruger, 2005).

Other South African literature (e.g., Delius and Glaser (2002) reviewed in the "South African research with culture and sexual socialisation" section of this literature review) shows that

extended family also plays a crucial role in sexual socialisation. A study conducted by Ndabula, Saville Young and Macleod (2020) to explore sexual socialisation in sisterly relationships, found that participants constructed their interactions about sex with their sisters in diverse ways, drawing on three repertoires. The first was that of “silence” which was used to describe conversations about sex between sisters which were relatively vague. Secondly, the authors reported a repertoire of safety and secrecy, where sisters created a safe space to share their experiences of sex. Lastly, they reported a repertoire of risk and responsabilisation, which referred to the kind of sex talk between sisters, in which avoiding risk was emphasised, and sisters encouraged each other to act “responsibly” where sex and sexuality were concerned. Ndabula et al.’s (2020) literature review showed that sibling sexual socialisation is uniquely beneficial, due to siblings being both members of peer groups and family. It is believed that this unique relationship can bridge the gap between open conversation about sex (usually found in friendships) and parent-child sex talk (usually associated with more conservative values). This was supported by their findings, which showed the diversity in sisterly talk, showing that these conversations can indeed perform different functions (Ndabula et al., 2020).

2.5. Life Orientation at schools

In addition to parents, educators of Life Orientation (LO) sexuality education at schools are believed to be another potentially influential source of adult communication about sexuality (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015). The LO curriculum is designed to provide a space that empowers learners with knowledge and skills in different areas of development, which include sexuality, sexual health, and human rights (Rooth 2005, as cited in Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). Against the backdrop of social issues that face South Africa, such as HIV, gender-based violence and homophobia, LO sex education can play an important role in educating young people about safer sexual practices, sexual diversity, and gender-equitable relations (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019).

Although LO sex education is supposed to create a space to work through these issues of gender norms and sexual agency, literature shows that the emphasis is usually on abstinence and teaching girls how to say “no” to sex, to avoid risk and disease (Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015).

2.5.1. Sex and danger messages

A prevalent theme in the literature on LO sexual education is that of sex as dangerous and to be feared (Shefer, Kruger, Macleod, Baxen & Vincent, 2015; Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). This was particularly evident in narratives told by young *girls* (compared to boys). In a research study with a sample of grade 10 learners in schools in the Eastern and Western Cape, South Africa, young women participants reported that a dominant message taught in their LO classes was that sex is dangerous, risky, and potentially damaging (Shefer, et al., 2015). They reported that sexuality education was taught through a lens of negative consequences of sex, such as unplanned pregnancy. Because of this danger lens, young girls were taught that active sexuality engagement was inherently punishable and damaging (Shefer et al., 2015; Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015).

In the South African context, part of this danger included potential sexual violence. In a study conducted by Shefer and Ngabaza (2015), research material was drawn from qualitative research conducted with teachers, young people, and other school authorities in the Eastern and Western Cape. Learners reported that sexuality was taught through a lens of sexual violence, and they were not encouraged to think of sexuality as a space for pleasure and agency within positive relationships. A female learner reflected on how LO sexuality only taught them about sex on a theoretical level. She said they learned about rape, and further saw in media, how one can be sexually abused, but that was all. She referred to these kinds of teachings as “basic things” (p. 71) noting that they never learned about everything else. These LO messages were skills deficient, with no talk of how to negotiate sexual relationships.

2.5.2. Sex and responsibility messages

Another reported lesson from LO sexuality education is that young girls (or women) are responsible for protecting themselves from the dangers of sex (Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015; Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015). Shefer and Ngabaza (2015) found that this responsibility was to protect young girls from both physical dangers, such as unplanned pregnancy, and social damage, such as losing their good girl image. They argued that this responsibility was placed on girls because they were seen as the ones who would bear the consequences of being damaged or spoiled by sexual experience, while young men were seen to be immune to such consequences. Due to the portrayal of the consequences

of sex as gendered, young women were set up as responsible for policing all young people's sexuality (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). This narrative of women being responsible for policing and controlling young people's sexuality was also seen in the literature exploring earlier sexual socialisation practices. Delius and Glaser (2002) found that in societies where young people practised controlled forms of sexual exploration, girls were the ones who carried the responsibility of ensuring that penetration did not occur.

Working from a similar premise as this study - that a slightly older sample could talk through memories of sexualities in high school with a level of insight, reflexivity, and freedom - Jearey-Graham and Macleod (2015) sampled students from a Further Education Training college in the Eastern Cape. The participants were between the ages of 19 and 25. First, Jearey-Graham and Macleod (2015) analysed written memories about participant experience of sexual education in LO classes. Secondly, mixed, and same-sex focus group discussions were conducted to discuss the sexuality of high school learners and the LO sexuality education that they had received. Their analysis indicated that LO sexuality education emphasised risk and responsibility, which was centred around safe sex, abstinence, delayed sex, and sex within marriage. Participants reported that these messages were communicated through non-relational communication, omitted any real-life stories and examples, and left no space for discussion. This responsible sexual subject was seen as unrealistic, and there appeared to be a disconnect between the responsible sexual subject taught at school and what was seen as the performable sexual subject (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2015). Similarly, Shefer and Macleod (2015) found that what young women were taught in LO sexual education classes did not reflect their desires and experiences. Mayeza, Shefer and Vincent (2019) argued that this moralistic approach to sexuality education, which was bound up in an acceptable "good and healthy girl" (p. 477) narrative, was contrary to the learner culture of romantic relationships at school.

Kruger, Shefer and Oakes (2015) argue that this responsibility narrative assumes that young women have power in their sexual relationships, or the agency to make reproductive decisions that will keep them safe from risk. In their study with a younger sample (between the ages of 16 and 18) they found that the sexual agency of women was both enabled and constricted. The explicit message was that they had agency and should take responsibility for their sexuality, but the implicit message was that what these girls thought about sex did not matter. Abstinence was still presented as the only option, and existing heteronormative gender roles were prescribed to determine how these young women should behave. Kruger,

Shefer and Oakes (2015) further reported that men were positioned as leaders in sexual relationships, and the implicit message to the young women was that they should submit to the needs and desires of the men. While the women were seen as responsible in some contexts, they were also presented as vulnerable and at-risk (Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015).

2.5.3. Heteronormative messages

Finally, another common theme in South African literature is a lack of diversity in sexuality education (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). In their research with a sample of learners reflecting on their LO sexuality education classes, it was found that heterosexuality seems to be prioritised, with little attention paid to addressing gender issues outside of this (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). The authors further reported that when same-sex relations or homosexuality were addressed, they were often addressed in a negative light. Shefer and Ngabaza (2015) reported that sexual activities were presented in heterosexual terms. As a result, sex was referred to as heterosexual, penetrative sex. Shefer et al. (2015) reported that gender was framed in binary male and female terms. Young men were presented as perpetrators, and young women were portrayed as vulnerable, submissive and without sexual desire (Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015).

2.6. Peers and media socialisation

Although there are complexities and differences in the literature on peer and media socialisation, they have been reviewed together for two reasons. First, peers and media are both informal sources of sexual socialisation, that young people choose for themselves. This is opposed to parental communication and LO sexuality education, where adults decide the specific messages that they want to communicate to young people. Secondly, as illustrated below, not only is media consumption a social activity (Strelitz, 2004) but peers and media play an interchangeable role in the construction and performance of youth identity.

The literature on the role of peers in sexual socialisation can be separated into three camps. In the first camp, peer influence is spoken of in a negative light. This literature – mostly focusing on early adolescent experiences – focuses on negative peer pressure, the role of peers in the distribution of misinformation about sexuality, and the role of peers in encouraging high-risk sexual behaviour (e.g., Gumede et al., 2017; Selikow et al., 2009; Thobejana, 2015). In the second camp, there is literature that explores peer-education as a health-promotion strategy, and a response to the dangers of negative peer influence discussed

in the first camp (e.g., Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Warwick & Aggleton, 2004; Wilbraham, 2009). In the third and final camp, there is literature that explores positive peer influence in the context of young adulthood (e.g., Harling et al., 2018; Mbotho, Cilliers & Ankitola, 2013; Shefer & Strebel, 2001).

Literature on media influence can also be organised similarly. There is, for example, literature that has criticised the representation of women in soap operas, such as the popular South African soap opera *Generations*, speaking to a negative role played by media in the sexual socialisation process (Tager, 2010). This is further explored in section 2.6.5 of this chapter. There is, however, also literature which explores how media exposes young people to new ways of understanding and performing sexual identity. This speaks to a positive role that media can play in sexual socialisation. For example, Macleod, Moodley & Saville Young (2015) on the sexual subject positions in LO manuals and songs voted most popular by grade 10 learners in schools in the Eastern Cape. Of the two songs voted most popular was a song by an African American singer, Usher. The song about a woman with whom he was in a relationship is called “climax”. The other song, by an African American rapper (who is a woman) was called “beez in the trap”. The music video of the song portrays the artist partying in a club, surrounded by men and women. This will be further explored in section 6.6.6 below. Although there are many different forms of media, in this literature review, the role played by media in sexual socialisation will be demonstrated by these two media outlets: soap operas and music.

2.6.1. Peers and the promotion of high-risk sexual behaviour

Some scholars have argued that because LO sexuality education and parental communication about sexual activities are limited to risk warnings, and thus fail to provide the necessary tools to make informed and safe decisions about sexuality, young people often turn to their peers for such information (Gumede et al., 2017; Mpondo et al., 2018; Thobejana, 2015). This information that they receive from their peers is said to be misguided and dangerous because it encourages them to experiment with sexuality in unhealthy and opportunistic ways (Mpondo et al., 2018; Selikow et al., 2009). “Better” parental communication and guidance are then posed as a solution to protect these young people from the perceived misinformation and negative pressure from their peers (Gumede, 2017; Mpondo et al., 2018; Selikow et al., 2009; Thobejana, 2015).

An example of this kind of literature, that explores the negative effects of peer influence, is a study conducted by Selikow et al. (2009). Using a racially diverse sample of boys and girls who were 13 and 14 years old, from schools in Cape Town, their study aimed to explore how negative peer pressure promoted high-risk sexual behaviour, and disregarded the educational principles to abstain, be faithful, use a condom, and delay sexual debut (ABCD). This study found that perceived negative peer pressure *did* cause young people to undermine what the authors understood as healthy sexual norms (ABCD messages) and two reasons enabled this. First, they believed that this was enabled by the adolescent need to belong to a social group. This meant that adolescents felt pressure to conform to peer-determined group norms, to which failure to conform could lead to exclusion from the group. Secondly, the adolescent participants reported that discussing sex with each other was more comfortable than discussing such topics with their parents who might believe that having such discussions with them was taboo (Selikow et al., 2009). In this study, negative peer pressure referred to peer messages and influence that disregarded the ABCD messages, while positive peer pressure (which was evident to a smaller degree) referred to peer messages that encouraged these ABCD messages.

2.6.2. Sexual socialisation in peer-education programmes

To respond to the perceived negative peer influence on sexual socialisation, a common public health intervention strategy was the installation of peer education programmes (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Warwick & Aggleton, 2004; Wilbraham, 2009). Peer education is an intervention strategy through which trained peers distribute health-related information, and role model healthy sexual norms, such as condom use (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Selikow et al., 2009). According to Campbell and MacPhail (2002) these programmes have been reported to increase condom use among peers and have reduced the levels of sexually transmitted infections and HIV in some countries. The authors theorised that this mechanism works to promote safe sexual behaviour because it mobilises the same peers – that are believed to be influential during adolescence – to talk to each other, but instead equips them to promote safe sex messages and messages of empowerment.

In a paper that explored peer education intervention programs in loveLife media, Wilbraham (2009) demonstrates how these edutainment television programs attempt to formalise and have adults regulate peer sexual socialisation. These programmes mobilise young people, who are portrayed as articulate, knowledgeable, and safe sex practising individuals, to be an

example to the rest of their peers, teaching them how to also be “responsible” young people (Wilbraham, 2009). In the interventions explored in the paper, parents are encouraged to use these youth-targeted television programs as “teachable moments” going as far as giving parents advice on what to say to maintain a conversation with adolescents who do not want to talk to them about sex. This demonstrates how these programmes, though peers talking to each other, seem to prioritise adult voices and messages over young people’s authentic voices, essentially having these young peer educators standing in for adults and people in authority (Wilbraham, 2009). Thomas (2004) argues that this loveLife idealised representation of young people who are empowered, articulate, and avoid HIV infection is intertwined with brand consumption and aspirational upward-class mobility. This is out of reach for South African young people from lower economic backgrounds, who are not as “cool”, empowered, or articulate due to socioeconomic factors (Thomas, 2004).

2.6.3. Peer socialisation with university participants

Literature that explores experiences of peer influence in young adults introduces a more positive representation of peer influence on sexual socialisation (Harling et al., 2018; Mbotho, Cillers & Akintola, 2013; Shefer & Strebel, 2001). These scholars show that as young people grow, peers and partners can be a source of support (Harling et al., 2018) and they can be reflexive and think critically about issues of sex and sexuality (Shefer & Strebel, 2001). This critical thinking shows in how they challenge what they have been taught to view normal and expected behaviour for young men and women, even discussing topics like female sexual desire (Shefer & Strebel, 2001) which is rarely featured in literature with other sources of socialisation. Young people are also at liberty to choose to surround themselves with peers who are like-minded and can become a positive source of peer influence, as opposed to blindly following what every young person is doing (Mbotho et al., 2013).

In their study that explored perceptions and experiences of abstinence among Christians in a South African university context, Mbotho et al. (2013) demonstrated how peer influence can be both negative and positive, depending on the group that one surrounds themselves with, and their perception of what is good or bad. This paper was an interesting review because it sampled university participants and showed the interaction of two cultures; a university culture that is believed to promote sexual activity and Christian culture that values abstinence.

The participants of the study – who were abstaining from sexual activities (oral, anal, or vaginal) - reported that their non-Christian peers who were constantly talking about the pleasure of sex, were a negative peer influence because they made them want to give in to the desire to also experience this pleasure. They reported that this university influence (to experiment with sex) was particularly strong in their first year of being in university until they became part of a church community, which became a source of positive peer influence for them. A close relationship with friends who were also abstaining from sexual activities was thus reported as a helpful resource in sustaining abstinence and shielding them from the pressure to have sex (Mbotho et al., 2013).

2.6.4. Media and identity

In the large body of literature that focuses on young people's consumption of media, there is an assertion that media plays a role in the identity formation of young people (Nuttall, 2003; Strelitz, 2004). Strelitz (2004) argued that young people used symbolic sources available to them (including local or global books, television shows and music) to help them form their identities. This is done by young people either seeing themselves represented in the media or using media images to project various versions of themselves, that they perform in their various social settings (Nuttall, 2003; Strelitz, 2004).

A young person may, for example, use an inspirational book that they identify with on some level, to help them make sense of their real-life experience (Nuttall, 2003). This was also seen in the Mbotho et al. (2013) study, where some of the participants reported using Christian literature to help them sustain their sexual abstinence. Another example of media being an identity formation tool was seen in the Strelitz (2004) study, where university student participants were using a television show as a frame of reference to construct meanings for themselves and their daily environments. This television show would be watched in a common room, and discussed by the group of peers, who would collectively make meaning and critiques from it. This thought process during/after watching the television show shows that young people may not be blindly consuming media. Instead, media messages are constantly mediated by real-life cultural experiences and this social consumption of media (Strelitz, 2004). So, young people consume modern culture (as portrayed in media) against their real-life experiences of culture, to make meaning that is largely influenced by existing personal experience (Nuttall, 2003; Strelitz, 2004).

2.6.5. Sexual socialisation in soap operas

Soap operas, like other forms of media, sell identity by allowing viewers to construct a sense of self, even becoming a motivating factor towards social mobility and social change (Tager, 2010). *Generations*, a popular soap opera in South Africa, is said to be an agent through which young adult viewers can identify, acquire and “try on” different versions and understandings of the human experience (Tager, 2010).

In an article that explored gender stereotyping in *Generations*, Motsaathebe (2009) found that women in the soap opera were presented as possessing less positive personality traits when compared to males. The article reported that women were associated with negative attributes such as negative emotions, immaturity, selfishness, jealousy, manipulateness, and greed in their sleeping with powerful men for material gain (transactional sex). Motsaathebe (2009) argues that this stereotyped portrayal and misrepresentation of women on television and film reinforces the negative sexual socialisation of women.

2.6.6. Sexual socialisation in popular music

Macleod, Moodley and Saville Young (2015) argue that music also plays an important role in sexual socialisation, and that it communicates with the listener’s sexual and gendered identities. Unlike the more formal sources of sexual socialisation, such as LO sexuality education, sexual socialisation through music is argued to be more fluid (Macleod, Moodley and Saville Young, 2015).

In their study, Macleod, Moodley and Saville Young (2015) compared two forms of sexual socialisation that young people were exposed to, the LO curriculum and lyrical content and videos of songs that were voted most popular by the participants of the study, who were grade 10 learners. Their analysis found that the lyrical content and videos of the popular songs portrayed shifting and complex sexual subject positions. Furthermore, they portrayed sex as a site of pleasure, personal struggle, and conflict. Constructions of gender were portrayed in tension, challenging traditional masculinity and femininity, and pushing heteronormative boundaries. Lastly, there was a fluid portrayal of sexual positions, in the context of relationships and the wider social system (Macleod, Moodley and Saville Young, 2015).

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed how sexual socialisation has been researched in South Africa. First, I explored public health debates about the risk of HIV and other co-epidemics, by sexually active youth, and the different strategies to respond to this, such as the implementation of parental communication. I then explored sexual socialisation in the black community of South Africa, starting from pre-colonial traditional practices of sexual socialisation to their breakdown following their disapproval by colonial Christianisation and their undermining by democratic political modernization processes. Finally, I reviewed the literature on the common agents of sexual socialisation. This included the more formal agents of sexual socialisation, such as parent and LO sexuality education, which highlighted risk and the potentially dangerous outcomes of active sexuality, such as pregnancy, and peers and media, as informal sources of socialisation that challenged some of the messages from parents and LO. These informal agents also exposed young people to more fluid sexual identities.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to situate the research study within a theoretical framework and provide a methodology, the step-by-step process followed during the study. I start this chapter by stating the aim and questions that informed the study. Following this, I explain how Memory Work was used as a type of narrative theoretical approach, to elicit stories of sexual socialisation from friend research participants. The purposive convenient sampling strategy that was employed for this research will also be explained in this chapter, giving a rationale for the use of friend participants and how they were invited to participate in the focus group discussion, through which Memory Work narrative material was collected and discussed. Finally, this chapter will end with an explanation of the thematic narrative analysis that was conducted to analyse and produce the group discussion material as themes, a discussion of ethical considerations, and a reflexivity section.

3.2 Research aim and questions

This qualitative narrative study aims to investigate how Black, young adult women – who are university students – experienced forms of sexual socialisation, through various communications, in South African cultural contexts. This was done by collecting and analysing their storied experiences of communication about sex and sexuality in various South African cultural contexts.

The main research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What stories do young adult women tell, about the cultural practices that they were exposed to in communication about sex and sexuality?
2. What themes emerge from these stories?

3.3 Theoretical framework

3.3.1 Narrative approach

Squire et al., (2014) assert that there are various narrative research approaches and that a narrative researcher's focus is guided by their research question and their theoretical and

disciplinary understanding of what a narrative is. Common in the approaches is that narrative researchers will use “stories” (of experience) as a research resource. The aim of this is to explore what stories communicate about the storyteller and their world (Squire et al., 2014).

While some narrative researchers see ‘an interview narrative’ in a broader way, Riessman (2002) argues that narratives are storied accounts of events that move in time and can occur in various contexts, e.g., memoirs, interviews on television or research, Photovoice descriptions of characters, places and events in family photographs, advice columns, and so on. A storyteller will usually invite audience members into past worlds, to tell them about what happened and the consequences of this (Riessman, 2002). Through storytelling, individuals can make meaning of their experiences, particularly troublesome or ambivalent experiences, and construct identities (Bruner, 1991). Bruner (1991) further argues that this is an organic and ongoing process, because people organise and make sense of their experiences through stories – for example, what happened first; what caused what; why did particular consequences occur; who was involved; who said what; where and when did this occur; or what was learnt from this event to mark a kind of transition. Thus, in addition to progressing in time, narratives are argued to allow storytellers to reflect on and reconstruct their identities (Riessman, 2002). For example, through storytelling, one can explore how one once held a particular belief about sex and how that changed after a particular event, such as forming a new friendship network at university.

Narratives are also told in relation to a dominant narrative (Squire et al., 2014). A dominant narrative refers to a bigger story that is shared or taken-for-granted by societies, and this is akin to Macleod’s (2009) theme of finding ‘culture’ as a singular overarching or underlying system of common-sense and taken-for-granted ideas – such as patriarchal and heteronormative gender relations (see Introduction chapter). This acts as a “script” for how people in that society should function and a framework through which they view the world (Squire et al., 2014). These dominant narratives permeate personal narratives and individuals rarely resist them because they are so familiar that they are hardly noticeable in everyday life. However, counter-narratives are ways in which individuals can and do resist dominant narratives. This could be done by telling a completely different story to the dominant narrative, or telling a story differently (Squire et al., 2014). Squire et al. (2014) assert that these categories (dominant and counter-narratives) can be interwoven, rather than as clearly separate stories.

Within a South African context of researching mothers' accounts of childbirth, Kruger (2003) argues that storytelling is a useful framework, as it looks at women's narratives of personal experience against a complex, broader cultural and medical and socio-political background as dominant narratives. Women's narratives, then, are shaped by their political realities. This means, for example, that women will not be able to comfortably acknowledge and sit with ambivalence and contradiction in their personal stories if this is not acknowledged in the same way in their cultural, medical, and socio-political background (dominant narratives); and this may be a powerful form of silencing. Kruger (2003) also argues that because storytelling is done in a larger social context and told to a specific audience, it cannot be seen as *necessarily* self-representing and as an individual act of identity-performance – as is seen in more liberal narrative approaches that assume storytellers' agency (cf. Crossley, 2000). Narratives are largely socio-politically influenced and can support a dominant ideology, which is why they would be told in a particular way, for a specific purpose; however, they also can be told in reflectively counter-cultural ways to resist dominant scripts, narratives, and ideologies, and thus might serve transformational agendas (Kruger, 2003).

3.3.2 Memory Work

This study employed an adaptation of the Memory Work (MW) research design and methodology to generate and discuss memories as narrative material. MW is a feminist research approach, originally formulated by Frigga Haug in the 1970s in Germany, that allows researchers to collaboratively examine how women's identities are formed, in a way that acknowledges the role of existing patriarchal and heteronormative social structures and their individual participation in sexual socialisation processes that produced their 'femininity' in particularly oppressive ways (Willig, 2001). In MW methodology, researchers are participants as well, generating the material that they will analyse – and this is taken to serve a reflective, consciousness-raising agenda for this collective (Willig, 2001). This influenced my decision to perform a dual role as researcher and participant in this research study – this is explained later, along with MW methodological guidelines for generating “storied memories” for discussion and analysis. MW is used in this study as a narrative theoretical framework because (a) it uses personal stories of gendered experiences of sexual socialisation as the focal point of discussion and analysis, and (b) it works in a conscious way with tensions between and within women's stories. For example, tensions between and within cultural

narratives of what is expected from a woman, and personal stories of experiences of sexual socialisation, sex, and sexuality.

Willig (2001) argues that the MW approach has value in exploring how ambiguous and confusing socialisation experiences were *experienced* in a direct way through “stories” first, and then intellectually reflected on in a group discussion to support resistances. This is as Squire et al. (2014) has argued, that narrative theoretical research has political and transformative agendas.

This study, produced as an individually researched and authored thesis, used particular (not all) MW “steps” to generate narrative material within a discussion-group setting, which was later analysed using a thematic narrative analysis. According to Willig (2001, p. 127-129), a MW design proceeds in several narrative phases and steps, as follows:

Phase one: Generating memories

1. Form a MW group of researcher-participants to work collectively on the project to completion (group analysis, rewriting stories together, joint publication) – this was not followed in this study.
2. Choose a trigger – A phrase, question or word that will prompt the generation of a memory or storied experience that is relevant to the topic under investigation.
3. Write a memory, according to specific guidelines which make it relevant for MW analysis.

Phase two: Analysis of memories

4. The MW ‘group’ reconvenes to share written memories and stories.
5. MW ‘group’ discusses their written memories with each other, highlighting the dominant cultural narratives, common assumptions, differences, and contradictory experiences that were difficult to make sense of.
6. The MW group may engage in a process of rewriting their stories to ‘think differently’ about the ‘same event’ – this is a consciousness-raising step and was not followed in the study.

Phase three: Integration and theory-building

7. Analysing transcripts and memories – The final analysis by the MW group will attempt to integrate some of the individually written stories and the transcribed discussion into

arguments about how socialisation works – this will also attend to ethical issues of anonymity and identification.

8. Writing MW – The write-up for publication would build in feminist and narrative theoretical frameworks, appraise the study, and make recommendations for further research.

The adaptation of MW Steps 2-5 (for generation of narrative material) for this study will become clear in the sections that follow.

3.4 Sampling friends

The study did not follow Step 1 of the MW guidelines listed above (Willig, 2001) – viz. form a MW group of researcher-participants to serve as a collective of women who examined their own gendered stories and published a co-authored account. The form of the study was determined by its academic degree requirement of production of a single-authored thesis; also, a formally named collective of joint-researcher-participants compromised anonymity in the previous MW study (Ludidi, 2018) – this was detailed in the Introduction chapter. Instead, a purposive convenient sampling strategy was used (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013), to recruit young adult, black women who were postgraduate students at Rhodes University.

Four of my friends, who were readily available and whom I knew were interested in the phenomenon and this research topic were invited to be participants in the study. I decided to recruit friends for several interrelated reasons, backed by methodological literature. Focus group discussions are largely based on group dynamics and relationships (Nyumba et al., 2017). Pre-existing relationships between myself as the researcher (and fifth participant) and the rest of the participants who were part of a social network of friends, were thought – following Hollway (1989) – to increase the trust required to share stories about sex. This sampling strategy is based on the premise that this focus group discussion covered themes and issues which I naturally talked about with my friends (cf. Brewis, 2014). Negotiating access was thus easier, because of the existing rapport between the group. Time was also not wasted trying to create a space where participants can “open up”, which is argued to produce rich and in-depth material (Brewis, 2014).

Along similar lines, Hollway (1989) has argued from ethical and research validity viewpoints on doing qualitative research ‘differently’, sexual socialisation, sex and sexuality are intimate

and sensitive topics that can be potentially triggering and embarrassing to talk about. On the one hand, the already existing relationship between researcher and participants (as a friendship network) can mediate against distress, fear of exploitation and embarrassment. The researcher and participants can relate each other's comments during the group discussion to actual incidents in their shared daily lives and can offer mutual support in expressing feelings that are common to the group (Kitzinger, 1994). A group of friends also has the unique dynamic of the participants being respectful, empathetic, and supportive of each other's stories because they are being told by a friend (Hollway, 1989). On the other hand, such pre-existing relationships also mean that group members can feel safe enough to challenge each other when there is a disconnect between what they claim to believe during the group discussion and what they displayed outside the group, which increases the validity of the findings (Hollway, 1989).

Potential limitations of such a sampling-friends strategy are that the group members can censor any deviation from the group standards (Kitzinger, 1994). There might also be fears around the researcher manipulatively using the pre-existing friendship with the research participants to elicit personal information from the group discussion participants that they did not want to talk about in the group context (Hollway, 1989). Brewis (2014) notes that researching with friends brings about the tension between the positions of the researcher as a friend, a researcher, and a participant (as MW emphasises these multiple roles). This can cause inner conflict as the researcher tries to understand if they are acting from their position as a participant, researcher, or friend and if the participants are engaging from a friend or a research participant position. Brewis (2014) reflects on this tension, quoting a research participant who said they might have been more honest with a stranger-researcher because as a friend, she was worried about what the researcher would think of her. Other participants, however, reported that they were more honest because they were talking to a friend-researcher (Brewis, 2014). Brewis (2014) concludes that the frankness and the depth of the narratives that she collected from her participant-friends was mainly a product of her friendship with them. The researcher is then faced with the tension of wanting this "rich data" that comes from researching friends while also trying to not use the intimate friendship relationship for professional gain. It thus becomes important to constantly reflect on this and not abuse the personal knowledge of the friend-participants in the research (Brewis, 2014). Brewis (2014) argues that the researcher must balance honouring their relationship responsibilities to the friend and representing the responses of the research participants to the

reader in a truthful way. These issues are returned to in the reflexivity section below, and in the Discussion chapter (chapter 5).

The final sample was made up of five young adult women, who self-identified as 'black' or 'African', and who were postgraduate students at Rhodes University. There were four friend-participants (known to each other) and the participant-researcher (known to all participants). All were currently single, cisgender heterosexual women who ranged in ages (between 23 and 27) and self-identified cultural belonging and home-language. Although the focus group discussion was held in English, the participants were home-language isiXhosa, Tshivenda, and Sesotho speakers. Due care was devoted to the ethical dimensions of the recruitment process, and this is set up in the Ethics and Reflexivity sections below.

3.5 Focus group discussion to gather sexual socialisation stories

For this research study, narrative material was collected through one three-hour-long face-to-face focus group discussion. This group discussion employed MW steps 2,3,4 and 5 listed and explained above (Willig, 2001). The format was as follows:

1. Drawing from step two of memory work guidelines, my first step as a researcher (before coming together in a focus group) was to choose trigger questions that would be used to generate storied memories of sexual socialisation. The trigger questions were: (1) Where did you first hear about sex? (2) What has been your experience of communication about sexual activities? (3) How are sexual activities discussed in the culture to which you have been exposed? and (4) What would you say has shaped your sexuality? These questions were developed in relation to the themes in the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and narrative theory. They were explicitly formulated to focus on *experience* and uncorroborated, subjectively storied accounts of experience. The first two questions are largely developed from the literature review, in that these would explore influential, multiple agents of sexual socialisation and the theme of 'silence' that was prevalent in the literature. Question three is to contextualise sexual socialisation, while also exploring cultural narratives through the different ways in which participants remember their experience of and talk about "culture". Question four particularly draws from identity formation claims in narrative theory (Squire et al., 2014) and participants were invited to tell stories about what shaped their sexualities. All the trigger questions would work together, chronologically, to explore how sexual socialisation has developed through

time, over several different developmental contexts, growing up; and how participants constructed meaning through their stories.

2. Once the focus group had come together, the first step was MW guideline three (Willig, 2001). All the participants – including myself – were asked to write a short story in response to each of the four trigger questions. The guidelines were that the story should include and reflect on the context, the people with whom participants interacted and what they were feeling at the time.
3. Participants took turns reading their stories to the group, as guided by MW step 4 (Willig, 2001).
4. When everyone had read their stories, the group members were asked to comment on each other's stories – step 5 of MW guidelines (Willig, 2001) – Probing questions like “what stood out for you in the stories read?” were used to encourage a discussion about dominant cultural narratives, differences and experiences that were difficult to grapple with. This discussion also formed part of the research material. As argued, a focus group discussion is a method of collecting research material through group *interaction*, about a specific topic (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Nyumba et al., 2017). Debates about experiences and issues, and the interaction itself, become part of the research material (Morgan, 1996; Nyumba et al., 2017; Kitzinger, 1994). The researcher is said to play an active role in creating the group, managing group dynamics, and facilitating the group discussion (Morgan, 1996; Nyumba et al., 2017). For this research study, I played the role of a researcher *and* that of an active participant. Hence, my stories also formed part of the material that was analysed. My quoted extracts are referred to in the analysis chapter below by pseudonym, for ethical reasons.

The group discussion took place in English, due to this being the convenient medium of communication that all participants could understand. Participants translated back to English any phrase that they said in their home language. The focus group discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed to be analysed with Thematic Narrative Analysis, which is different from MW guidelines.

3.6. Thematic narrative analysis

Narrative research incorporates different theoretical definitions of narrative from different disciplines, different ways of collecting or generating narratives, and multiple methods (and levels) of analysis (Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2014). Some of the shared narrative

theoretical assumptions have previously been set out in this chapter, and the MW steps that were used to generate narrative material for analysis. The method of narrative analysis will be laid out here.

Squire et al., (2014) categorise three main approaches to doing narrative analysis: (a) structural narrative analysis, which is related to the organisation and structure of the narrative. This refers to how the story is set up linguistically and episodically, to make its purpose clear to the self and others; (b) thematic narrative analysis, which focuses on the *content* of the narrative; and (c) social constructionist narrative analysis, which looks at the engagement between social contexts, audiences, storytellers, and the story that is being told. This coheres with Riessman's (2008) categorisation of different types of narrative analysis as *what* stories are about (Thematic Narrative Analysis), *how* stories are told (Structural Narrative Analysis), and *how stories are produced interactively* between storytellers and social contexts/audiences of various kinds, and "performed" in particular ways (Dialogic/Performative/Positioning Narrative Analysis).

This research study was interested in analysing the *content* of the stories about sexual socialisation that were told by young women, and the themes that would emerge from these stories. So, Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis was used to analyse the narrative material generated by the MW steps. Thematic narrative analysis is the most used method of narrative analysis, analysing the content of stories – What was said or written, "what" the story was about – rather than unpacking the underlying conversational or episodic structure in the storytelling (Riessman, p.19). Narrative researchers have pointed out that thematic narrative analysis is not the "same" as thematic analysis (Squire et al., 2014; Riessman, 2008). In thematic narrative analysis, there are both "narrative analysis" and "thematic" dimensions to the analytic work.

In terms of the "narrative analysis" dimensions, firstly, there is an attempt to hold "a story" (told by participants about their experience of an incident) as a unit of interpretive analysis in all extracted quotes cited as evidence, as intact as possible (Riessman, 2008) – even within interactive discussion material. Thus, the analysis proceeds story-by-story through a narrative, rather than line-by-line; and then thematically, explores themes across stories (Squire et al., 2014). Secondly, the narrative analysis still holds attention to the narrative theoretical aspects of stories (Riessman, 2008). This includes, for example, temporal organisation of experiences (descriptions of what happened first, and the events that changed

everything); how shifting contexts transformed stories; and how resistance towards dominant cultural narratives was told.

With the above two caveats in place, Riessman (2008) does not provide clear “thematic analysis” guidelines in her approach to thematic narrative analysis. To this end, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps for conducting a thematic analysis were adapted here:

1. The thematic narrative analysis process began with listening to the audio recording of the group discussion. I did this to familiarise myself with the research material (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The content of all individual stories – in response to the trigger questions – and the discussion that followed were transcribed. Any words or phrases that the participants said in their home languages were translated for clarity.
2. The next step was to generate codes, to organise the material into categories that would make it possible to come up with themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). So, I looked for and made note of the different *stories* that the individual participants were telling in their storied responses and the discussion. These were the codes. For example, stories about getting in trouble for talking about sex, stories about not being allowed to watch soap operas that are believed to show sexual content, and stories about the risk of active sexuality. Due to the many complex stories that were coming up, the codes (which were in-tact stories) were re-coded to further categorise the stories.
3. The codes were then categorised, to generate themes across stories. This was done by looking for the stories that the individual participants were telling, and how these stories worked together to tell a greater narrative. For example, the individual stories about getting in trouble for talking about sex, not being to watch soap operas with sexual content and stories about risk and sex were combined to tell the bigger story of engagement with sex and sexuality as forbidden. This would be noted as a potential theme.
4. Potential themes were reviewed to see how they fit together in relation to the material and codes. I looked to see if particular stories were codes, in that they were stories that contained a single idea, or themes – bigger stories, made up of many individual narratives and counter-narratives.
5. Themes were then named in a way that would tell an overall sexual socialisation story that all the participants were telling together. These themes are arranged narratively – in a chronological way that tells the story from the beginning (first memories of communication about sex) to events along the way which might have created confusion,

until the current stage in the sexual socialisation journey, as young adults. This narrative also includes different role players at different parts of the story and the different feelings that participants experienced.

6. The report that was produced then tells individual stories of sexual socialisation, within one big story of how young adult women participants narrate their experiences of sexual socialisation in South African cultural contexts.

3.7 Validation in thematic narrative analysis

Validation refers to how the researcher ensures the trustworthiness of the interpretations made in the research study (Riessman, 2002). Riessman (2002) offers four main criteria that relate to trustworthiness in narrative approaches, namely persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and usefulness. The first criterion of persuasiveness addresses whether interpretations made from the material are reasonable and convincing. Interpretive analysis in this report was supported by evidence as quoted extracts from the narrative discussion material. The second criterion, correspondence, refers to participants being able to check and confirm the interpretations and conclusions made by the researcher. There was no “member checking” for this research study, due to the impacts of Covid-19 lockdowns on the progress of the collection of discussion material in this study. Participants do, however, have access to the written report, and it was explained that the interpretations that were made were *my* interpretations. This is to keep in line with the interpretivist qualitative research paradigm, where it is the researcher’s interpretations that are reported (Saville Young, 2016). Thirdly, the coherence criterion refers to the goals, aims and themes of the study working together for this study. This study reports on one overarching story that answers the research question. Lastly, the recommendations section of this report addresses the pragmatic use criterion.

3.8 Ethical consideration

Before proceeding with this narrative study, this research was granted ethical clearance by the Psychology Department’s Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) and Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) with approval number: 2020-1351-3591 (Appendix A). This ethical standards protocol took into consideration informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, and potential risk to participants. The certificate was also a certificate of Covid-19 compliance, to conduct the group discussion face to face.

Consent was negotiated from the recruitment phase of this narrative study. In the invitation to participate in the study (Appendix B). It was explained that participation in the study was voluntary and that if a potential participant was interested, they should be the ones to contact me and ‘volunteer’ to participate. This letter further explained what the research was about, how narratives would be collected and what would be done with the material after, to ensure clarity on what volunteering to participate in the research would entail. This letter also had the group discussion questions, so that the participants were aware of what they would be discussing, before volunteering to participate and signing the consent form.

At the beginning of the focus group discussion, the participants were given three forms to discuss and sign. The forms were (1) an individual consent form (Appendix C), (2) a group consent form (Appendix D) and (3) a “permission to record” form. The individual consent form that was signed included information about where the participants would be referred to, if they were distressed, that there were no reimbursements for participation in the narrative study, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Confidentiality was a crucial ethical consideration in this narrative project. It was made clear in the group consent form that anything that was said in the group would remain confidential and that participants should not discuss it outside of the focus group. The focus group discussion took place in a quiet and secluded environment, to respect the privacy of the participants. It was discussed at the beginning of the focus group discussion, that the discussion should take place in English, so that I would be able to transcribe the narratives without needing a translator, to further preserve confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms, in the transcripts and the written report, to protect their anonymity.

This was a ‘code orange’ project, which refers to projects with a slight potential risk of harm to participants. This is because there could be a slight risk of embarrassment or distress to young adult women talking about sexual socialisation within a South African cultural context, which is patriarchal. I took into consideration that the discussion could touch on experiences of rape, sexual coercion, abuse, violence, exposure to risk or infections and uncomfortable or confusing events, activities, and conversations. However, this is not a vulnerable population and recruitment was geared towards remembering communications about *ordinary* sexual experiences. The information letter to recruit participants stated that the research was non-clinical and non-therapeutic. Potential participants were asked not to

volunteer if they believed that talking about their experiences could be triggering or distressing. Even ordinary stories about sex, however, can involve instances of anger, misunderstanding and hurt. These may cause a level of distress and be embarrassing to talk about in a group. These difficulties are not psycho-pathological and do not place these participants in a vulnerable group. The check-in with the participants after the research project allowed the space for the participants to communicate any discomfort they might have felt, and there was an option to refer them to the Rhodes University Counselling Centre for further containment. This referral system was put in place to manage any negative psychological consequences caused by participation in the research (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2016).

3.9 Reflexivity

In the sampling section above, I report on the tension of being a friend researcher, and the implications of these multiple relationships for the study. I found that during the focus group discussion, this was manageable, and it felt like any conversation with my friends. The research participants (friends) were comfortable and relaxed. They found it easy to trust me in my role as the researcher and participant, and they also trusted the rest of the group. This was maintained throughout the discussion. After the focus group discussion, friend participants expressed that they were comfortable with how the group discussion ran and that they were comfortable with the stories shared. This was exciting for me as a researcher, because of the “rich material” that would be analysed. During the analysis process, however, I began to experience this tension and had to work harder to navigate it. On one hand, it was important that, as a researcher, I report on all of the material and represent my participants’ stories as they were. As a friend, however, I became protective of my friend’s stories and wondered how they would be received by the people who would have access to the collected material. In hindsight, I wondered if my friends would be embarrassed when they read my interpretation of their stories. I wondered if they would think I was being too analytical, or if they would love what I had to say. Although the participants reported being comfortable with what they had shared during the group discussion, I was still aware of “exposing” my friends because, during the focus group discussion, I saw them confronting parts of their narratives that they had not yet confronted before. I saw them discovering new parts of their stories, often reflecting on how they were learning something new. This felt vulnerable and sacred, which was hard to report on.

Although this tension was hard to navigate, I am comfortable with it, as it humanised my participants and it made me more careful of what I write and how I make sense of people's experiences. It made me thorough and more respectful of the material, especially since my stories also formed part of it. I intended to honour my responsibility as a researcher and report on the material as best as I could, while also honouring my responsibility as a friend to not exploit my relationship with them and to treat this material with sensitivity. The themes below were developed in the context of this tension, and this could have influenced the themes developed and how I reported on them.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter mainly served two functions. First, to provide a theoretical framework for the study. The narrative theoretical approach was explained, then MW, the research design and methodology that was used as a type of narrative approach, to gather sexual socialisation stories. The second function was to explain the methodology used in the study. The chapter explored how friends were invited to be part of a focus group, through which sexual socialisation stories were collected, ethical considerations, and the thematic narrative analysis that was used to analyse the material.

Chapter 4: Thematic narrative analysis

This chapter reports on the thematic narrative analysis conducted from the participants' sexual socialisation stories. Themes were identified and organised to reflect an overall story of different experiences of communication about sex and sexuality as participants interact with different characters (such as teachers, parents, cousins, siblings, friends, and partners) different events (such as menstruation or watching a television show with the family) and different cultural norms (such as a liberal university culture) at different stages of their lives. This story progresses through time. I track the accounts of the participants, as they tell the story of moving from a state of "innocent oblivion" when they were young girls, to a time of receiving mixed messages about sexual activities, to the "liberal" university culture, and lastly, the current stage that these young adult women are in, a stage of deconstruction and reconstruction of the messages that they have been taught. I have termed this the "reauthoring" stage.

Stories were told retrospectively in the discussion group, and participants used their present context to try and make sense of their previous ones. The group discussion gave them space to talk through transitions, contradictions, and mixed messages in their experience of communication. Through storytelling, participants could talk through these mixed messages and reflect on how they made sense of them and the lessons that they learned from them. For the participants, the present context seemed to require a new kind of approach to storytelling. Participants appeared to adopt a counter-narrative in trying to show lessons that they have learned from the past "conservative" stories and use "reauthoring" to try and write their own story against the dominant story. This is represented as a "liberated" modern story.

4.1. "Innocent oblivion" story

I have termed the first part of the story "innocent oblivion". This was the most prevalent theme in the first memories of communication about sex. Participants reported that they had no concept of sexual activities, and it seems like the people who were referred to as "authority figures", such as parents, caregivers, teachers, and adults in general, tried to maintain this sense of "innocent oblivion". The participants reported that they were oblivious to the concept of sexual activities until almost by accident, they discovered this huge concept of sex. The level of "innocence" or even "oblivion" here is debatable, because even though there was not a lot of sexual knowledge at this stage, some participants were aware of this

elephant in the room. This means that they might not have been as “innocent” or even as “oblivious” as authority figures might have hoped. I still use this term, however, to refer to two things. Firstly, a time where participants had not, within themselves, attached any connotations to sex. This is a period before all the mixed messages. A time where sex was just that. Neither good nor bad. Perhaps something that should not be spoken about, but no one knew why. As a result, some participants responded to first messages about sex with childlike curiosity, some responded with apathy, and some responded with a fear of this “thing” that they could not talk about. Secondly, this term refers to the story that authority figures seemed to be telling about the young girls, that they were innocent and oblivious to issues of sex and sexuality.

In this part of the story, the prevalent themes were that there was no initial direct conversation about sex from authority figures, sexual activities (and conversations about them) were forbidden, the discovery of sex was unsupervised and accidental, and authority figures responded to this discovery with rules and warnings that were supposed to “protect” these young girls.

4.1.1. No recall of direct conversations story

1. For the most part, as a child, I think I just didn't care. We watched “The Bold” ... and I'd see it, but mentally, there was no concept. I had no frame of reference. Nothing. And so, I think it was 12 or 13 at school, right, they'd have this thing. It was this one day when... I don't think they spoke about sex as much as they did about puberty and STDs and stuff. I don't know, I think they did? I don't remember, but I didn't really care at all... And then... when it started to click... I was 16. I had a boyfriend... he wanted to have sex... I started to see myself desirable in a different way... and sex was something that I gave to him. We didn't have sex, but it was something I could give (Naledi, pg. 2)
2. I don't remember the first time I heard about sex, but I think my first memory is in grade 3 when I was 8, 9 years old? (Nelly, pg. 1)
3. So, with my story, I don't really remember, but I think it was either grade 2 or 3 (it's hard for me to track, because you know how we all move together). (Andani, pg. 2).
4. I don't have a clear memory, but I think it would be TV. (Mpho, pg. 3)
5. I remember, I think this was in 2018, when I wasn't pregnant, but the doctor thought I was. I had some nasal infection and I'd had the symptoms of a pregnant woman. And so, I went to the doctor, and we had like a back and forth and he was like “Are you pregnant” and I was like “No I promise I'm not pregnant”. So, I came home and told my aunt that I had to convince people that I'm not pregnant, and she didn't find it... She didn't laugh... She was just... So, I was like “tjoh, so even as an adult, I can't say anything”. And it was a joke because obviously I was not, but the fact that you couldn't even laugh with me! I was like okay we're never talking about this. (Naledi, pg. 11)

The participants found it hard to reflect on their very first conversations about sexual activities, as there was no *direct* introductory conversation. The extracts above (1, 2, 3 and 4)

use phrases like “I don’t remember” and “no frame of reference” to illustrate this. The lack of direct conversation about sexual activities seems to have communicated to the young girls that sex was a taboo topic and should not be spoken about. Naledi’s story (5) suggests that this has not changed over time. In extract 5, Naledi (who is a young adult at this point) challenges the dominant narrative that sexual activities should not be spoken about by talking to her aunt about an experience with the doctor, but she is met with resistance. Her aunt not only reinforces the narrative that sex should not be talked about but also seems to preserve the narrative that young people *should* be innocent and oblivious to issues of sex and sexuality. At this point, this “innocence” and “oblivion” narrative seems more important to the aunt than it is to Naledi, who is reaching out to talk to an adult about sex. Naledi tells a counter-narrative, that young people are not really “innocent” or “oblivious” and ignorant about sex and sexuality. Even without direct conversations from authority figures, young people (from a young age) know about sex from media, friends at school, or other daily interactions that seemed so insignificant, the participants could not bring them to memory.

4.1.2. Sexual activities as “forbidden” story

6. **So, there were certain shows that we were not allowed to watch, Like *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Days of Our Lives*, especially *Passions*. My aunt Forbid me from watching *Passions*. But interestingly enough, we’d all watch *Generations* [Agreeing murmur from group] I would watch *Generations*, and whenever there was a kissing scene, you’d look away or close your eyes. That was the rule. Look away or close your eyes. (Mpho, pg. 3)**
7. **So, when I walked home with boys this one time, suddenly there were rumours that uSethu wenza izimanga [Translation: Sethu is partaking in dirty activities]. [Laughter from the group] I actually didn’t know what this was about, but I knew that it was something that happened between a girl and a boy and I knew that it was something that my grandmother and, in fact, something that everyone frowned upon. If I did it, everyone would find out and I’d get into trouble. (Sethu, pg. 1)**

In extracts 6 and 7, Mpho and Sethu tell a story of participation in sexual activities being “forbidden”. Interestingly, sexual activities in this story do not only refer to *active* participation in sex or another sexual activity. They include walking with boys or watching certain soap operas where *other people* are participating in sexual activities such as kissing. One could argue that these girls were not “engaging” in sexual activities, but this was enough to get authority figures worried. This message came from authority figures, who might have said this in another attempt to preserve “innocence” or make sure that these young girls do not engage in anything that could start to make them curious (narrative that young people should stay oblivious). Sethu’s story (6) also suggests that sexual activities were forbidden because they were understood as “dirty”. Before Sethu learned what sex was about, or what it meant (if anything at all), she learned that it was “dirty activities”.

What stands out in these stories, is that it seems like the young girls had not yet formed their own beliefs about engagement with sexual activities of any kind. Sethu appears to have been comfortable walking with boys (7), but rumours and her grandmother's ideas about sex made her believe that she had been doing something wrong. Likewise, Mpho does not share her own opinion on watching kissing scenes on television (6) but the rule from her aunt is that she must look away. The lack of engagement with the television here seems to be because of rules, not Mpho's embarrassment or beliefs about what she is watching. Participant behaviour at this stage is thus strongly influenced by the dominant authority figure story, instead of own beliefs.

Mpho's story, of being allowed to watch *Generations* (a South African Soap Opera, with predominantly black people, briefly discussed in the literature review above) but not being allowed to watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Days of Our Lives* and *Passions* (American Soap operas, with predominantly white people) was also an interesting story that all the participants related to. *Generations* was a popular Soap Opera in South Africa, particularly in the black community. It was a Soap Opera made for them, to represent a better South Africa, with black people in positions of power and authority as well. This Soap Opera was somewhat more relatable, allowing black people to see themselves represented in the television show, and allowing them to try on different identities that seemed attainable. The representation of sexuality in this Soap Opera (although criticised) was perhaps more "tasteful" than that of American Soap operas, due to the familiarity. Furthermore, watching *Generations* was a family activity, speaking to the social consumption of media, so young people could not be excluded from participation completely.

4.1.3. Unsupervised accidental discovery story

8. **So, it was during class, and my friend, Ntando, was the one explaining what sex is, and then she mentioned that her parents have it, and all you do is get under the covers** [Laughter from the group] Nelly: **"Banjalo!** [translation: They're like that] **There's always a Ntando". We were all so shook, but we kind of knew that what we were talking about was a bit forbidden. So, I was really confused, and because I was the brave friend, they dared me to ask the teacher** (Andani, pg. 2).

Despite people in authority's efforts to shield these young girls from the knowledge of anything to do with sexual activities, they found out anyway. This discovery seemed to always be by "accident". No one was looking to find out, but as if it were a part of life, "there's always a Ntando" to start the journey of discovery. Ntando is depicted as the more knowledgeable one in the group, and she plays the role of educating the rest of the group, breaking the sense of "innocent oblivion". This illustrates the complexities with this

“innocence” and “oblivion” as it holds *some* knowledge. This knowledge, however, is “misleading” and “innocent”. Ntando explains sex as getting under the covers, perpetuating myths and innuendo about what sex really is. Andani depicts herself as confused and shook up by the news, which was “a bit forbidden”. So, the discovery is by accident, but also somewhat risky – hence having to be “brave” to approach the teacher.

9. **I'd be at home alone and stuff doing my homework and stuff, but I wouldn't do homework obviously, cause I am a kid. I'd watch TV So I'm scrolling at 4 p.m. and I see Tabatha *Group laughs and relates* and little Timmy and witches and stuff. And I am like I'm going to watch this. And as I am watching, I think it was Ethan or Teresa. Someone was like “I wanna make love to you” and I was like “OOOOhhhh, what is that?!”. So, I think that's my earliest memory of sex and something of that sort. They would make out, it was a PG show so I wouldn't really know the full-on details until much later, but that concept was introduced to me at that age, and then similar to *Bold and the beautiful* and *Days of our Lives*. So, for me it was TV and Television.** (Nelly, pg. 2)

This story shows Nelly, between other daily activities, finding out about sex. She also was not looking for this knowledge, and she did not have a “talk” designated to teach her about sex, but she discovered it anyway. Her response to her discovery is excitement and curiosity. During the focus group discussion, Nelly told this story with a big smile and re-enacted the childlike excitement that she must have felt, with an openness to find out what this “making love” was about. This is a counter-narrative to the dominant “sex is dirty” and altogether “forbidden” story. It seems that these young girls have an openness to learning about sex, which could be seen as silenced by the authority figures at this stage. Nelly reflects on her discovery of sexual activities, saying she “wouldn't know the full-on details until much later”. This suggests that the accidental discovery only *begins* this journey of sexual socialisation. For these young girls, this might not be experiential for a while.

10. **I was home alone so this guy invited me over, kanti [Translation: turns out...] he had other plans. He tried to force himself on me, but I tried to escape... which made me curious; What is it about this thing, that is number 1, sacred and 2, all men want it. First of all, watching it... on tv, I am not allowed to see it but there is something about a man, they want it. Later on, I had two more experiences of men trying to force themselves on me, so that shaped my ideas, that this is something that men want, it must be dirty and whatever it is, I don't want to know about it, I don't want to be part of it** (Mpho, pg. 3).

In the extract above (10), Mpho reflects on the lessons that she learned from experiences of men trying to force themselves on her. These include that “sex is sacred”, it is “wanted by men” and that it must be “dirty”. These lessons made her distance herself from it, concluding that it was something she did not want to know about or be part of. In this story, Mpho was not looking to learn about sex but finds herself being introduced to a violent expression of heterosexuality. This story illustrates the dominant narrative of rape culture in South Africa. The story is that if men are not *given* sex, they will *take* it.

This “men want sex” narrative that Mpho (10) had learned, is also seen in Naledi’s story (extract 1), but due to the context in which she had learned this, she responded differently. Upon learning that her boyfriend wanted to have sex, she learned that she was desirable and that she had something that she could give, and this was a good thing (a counter-narrative). This is the belief that women hold a treasure that men want. Holding this treasure gives them the power to “give” sex to whoever they want to. This can be seen in two ways. On one hand, like Naledi (extract 1) being the gatekeeper of sex puts these girls in a position of power and makes them in control of sexuality, in a way that they can do what they want with it. They can give or withhold sex when they want to. On the other hand, like in Mpho’s story (10), having treasure that men want can make girls vulnerable to violent men who might want access, even if the girl does not want to give this access. It makes the woman’s body an object for someone else’s consumption. In this story, the women are not powerful at all.

The stories in this sub-theme illustrate how the source of accidental discovery is important, as it frames how sex is viewed. An example is that Mpho (10) learned that sex was dirty, from men trying to force themselves on her. It can then be said that the consumption of American soap operas also comes with such consequences (e.g., Nelly’s story. Extract 9). These soap operas introduce a dominant narrative about sex and sexual relationships. This narrative includes conventionally “pretty” women, with a certain body type (usually a flat stomach), race white and high socioeconomic status. This brings Western ideological baggage about appearance, attractiveness, and so on.

4.1.4. Rules of engagement and warnings story

11. **The primary school teacher was some white old lady, and she was shocked, and she made all of us wash our mouths with soap. That was a common practice in my primary school, for swearing or anything. Anything bad, you have to go to the sink and wash your mouth with soap.** (Andani, pg. 2)
12. **Interesting that you talk about your first period. This was the conversation with my aunt when I had my first period. She was like, don’t touch a boy, you’re gonna fall pregnant. Don’t even look at a boy, you’re going to fall pregnant. Like don’t. All I heard was the don’ts. She didn’t even want to go to sex. She was like now you are having your periods; it means you are bleeding; it just means stay away from boys. Don’t touch boys, don’t look at boys you’re gonna be in big trouble. You’re gonna have a baby and you can’t handle a baby. We’ll tell you the consequences of your actions, but don’t do it. So that was kinda like the sex talk.** (Mpho, pg. 5)
13. **I think I was 12 or 13 at school, right... I know one of my friends was on birth control...Uhm... Because her mother... Because her family had a history of teenage pregnancy and her mother wanted to avoid it, so she was kind of forced. She was like whether you are having sex or not, you are on.** (Naledi, pg. 2)

Upon realising that these young girls had a level of insight into sexual activities, and the pretend innocence was over, authority figures are reported to have responded with risk

warnings a set of rules on how to engage with sexuality in a way that avoids risk. Although set out to be protective, this further communicated that sex was bad, shameful and something to be afraid of. Both talking about sex and the act itself (doing sex) were viewed as shameful and bad. In extract 11, Andani tells the story of how talking about sex to her teacher, led to being punished for a dirty mouth and having to wash it with soap. This washing of the mouth with soap not only punishes the behaviour of talking about sex, through having to endure the disgusting taste of soap but also symbolises cleanliness. *Talking* about sex is seen as having a dirty mouth that must be washed clean. The communication from this teacher is that Andani should never ask questions about sex again. This is a shaming and silencing technique, which teaches these young girls to not engage or to actively disengage.

In extract 12, Mpho's aunt, through a list of "don'ts", communicates that engagement in the *act* of sex has negative consequences. "Sex", here, seems to mean penis-vagina penetrative reproductive sex. It does not seem to refer to other sexualised activities that one could engage in or watch pornography without actually "having sex". These rules seem to be specifically about protecting from the risk of having babies. Sex is dangerous and bad because of the consequences, which are babies. Even in the story (13) where parents offer a solution to protect from risk, in case their daughter *does* have sex, the protective measure they implement is contraceptive pills. Hormonal contraceptive pills prevent pregnancy, but not sexually transmitted diseases or HIV, which also have health-threatening implications. So, this becomes a story of how to not have babies.

Mpho and Naledi's stories (12 and 13) show how these rules about not having babies, go beyond babies. They are warnings about: (1) Risk, such as disease and death, (2) disappointing family, (3) exploitation, abandonment and betrayal from men and boys and (4) sex resulting in pregnancy, which changes one's life forever. These messages communicate the dominant narrative of girls being powerless and victims of male sexuality. The stories show these consequences as inevitable, so girls are encouraged to stay away through shame and scare tactics. The rule of engagement is "do not engage". These risk warnings do not seem to teach girls any skills.

This theme of rules of engagement and warnings is also prevalent in the later stories, but the content changes over time. As the girls grow up, rules and warnings start protecting against other things, like how to avoid falling in love and heartbreak, over and above how to not have babies and the responsabilised weight of pregnancy.

4.2. Mixed Messages Story

“Mixed messages” refers to transitions, variations, and contradictions in the messages that participants received about sex. This was the prevalent theme in the stories from when participants were in primary and high school.

Acknowledging that these young women participants (then adolescents) would be confronted with their sexuality, authority figures used books or periods as triggers for conversations about sexual activities. The material showed a shift from authority figures avoiding the topic altogether to preserve their innocence, to actual teachings from teachers, some comments and more teachings from parents, older women, friends, and even friends who were young men. The prevalent themes in this story included authority figures using external triggers to initiate conversations about sex, tips on how to navigate sexuality (from various characters), teachings about sexuality and gender, a shame narrative and stories about friends who were portrayed as more nurturing than authority figures. The dominant narrative that was communicated through various means of communication, was that females are vulnerable.

4.2.1. Triggers to encourage conversations about sexual activities story

14. I was probably 12 years old when my mom read me “Whitney’s Kiss”. This was like some “Lovelife” book back then. It was about HIV and peeps dating and High School (Mpho interjects: Soul buddies!). There was a high school boy, with... I think a primary school girl. So, my mom read that to me to kind of initiate the sex conversation, but the message from that book already or at least the message from how we engaged with it, was that sex was bad and that dating was bad because “boys only want one thing” And then over time we started talking about it in a better way. Over time, sex stopped being bad. I don’t know how we made that jump. But over time, we spoke about it and it wasn’t bad anymore. But it was obviously only good in a specific context, so even if we were to talk about sex, we would talk about sex in the context of marriage. (Sethu, pg. 11).
15. So, in grade 8, we read this book called “Blue train to the moon”. And I think it’s about what you said, where now also, in that book, right, it’s about this girl who has sex and she falls pregnant but then they decide to abort the child, right, but it’s the emotions and the way she talks about her emotions and the way she talks about “I want the sex, I want, you know?” So, it was almost like okay this is like something, you know? And it was very exciting because we were in grade 8, everyone is coming from different places, this is the first book we are reading, so you know, it almost set that tone, we are very like comfortable with each other. (Andani, pg. 13)

Sethu and Andani’s stories (14 and 15) show authority figures using books as triggers to initiate open conversations about sex. This openness, however, was interesting because it was *created* by the parents and teachers for a specific purpose. Sethu’s mother (14) seems to have initiated this “open” dialogue to warn her daughter about male sexuality and teach that “boys only want one thing”. Boys are seen as predatory. Andani’s teachers (15) wanted to “set the tone”. They wanted the students to be comfortable with each other. This kind of “openness”

is created with an agenda in mind, and the dominant voice is that of the “authority figures”. This kind of “openness” is different from that of friends.

Sethu’s story (14) also shows a shift in the narrative that her mother has told over time. In earlier memories, her narrative was that of sex being “bad”. Through time, Sethu comments on a new narrative told by her mother, saying “sex stopped being bad”. Her mother teaches that the right context to have sex is in marriage. This is a religious dominant narrative. Marriage is seen as a container for safe sex. Mixed messages are evident here. Sex is both good and bad, depending on the context in which one has it. Outside of marriage, men are predatory. In marriage, however, men are partners for safe sex. Perhaps this is not a story about the “goodness” of sex or men, but a story of fear of exploitation and neglect. Sex in marriage can protect one from having a child out of wedlock (which is shameful in the religious narrative) and protect these women from possibly raising babies without support from partners. This narrative, however, does not protect from the, sometimes, coercive nature of sex in marriage.

Despite Andani’s story (14) being about authority figures telling another story about a pregnant teenager, Andani adopts a sex-positive counter-narrative from the experience. Her story is about a woman’s emotional response, rather than mere warnings. This story also shows an interesting counter-narrative to the dominant story of girls being victims of male sexuality. In the story, the young girl is reported to have expressed her sexual desire she seems to be an active participant in the process, rather than a girl witnessing sex happening *to* her. Andani describes this as “exciting”. She seems to appreciate this expression of sexuality, rather than conforming to the silencing narrative, where talking about sex is seen as shameful.

16. Okay, so you know, I’m Venda, so in our culture, as much as I didn’t grow up in Venda and everything, but every time I go back home, because where my grandparents stay, it’s like close to the royal house, so at the royal house we have the *Domba*, right? Which is like a coming of age. So as soon as you get your period you go for that and the older women, they teach you, like this is how you carry yourself and basically, it’s the sex talk like introduction and everything. Every time I go there, I’d feel awkward because I haven’t gone through it but I’m allowed to go sit in whenever *Domba* is happening even now, I can go sit in but I’m never... you know, so even from the girls around there, it was always like “You don’t know what we know, you’re a girl from the city”. (Andani, pg. 5).

In extract 16, Andani reflects on *Domba*, a coming-of-age ceremony that offers an opportunity for intentional sexual socialisation. Andani explained that this would happen when a girl had their first menstruation. Older women would teach these young girls how to carry themselves as women. She reported that here, the older women would give them the

“sex talk”. This story shows how authority figures use menstruation a trigger for conversations about sex. This was also seen in Mpho’s story (12) above. Andani’s story (16) also shows inclusion and exclusion groups in sex talk. Andani, who has not undergone the ceremony and is from the “city” is seen as ignorant by those who have. This also speaks to variations in the socialisation of people in the same cultural group. Andani, who grew up in the city and identifies as Venda, has a different sexual socialisation experience than some of the girls who grew up in Venda.

17. **And I remember at umgidi ka Lucky** [A coming home ceremony for Xhosa young men who are coming back from initiation school], **I remember after everything, we were all just chilling. At the back of the house, we were all just chatting, and he was like “yeah, so I need to have sex” and he was like “I need to hurry up, ukhupizotho”** [Having sex with a girl to leave impurities with her or Having sex with a girl to cleanse yourself as a man] **and I was like “wait, mntase, what’s that?” and he was like “I need to have sex with someone to ukhuphizotho” and he was like he’s going to have sex with this one girl. He was like “all the guys, when we come back from the mountain, we all go to her, sikhuphela kuye** [we have sex with her after initiation], **so she’s the girl we all go to when we’re done”. And he was like once again, giving me advice “mntase you must make sure you never do that cause it’s bad luck. And you as my friend, you must never”. {Naledi: “Why is she the designated girl?”}. I think, mna personally, it’s because she was very sexually expressive. Since grade 9. She... shame, poor girl, had sex with a lot of the guys. So, they made her the poster girl for izotho. So literally, all of them, especially grade 11 and 12, they’d just go to her. I don’t know if they actually did... They would never do it to their girlfriends. They would never do it to the girl they are eyeing. They’d do it to someone they already had sex with. The girlfriends knew, obviously. They'd talk about it, pre-mountain** [Before going to initiation school]. (Nelly, pg. 19)

In the extract above (17) Nelly reflects on a conversation that her friends were having at a male coming of age ceremony in some Xhosa communities. The rite of passage for young adult men also seems to offer women an opportunity to reflect on their sexuality. Although not directly involved, participants reflected on the Xhosa traditional male circumcision ceremony and how being a girlfriend of the initiate could make the woman negotiate views on polygamous relationships (or men having multiple sexual partners), due to practices that encouraged male sexual expression, while problematising women who are sexually expressive. This practice is called *Ukhupha izotho* which refers to the first sexual encounter after an initiate comes back from initiation school. Some men believe that this sexual encounter cleanses the man but is bad luck for the woman. This allowed for an interesting discussion as Nelly and Sethu tried to recall what the practice was about and what it meant. The details remain unclear, but this discussion was interesting for two reasons. Firstly, this practice shows different standards for women and men. Men are permitted to be sexually expressive, having sex with a girl with whom everyone else had sex, but girls are not allowed the same liberty. The “sexually expressive girl” faces the consequences of being the target for these young men. Secondly, these young men are protective of the people whom they care about and will not allow them to be taken advantage of. They make sure that they do not have

that first sexual encounter after initiation (which is believed to bring bad luck to the girl they have sex with) with their girlfriends, and they warn their women friends against it as well. The lesson here is that women cannot be sexually expressive in the way that men are encouraged to be. This young man is encouraged to have multiple partners, as part of a “cultural practice” something which is not true for women. Furthermore, men are portrayed as predators and women are vulnerable. Male sexuality is to be feared and men are not to be trusted.

4.2.2. Teachings and learnings about sexuality and gender story

Another prevalent theme in the story that the participants were telling together is there were specific prescribed roles for each gender. These included direct and indirect messages from parents, pastors and teachers or interpreted messages from heteronormative cultural practices, households, schools, and churches.

18. **So, I think pretty much... Home was a very conservative space... In the sense that “You are a female; you should express yourself as a female” ...So I guess that also came to shape my sexuality. People around, seeing from people around, how certain behaviours are considered as “no, girls don’t do that”. Girls don’t do that. Boys do this, girls do that. I think, also, I wasn’t exposed much to other ways of expressing your sexuality. So, it was like, female, male, that’s it. (Mpho, pg. 27)**

In the extract above (18), Mpho tells a story about prescribed gender roles. “You are a female you should express yourself as a female”. This was prescribed by family, church and friends who taught how a woman ought to act. This was rooted in the cisgender heteronormative dominant narrative. Sex and gender are seen to mean the same thing. Gender is seen as binary and biological and there is an appropriate way of expressing it. Any performance outside of the bounds of the prescribed “norm” was seen as “weird” or strange. Mpho also speaks on how a lack of exposure to alternative ways of expressing or performing gender shaped her sexuality. The lesson then, was that she should only behave in certain ways that are considered appropriate for girls. Retrospectively, Mpho sees this as “conservative”.

19. **I think the queer community at school also did a number on me. So, there was a sense of “If you are tomboy-ish, you are lesbian”. And I think coming into that space, having grown up with boys, really enjoying hanging out with boys and being the tomboy girl, that really doesn’t want to do a lot of things. I’d rather wear sweatpants. And then that translated into... They called me “Ta SETHU” [Loose translation: Mr Sethu] and I kinda enjoyed that, because I was like “Okay I really am the guy in the school” but then I am not lesbian. In fact, I was attracted to a very masculine girl at the school, which made me think that me I want the masculine. So, there was a tension between “This is the identity that has been given to you” This is what you are supposed to be, and I’m like “But I’m not that”, but at the same time, that masculine girl looks really cool, is that something that I want to explore? But maybe not. There’s a reality of trying to grapple with “Okay I’m heterosexual, this is how I see myself” but that’s not what the next person sees when they look at me. So, I think I got to a point where I had to wear my sexuality. I had to put on a**

dress so that I can become desirable to the man, or I had to speak a certain way so that a guy could find me attractive, so I had to perform my sexuality in a very specific way. So, performance definitely shaped my sexuality as well. Yeah, I think that's about it. (Sethu, pg. 33-34).

In the extract above (19) Sethu tells a counter-narrative to the dominant “heterosexual cisgender women wear dresses” story. She reported that she enjoyed being with boys and that she was a “tomboy”. The word “tomboy” shows how, according to the dominant narrative, she was behaving in a way that was considered inappropriate for girls (A tomboy is a girl who behaves in a way that is associated with boys). Sethu’s behaviour and dress code thus earned her the title of a “tomboy” instead of just a “girl”. In the school community, there seems to have been a connection between how people dressed, and their sexual orientation. According to the dominant narrative, the “masculine” expression of herself was understood to mean that she was homosexual. Sethu, however, also did not subscribe to this narrative as she identified as heterosexual. This story, then, is about Sethu trying to navigate through the message that she is dressed inappropriately and is homosexual (the story that her peers were telling) and the story that she was telling herself, which is that she was heterosexual and there was nothing wrong with her clothes. She reflects on the process of trying to reconcile these two stories by considering whether homosexuality was something she wanted “to explore”. This opportunity for exploration seems to be offered by the “exposure” to the “queer community” which Mpho, for example (18) did not have. In the end, Sethu (story 19) decides to conform to the dominant narrative by “putting on a dress” and deciding to “speak a certain way” so that she can pass as a girl and be “desirable to a man” as a heterosexual woman. Earlier in this story, Sethu also reported that she somewhat enjoyed being “the guy in the school”. This could be due to the dominant narrative that men are superior to women.

20. I think just as you guys were going through, I was actually thinking about sex and the body. Like especially just around fitness culture and whatever. It's always like... your butt needs to look a certain way, your waist a certain way, but also when you're growing up. Particularly for me, because I was a little bit bigger than the other kids, it's almost like “Oh you're mature, so you should be having sex”. But then now as I'm growing up, and then I'm told I don't have to have a big butt and whatever. But then when you think about the act and everything, you're just like... “but we're all just doing the same thing” (Andani, pg. 38)

In the extract above, Andani (20) seems critical of the dominant narratives around sex and the body, saying “we’re all doing the same thing”. While growing up, the dominant narrative was that more curvy women who were “a little bigger than the other kids” were having sex or “sexual beings”. With “fitness culture” these ideals have changed. The dominant narrative now, is that one “doesn’t have to have a big butt”. These women’s bodies (shapes and appearance) seem to be under surveillance. They need to look a certain way (bigger butt and hourglass shape) in different contexts. This shows that culture is not unidimensional. So,

these women are always trying to find ways to “fit in” to context-specific ideals, but never really “fitting – in” because the rules keep changing. This “fitting in” is to the (heteronormative) male gaze.

21. **But don't you think also, the “genderedness” of the sex talk comes in, right? Because “Men want sex and women just need affection”. So “husband love your wives, and wives, give your husband sex.” and so, I kinda found myself back to like 16-ish where I was like “Oh, this is something that I give to a man.” Where on Rhodes campus, it was a different story because it was just the pleasure but now it's “Okay, we need to separate that again, because this is ungodly”. As a wife, this is what it means for a Christian woman to be having sex. And babies. It's not about the sex, it's about babies. (Naledi, pg. 18)**

In the abstract above, Naledi (21) comments on the gendered nature of the “sex talk” in different contexts. The comparison is made between sex talks in the religious context, versus the university context. In the Christian religious context, the message is that “men want sex, and women just need affection” and love. This message also seems to suggest that the wife has a responsibility to “give” sex to their husbands. Naledi is critical of this dominant narrative. She comments on how it sounds like the “sex is something I give” narrative again (story 1), where sex is something to be given to the man, for his consumption. In this context, the woman is also taught that sex is a means to an end. The dominant narrative is that men want sex for the sake of sex, but women have sex so that they can receive affection and have babies. Affection and babies thus become the goal. University is said to offer a counter-narrative. In that context, “sex is just pleasure”. This phrase “just pleasure” suggests that Naledi is critical of this narrative as well, and she calls it “ungodly”. In this story, she sits with the two narratives offered by the contexts that she was exposed to, not quite identifying with either.

22. **I remember the first time I had a sermon [in church] on sex. Plainly talking about sex, and that sermon made me feel so uncomfortable. I was just like ... Firstly, I had never heard a pastor talk about sex, and number 2, I had never had someone talk about sex being a good thing. Number 3, a Christian nogal! talking about sex as a good thing! A desirable thing?! I was never the same after that sermon. I was like... what? So, this is a thing that's good, that's desirable? That's for Christians? You know? And... cause you know how also, it's like there's stages to do it. You gotta get married, go to classes, traditionally, in our church, the women have to teach you how to be a wife, then you have sex, and then you can have... even the... sex is not mentioned, it's having the kids. you're going to have kids, and then raise kids. Sex is not part of the conversation, but it's like you're going to get married, have kids, and then build a home as a wife. (Mpho, pg. 17)**

In the above story (22) Mpho reflects on the confusion and discomfort brought by counter-narratives in different cultural contexts. This confusion seems to be brought about by the radically different narrative that is being told by the same structure (church) in a different context. Speaking to how these narratives shape identity, Mpho says “I was never the same after that sermon”. The counter-narrative that the pastor is telling here is that sex is a topic

that can be talked about, it is a good thing, even in the Christian context, and it is to be desired. This pastor is also talking about sex for the sake of sex. It is no longer just about making babies (dominant narrative also seen in extract 21). In the dominant narrative that Mpho had previously been told, “sex is not mentioned”. The lesson for women was that they must become wives and build homes. It seems that sex was only a way to get there, part of the duties of being a wife. “Traditionally” women are not taught to desire sex. To acknowledge desire was then viewed as non-Christian. Religion was positioned as offering an alternative expression of sexuality, one that tries to control “desire”. The counter-narrative provided by Mpho’s pastor allowed her to evaluate her “traditional” beliefs. Although this was initially an “uncomfortable” experience for her, it seems to have had a positive impact on her sexual socialisation journey.

23. ...what I find is that for me, personally, the church experience with celibacy is the... I don't know. Nobody tells you what happens when I feel like... It's almost like... everyone will just say “Go read the bible”... And so it's almost like nobody really tells you the “How”. And that's why I think I would appreciate the, I would call them, New age and young pastors that are coming up and who talk about it so freely, and say “This is the temptation, this is the lust” Still, sometimes when They are talking, I'm like “you're not telling me how to run away from the lust”. And then again, there's also the silences. This Christian couple, they ran away from, I think someone asked them about masturbation. There's these silences within, where nobody's saying anything explicitly, right, and it's just like... well, what am I supposed to do? What am I not supposed to do? In reality, like... How do I do this thing, you know? (Andani, pg. 23)

The participants, at this stage, report trying to navigate the tension between the learned “conservative” beliefs and their real desires. Christian teachings had made them believe that sex was only safe and permitted in a marriage context, but unmarried women found themselves having real-life sexual desires and not knowing how to reconcile them with the message. These stories show how these women start to think about the story that they want to hold on to. They must decide whether they are “conservative” or not, and the implications of this, as being “conservative” is also not unidimensional. This is seen in later narratives. Andani, here (23), reflected on how talking to girls about sex, in the contexts of households or sermons at church, is often quite abstract and focuses on values and stereotyped rhetoric of “proper” or “real” sex, which is penis penetrative, unprotected, reproductive sex that is given to men or they will take it. It is not about confusing everyday real experiences between actual people. It is not about practical skills or negotiations, or women’s desires and diversities of sexual experiences and practices. Her frustration is about a lack of practical skills and honesty, and silence around other sexual experiences and alternative messages.

24. I remember my uncle was a pastor. I remember this one time, we were sitting in church, it was in December, it was very hot. I don't know what it was, he was talking about something and he was like “You and your wife” he was like “Men, I employ you to treat your wife well. Buy her some

linger lingerie” and I remember what made it click... The older we got, the more they became liberal with us... because obviously you no longer go to Sunday school, you go to big church. I remember all my cousins, we looked at each other and were like “Does he mean lingerie?” and we looked like “Is this you?”. He looked at us like “Don’t look at me like you don’t know what I’m talking about”. (Nelly, pg. 20)

25. I know that, especially when someone is about to get married, the older women gather, and they have “The talk”. And I think I’ve had that from about two. The one girl was Xhosa, the other Ndebele, so maybe just black people in general. The one girl wasn’t getting married, I think her sister was, and she was like “Friend, all these mamas, who you have respected, who were very conservative, all of a sudden, they are saying the most revolting, vulgar things to you.” And so, it goes from radio silence to things that are too much for you. (Naledi, pg. 21)

Within this “conservative” culture, there are contradicting stories. There are stories of Christian pastors encouraging married people to have sex, and older people telling young women to “give” sex to their husbands. Contradictory stories which point to hypersexuality even in this “conservative” culture. These stories show how the narrative changes through time. When girls reach puberty, and beyond this, the ways that sex and sexuality are talked about tends to shift and change. The talk becomes more erotic with lingerie (24) and more “vulgar” statements (25) from the same “authority figures” who were initially viewed as “conservative” and had seen these girls as innocent.

4.2.3. Shame story

26. But I’m thinking about, in high school as well, we didn’t really speak about... my friends and I, we didn’t really speak about sex in detail until Grade 11 Grade 12. And Uhhh, the sex that we spoke about would be like “U... Ubusy, yhoo hayi lona”. This one is busy there; this one is busy there, and ... Do you see what... So that was the kind of thing. I was part of a friendship group that was very academically inclined, so we’d hear from the cool girls at school, that “oh I did this over the weekend, oh I was at so what lounge” and there was this thing in (hometown) where a lot of, where the doctors, attending doctors, would sleep with high school students... Uhm and you see them... like... because my high school was the school where you’d like wear your blazer... girls would wear their blazers and our short skirts and then we’d do the whole walk around town, so you’d literally see like every afternoon you’d see like a Benz or an Audi or a Range Rover just park in front of the school and someone, one of our girls would get in with a doctor, you can still see his lab coat on with the stethoscope and everything and they’d drive off to like the bougie suburb where the doctors and like businessman lived. So, like my friends would talk about it, like “did you see this person did this and this?” but in terms of like detail, we didn’t really speak about anything detail. What we’d speak about is...okay cool, so I’ll probably have sex in like marriage or like in university, but not now I wanna get my matric certificate now, you know? (Nelly, pg. 9-10)
27. In black culture there’s also this, like “Go to school, get everything right” but then also in church culture, especially white church culture, a lot of the people get married young. But you know, if you were to go home today and say you were getting married, it’s not going to work. Where’s your job? House? (Andani, pg. 26)

Another theme that was prevalent in the narratives told by the participants was the theme of shame, as the young women started to explore the “forbidden”. In the high school story in extract 26, there seems to have been a divide between the girls who were actively exploring their sexuality, meaning that they engaged in “real sex” – heterosexual activities with various partners – and those who were not. The participants told their stories from an “in-group/ out-

group” perspective. The shaming was on either side of the group. The participants reported that it was easier to have honest conversations with people who had similar experiences. Those who were engaging in sexual activities found comfort in being part of a peer group that was doing the same, shaming those who were not and leaving them to feel like outcasts. Those who were not engaging in sexual activities often worried about those who were and problematized their actions. Both sides (as cultural practices) offer different identities for young women. This was a story about the “cool girls” who were sexually active versus the “academically inclined”. The “academically inclined” is seen as not engaging in sexual activities because they are not engaging in heterosexual with various partners. Interestingly, the academically inclined have postponed and projected sex into future narratives in marriage and at university. Fictional spaces at this stage. There is also no indication that they were not watching pornography or masturbating or engaging with this content through novels. Just that they are not engaging with other people in sexual encounters. The academically inclined scholars refer to the “cool” girls as “busy” as if they are doing something that they should not be doing. This is because according to the teachings up to this point, these girls should have been focusing on school. The prescribed order is to first go to school, get a job, and buy a house before entertaining sexuality, as seen in extract 27. This is reported as something rooted in “black culture”, and the western culture is understood to be less strict on this order of priorities. This is Andani’s perspective (in extract 27), who believes that “white church culture” allows women to marry young, while “black culture” requires women to postpone marriage until they have a level of financial independence, such as owning a house.

4.2.4. “Nurturing friends” story

28. Uhhh... and so most... yes actually, almost all that I understand about sex has come from my friends. It’s always been... friends are liberal, so communicating about sex... they’ve been warm and nurturing. Kind of like a guide. Back to my first-ish boyfriend. Uhhh... I had a friend, and I guess I started to open up to her because she’d opened up to me. So, she... this one time told me about how her boyfriend kind of snuck in this one time when her dad was out. Her boyfriend snuck in, they had sex. And so, I think because of that, I was like okay cool let me tell. So, I think with her, I remember the first time... Guys, I did a lot of things (disclaimer to the group). The first time my boyfriend sent me nudes, I told her about it and so she was, she was a guide. And so I think my friends kind of functioned as a Yoda... Uhhh... because even the first time I actually had sex, here in university, it was like “okay, how did it go? How did whatever... Okay it’s sore when you pee [referring to vaginal discomfort], you probably have a bladder infection, go to the doctor he’ll give you...” So, they did the nurturing. Which in hindsight, I really appreciate it because they could kind of spot the danger. Don’t do this, this is life threatening. Friends kind of nurtured that “Sexual discipleship”. (Naledi, pg. 10-11)

All the participants reported that friends were the most nurturing and influential of the sexual socialisation agents. From a young age, where they shared the little that they knew about

sexual activities, to now sharing tips and advice. Naledi (extract 28) reports that “almost all I understand about sex has come from friends”. She describes them as “Yoda” (a Star Wars reference to communicate that friends offered wise counsel). This is seen as positive. Contrary to the dominant narrative of the “innocence” and “ignorance” of young people in this area, and negative peer influence, Naledi (extract 28) describes her friends as knowledgeable, informed, and helpfully supportive. They knew which questions to ask, they affirmed good sexual practice, and could “spot the danger” and offer relevant advice when a friend was at risk.

29. I think also in High School, a lot of people were having sex. So, I'd sit, I'd listen to stories where people would be like “Oh my Gosh, when you break your virginity, it's so painful because it is this hard thing that is penetrating you and you are very soft, and so I think in high school we spoke about in a lot of detail. Girls would say you need to be a porn star for your man ****laughter****, and so High School, grade 11 Grade 12, that's when we got into... But even then, I think I was very distant to it. Then I think first year was actually the first time I spoke about sex while also owning up to my desire to have sex. My friends would actually have to pull it out of me using games like “never have I ever” and then that's when you own up to how far you've gone and stuff like that. (Sethu, pg. 8)

From high school, the more sexually experienced friends were playing an important role in the sexual socialisation of these young women. They opened room for discussion and were able to warn against pain. This pain refers to physical pain from penetrative sex (as in extract 29), but the group discussion suggested that these warnings were also against the pain of emotional distress and embarrassment. In the stories, the friends are also seen embracing their sexual desire, and sharing stories about “how far they have gone”, showing the continuum of sexualised practices that are moving towards or beyond “real sex” (extract 29). Sethu's story (29) also shows how friends, though represented as a counter-narrative, can also reinforce the dominant narrative. An example of this is Sethu's friend saying, “you need to be a porn star for your man”. This also shows how the dominant narratives permeate individual narratives, without the individuals noticing or resisting them.

30. In Grade 10 we started becoming more “Mature” a lot of the guys in my grade I was close friends with, and they'd be like “yeah, no nhe, this weekend me and ... we did this” and they'd keep telling me “Uyabona wena Nelly [you see, Nelly], so when you're doing this nhe, you need to do it like this nhe. You need to do this like this. So, they would give me tips on how to please a man, and these are my guy friends who are like “I don't like it when so and so did this.” And I'd literally sit there during break time and they would point out that this girl did this and I didn't like that, but I liked it when this girl did this to me, and just thinking about it, even first year in my digs, the guys I lived with, they'd talk about sex explicitly and they'd be like... so I did this this. I remember even once, one of them even wanted me to buy “morning after pill” and I was like “excuse you? It's a Sunday morning dude, I'm not going anywhere. Figure it out yourself. You and her” So yeah. (Nelly, pg. 11)

Within this theme of friends acting as a guide, there is a unique role that is played by young men who are friends of the participants (extract 30). They are also reported to be open and honest, going as far as sharing tips on how to please a man. They were able to reflect on what they liked or did not like from the women that they had sex with. These male friends also played a protective role, warning their female friends against the male sexual drive. On one hand, this reproduces the dominant heteronormative ideas about men's sexualities. That means that this might not be the appropriate context to question "facts about sex". On the other hand, this is the first actual skills-based knowledge transfer. The first-time conversations about sex are being had in a technical way to increase pleasure. These young men seem to not be apologetic about their sexual experiences. They speak about it without shame, going as far as asking Nelly to go buy the "morning-after pill" even though she was not part of the sexual encounter.

4.3 The "liberal" story

As they transitioned to university, the young women participants reported being more confronted with a sexually "liberal culture". Within this theme, the young women sit with the tension between what they have learned from authority figures in the past, and what this new culture provides and produces. The university stories are filled with first sexual experiences, owning sexual desire, and confronting own ideas about sexuality. This offers space to unlearn, learn new concepts and opportunities for resocialisation. Participants talk about this liberal culture in two ways. On one hand, it is celebrated for being educational and providing language, but it is also criticised for being prescriptive and problematising people who choose to perform their sexuality in different and perceived "conservative" ways. The same in-group/out-group dynamic. Not only was this "liberal" theme the most prevalent in university stories, but it was also the lens through which participants understood and told their previous stories.

4.3.1. Learning about and embracing sexuality story

31. **Yeah, I never spoke about sex until I was in a lecture here at university** [shocked sounds from group]. **Funny story. A scenario was made about hookers, sex workers. Twice, and I'm looking at this man and I am giggling. The thing is, I caught everybody's attention. Everyone looked at me and he was like "Why are you laughing, Mpho? it's not funny" *group laughter* In my head I'm like "Oh? It's not?". But then, this friend sitting next to me, it's a guy, is like "Have you not had sex before?" and I look at him like "What the heck?" and he's like "I can tell from the way you were giggling". So I was like actually, okay, maybe there's something wrong with me, I should start having sex conversations because I giggle in public.** (Mpho, pg. 14 & 16)

32. **And my mom also tried to be open as I got older. Which annoyed me very much, because my whole entire life, she had been like “Don’t have a boyfriend. Don’t do this, don’t do this”. And then the minute I got into university, the minute I graduated, she was like “So when am I going to have grandkids?” and I’m like...? (“Where are they going to come from? You told me to stay away from boys”).** (Nelly, pg. 20)

In the university context, the participants reported that the “innocent oblivion” that used to be celebrated or seen as defensive against scary or dangerous sexual knowledge/experience, was now seen as unusual and no longer something to be proud of. Innocence and inexperience were to be hidden as they could potentially be mocked (as in extract 31). University was seen as the place for sex. This narrative was reinforced by young girls who had projected sex into a less regulated university space, parents, who were now “open”, acknowledged their daughter’s sexuality and started enquiring about babies (extract 32) and lecturers and colleagues who took it for granted that everyone in university had been and was having sex (extract 31). This shows a drastic shift from the dominant narrative being that engagement in sexual activities is forbidden, to engagement in sexual activities now being the expected norm, as seen in both extracts 31 and 32.

33. **But then, when you mentioned #RURreference list, right, I noticed something, that during #RURreference list, I started having language for some of the things that happened when we were like younger. [“Sooooo GOOOD” From the group] Like “grooming” and all of these things and that was a very... But this stage for me was very awkward, right, because there were also some things now that I also had to deal with and be like “yho, you know, when this and this happened, was I really ready? Was I groomed into it, was I ...? You know? So, it was a very uncomfortable stage with me, cause now I had to be like “what happened there...? What does this mean?”, you know?** (Andani, pg. 14)

In addition to normalizing and encouraging engagement in sexual activity (talking about and having “real sex”) university provided language. The participants reflected on the impact of the #RURreferenceList protest at Rhodes University – referring to protests in 2016, where students “protested the university’s sexual violence policies and procedures, as well as the ‘rape culture’ that pervades social structures.” (Macleod, Böhmke, Mavuso, Barker & Chiweshe, 2018, p. 1) – which created a space for reflection of past sexual experiences, while also providing new language to make sense of these sexual experiences and experiences to come (as seen in extract 33). These protests, which were dominated by strong women and feminist narratives on sex and rape, offered a counter-narrative to the heteronormative narratives that these women were previously exposed to. Narratives that usually did not favour the young women and were centred around male sexuality. In this new counter-narrative, women are strong and their sexuality is more than a product to “give” to the man. In extract 33, Andani talks about sexual grooming, wondering if she might have unknowingly

been a victim. Grooming is a process through which a perpetrator will manipulate to gain the trust of a victim, usually to abuse them. In this case, a young girl, for example, might find themselves engaging in non-consensual sexual activities without having the language to explain discomfort. This could be especially because the perpetrator has gained the victim's trust over time. University introduced this language to the participants through very specific incidents on campus, that produced vigorous consciousness-raising responses in protests, shutdowns and challenging of university-based policies related to gendered heterosexual norms and violence.

4.3.2. Liberal university sexual culture story

34. I would say the first encounter...The first guy I actually had sex with, SIGNIFICANTLY shaped how I see myself and my relationship to sex. I don't know if I should tell the story... It was a homeboy from the streets ["The streets" refer to people that one would meet at night clubs. "Homeboy from the streets" is thus a colloquial term referring to a potential casual sex partner that one met at a night club], university, and there was a familiarity. I had slept over at his res a few times, but we didn't do anything because I wasn't quite there and obviously my friends would go home and they'd be like "so what happened?" and so, eventually, when it did happen, it shaped, because 1, he had no idea that I was doing that for the first time, and I love the "University takes love out of sex" because that was my experience. This is not love, this is because we are having a good time here. And so... I think that's when I learned to acquire intimacy without vulnerability. And it has a rush that I can't explain. "Oohh we're close, but you don't get to see me like that." But it's awkward because you know me in a way that very few people will ever know me, but somehow, in my mind, I'm like "yeah no, it doesn't mean anything". So that was boy number 1. Boy number 2, I remember this was towards the end of my third year, where I was kind of working a lot on my soul and my heart and therapy was happening there and I think I kind of got a glimpse of sex with love, which terrified me, right? Because, again, it's a guy that I met in the streets. But I was doing things I would never do. I remember we were just holding hands. We were overlooking a dam. I was gone [Colloquial term for "in love"]. He was telling me the countries he's been to, the relationship with his dad. And mind you, with boy number 1 and other boys in that category, I don't care how you are feeling. Sure mjita. I think we even had breakfast together and I was eating off his plate. Trouble. Just danger. I was a gone girl, but I didn't realise it, because in my mind, I'm just like "Oh intimacy..." but the two were starting to come together. And obviously, that didn't work out. Fortunately, because I was ready to go to Cape Town with him. Thank God, God intervened because I was a gone girl [In love]. Boy number 3. I guess stage 3, is "Though I really like you, the idea of being sexual with you is not a factor. It's off the table." So I had gone from, I think I might still be in that space, I'm afraid to explore that, sex with someone whom I like, is off the table. It's off the table. And so I think a lot of that comes from boy number 1, right. I think if I had had sex with someone that I love, I wouldn't be in a place where I'm like, I like you, we connect emotionally, spiritually, but we can never connect physically because I feel like that would ruin this. (Naledi, pg. 28).

Reflecting on more lessons about sex in university, participants agreed that "University takes love out of sex". In Naledi's story (34), this was ingrained in "hookup culture" or "the streets". This refers to a culture that promotes casual sex, one-night stands, and being in non-emotional and non-committed sexual relationships.

In addition to friends who were seen as the most influential agents of sexual socialisation, Naledi (extract 34) reports that her first sexual partner "significantly" shaped how she sees

herself and her relationship with sex. She tells a story of how she related to three sexual partners, but the first sexual partner seems to have influenced how she related to all of them. The story that he told her; that intimacy does not have to be vulnerable, and that sex is separate from love, is the story that she carried into the next two sexual relationships. This is dominant narrative in university. Naledi reports on the measures that she put in place to maintain this narrative. These included rules such as not falling in love with a sexual partner, not being vulnerable, not speaking about family or sharing feelings and no holding of hands. All of this was viewed as “dangerous” because it would merge intimacy and vulnerability, thus opening space to merge love and sex.

This narrative protected the participants from emotional vulnerability, which could lead to exploitation. Naledi explains this saying “we’re close, but you don’t get to see me like that”. This university narrative thus seems to be protecting the participants from “being seen”. “It’s awkward because you know me in a way that very few people will ever know me, but somehow, in my mind, I’m like ‘yeah no, it doesn’t mean anything’” she continues. This is interesting because Naledi seems to be holding two positions here. On one hand, she is participating in the culture but also sees it as “awkward” which suggests that she might not be fully convinced by the dominant narrative. She later speaks of a time where she went to therapy, which is associated with emotional health. After therapy, Naledi reports getting a glimpse of sex with love and how this terrified her. This could be because if she explored this sex with love, she could fall in love with her partner, which in this context is referred to as being a “gone girl”. This could be because of the vulnerability that comes with being in love. One might find themselves “gone”, disappeared into the other, or completely controlled by being in love that they are “gone” from themselves and acting in ways that are outside of their control. This is not encouraged in this context which is focused on education, preparing for a professional career and financial independence later on. The dominant narrative is that “falling in love is dangerous”. Liberal university sex is without emotional attachment, which is contrary to the “conservative” story.

4.3.3. Prescriptive liberal culture story

35. ...but once you’re in the work environment, or your career people, it’s just “No, what are you doing?” And you’ll have people telling you these stories... And then again, especially with... We have visiting lecturers, so this one that we were having drinks with, and it just so came up on the table that okay... Well... whatever. And then he was on some “Do you know that if you get on the kind of work that I’m in, do you know how hard it is to keep a marriage? You need to be having sex, and not only sex with your partner, but sex with other people too, because you are on these missions, you’re in different places.” (Andani, pg. 23)

Although this university liberal culture allowed for the exploration of one's sexuality, the participants reported that there was a prescribed way of doing this, which problematized certain choices, such as being celibate or conservative. Such behaviour was believed to be incongruent with the intellectual space and somewhat "constricted". To be liberated, according to this culture, is to always pursue desire. The conversation between Andani and her lecturers (in extract 35) brings an interesting dynamic. "Career people" and lecturers are the "authority figures" in this new liberal university space. They are usually influential to students, as the more knowledgeable people that they learn from. These intellectuals are particularly seen as more "knowledgeable" than the "authority figures" in the "conservative" story, so what they have to say could be seen as more trustworthy and not as open to negotiation as the previous stories from "conservative" authority figures. In this story, intellectuals seem to have "given" participants a sense of freedom with the "liberal" language, but there seems to be policing on what this looks like practically.

36. ... a lot of my friends especially in first, second year, were on some bisexual, bicurious type of vibe. And they were on some Katy Perry's song "I kissed a girl and I liked it". So, I was having a conversation with someone, and he was like "How would you know if you like girls if you've never been with a girl before?" I thought about it was because in our undergrad, one of our...girls in class had a crush on me ...but I always felt awkward cause I'd be like... I don't know how to interact with you because I don't want to be problematic, I don't want to tell you "no". Cause I'm really not attracted to you, but at the same time, if I say "no" you might take it the wrong way and call me homophobic. So, I didn't know, and I kinda felt pressured as well, to like her. And I tried, I just couldn't. (Nelly, pg. 30)

In this extract (36) Nelly tells a story about how a girl in class was romantically interested in her and how she felt pressured to try and be with her. This was so that she would not be labelled as "problematic". She was taught, in university, that sexuality is on a sliding scale, and that her current understanding of her sexuality was due to religious teachings. She believed that if sexuality was on a sliding scale, to not want to explore same-sex relationships could be interpreted as denying this claim and that would be considered "homophobic". This showed evidence of policing, in this liberal space, which censored people who said or did anything that was perceived to be heterosexist. There are tensions in this space. It is heteronormative in experiential spaces, but also critical of toxic masculinities, patriarchy, and heterosexuality in academic and intellectual spaces.

4.4. Reauthoring story

I have called the final theme of this story the "reauthoring" phase. This seems to tie everything together, with the young women doing the work of trying to take back their stories

and now become the authors of their sexuality. They carefully consider everything that they have learned up to this point and try to decide what they choose to take forward. These young women set up a vision of the story they would like to narrate about their sexuality in the future and they keep working to build this. This story has statements like “work in progress” or “freeing myself” and “unpacking”. These speak to a process of carefully considering all the little stories, to try and decide what the rest of the story should look like. Like any process of unpacking and freeing oneself, this process seems hard, as these women sit with all the tensions created by the messages before this, the messages that are still to come and personal experience (good and bad).

37. So, I started by saying that I think my sexuality is a work in progress. And I think that when you spoke about how you are getting to a point where you're deciding for yourself ukuthi [translation: to say] what does this look like, I think I'm like “Yes, that's true” because it becomes a journey of “Am I conservative in this area? Am I liberal here, and what does that look like?” (Sethu, pg. 32).

Sethu describes this “work in progress” and “journey” to indicate the life-long process of sexual socialization. It seems that one never truly arrives at a destination point. This remains a process of learning and unlearning. In the extract (37), Sethu also questions where she is conservative, and where she is not. This speaks to the complexities and variations even in the “conservative” or “liberal” stories. She decides to continue the journey to write a story that is comfortable for her, permitting herself to hold both the position of being conservative and being liberal.

38. Now I'm at my, I call this the pleasure stage. Not because of anything particular, but I think it's because I've really freed myself from a lot of... like... be it the church, be it whatever. I'm at the place where now, my sex life is for me, I don't (I'm sorry, I know we are all church people) I don't like care anymore who says what, or who. I don't care who's going to say what about me. It's really me centered, very me. The reason I also call it the pleasure stage is because I find a lot of the conversations now, I engage in, are very much around pleasure. This is what pleasure looks like, this is what. Even during lockdown, a lot of the people at res, when they talk about sex, it's about pleasure, go there, like do this, do this. The conversations are a little more like “okay, this is normal, this thing is good. People really enjoy it. It's really good to enjoy it.” (Andani, pg. 14)

Andani apologized to the group, saying “I am sorry, I know we are church people” (38) while she was talking about “freeing” herself and choosing to call this phase of her sex life “the pleasure stage”. This was interesting, as it showed the uncomfortable process of trying to take back your story when it seems to have already been written in a particular way. The story that was written for Andani, did not include personal “pleasure” or “enjoyment” in sex. Choosing to add that part almost sounded like she was betraying some of the group members and probably the people (mostly authority figures like parents and pastors) who had taught her about sex to this point. It was “freeing”, but it still came with a level of discomfort that she

had to apologize for. These women continue to do this work of “internalizing” the different voices to be able to find one’s own appropriations and responses.

39. **For me, sex and affirmation go together. This is why, shame, when I decided to do the Jesus thing, I knew. It was one of the first things that I knew because I associate sex and affirmation together (and affirmation is love?) everything, actually, in terms of from a man. I knew I couldn’t have casual sex. Also, I wanted the... Sex was safer in marriage.** (Nelly, pg. 36)
40. **Sex. I think even now, it’s one of those things that I’m not intentional about talking about. Unless I have to. Also, I’d prefer reading about it, than talking about it. And then creating scenarios about it, and if I’m curious, I’ll go ask my friends. So yeah, I guess that’s me and sex talks.** (Mpho, pg. 16)

There is also space in this part of the story, for people who are uncomfortable talking about sex, people who would rather use books or other ways to learn about sex, people who don’t find it important to (extract 40) and people who “decided to do the Jesus thing” and become celibate, even after having tried to participate in the hypersexualised university culture (extract 39).

41. **So, there are all these messages that I am receiving, but what do I want to construct and hold on to? ...I’ve confronted... I guess the scriptures and my own experience, what I would want, ideally, sex to be for me?** (Naledi, pg. 22-23).

This extract from Naledi (41) sums up this phase well. She reports that after hearing all the stories and participating in different cultural contexts, she begins to question what sex means to her. This is an empowered story. The focus group discussion and storytelling were also part of this reauthoring. This is because the stories were told against what had happened before, and now represented the lessons that were learned, and the transitions made with retrospective knowledge. This reauthoring is also shaped as a counter-narrative in this university context research discussion.

4.5. Conclusion

This thematic narrative analysis chapter tells the participants’ stories of sexual socialisation over time. These socialisation stories began when the participants were young girls (the earliest memory is from grade 2) and is still being written, past this current young adult stage. Four major stories emerged and were analysed: the story of perceived innocent oblivion, the mixed messages story, the “liberal” story, and the reauthoring story, which has allowed the participants to work through all the different messages, from the different voices, in different cultural contexts and to continue to author the rest of the story. These stories of socialisation, the contribution made by the reflective nature of young adult participant stories, and the role

played by different cultures in the stories will be further explored in the discussion chapter that follows.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

Using a narrative theoretical framework, through MW, this qualitative research study sought to investigate how black young adult women – who were university students – experienced forms of sexual socialisation, through various communications in South African cultural contexts. The findings were complex and layered, with participants telling stories of trying to navigate contradictory messages from various agents of sexual socialisation, such as parents, teachers, pastors, friends, partners, media, the heteronormative cultural context that influences most of these messages, and the “liberal” university context. In this discussion chapter, I return to the title of this thesis *Sexual socialisation: young adult women storying how sexual activities were discussed in South African cultural contexts* to talk about these three concepts: sexual socialisation, young adult women narratives about sexual activity discussions and cultural narratives.

5.2. Sexual socialisation narratives

The findings of this study demonstrate that the sexual socialisation process is an ongoing story, with different role players who brought about complicated feelings from the participants. Participants told their sexual socialisation stories, beginning at the stage of perceived innocent oblivion, to mixed messages about sex and sexuality, liberal university messages, to the current reauthoring stage of trying to put together all the different messages, to find and tell one self-authored story of their sexuality.

5.2.1. Sexual socialisation as an ongoing process

In the “Public health research in South Africa” section of the literature review, this paper explored how public health research identified young adolescents as “at-risk” of epidemics such as HIV, unwanted pregnancy, and coercive sexual practices (Bastien et al., 2011; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; 2005) causing public health interventions to address such challenges, to be tailored towards the youth (Wilbraham, 2009). Some of the reasons for this approach included: (1) the argument that early adolescents tend to act according to risky peer-defined sexual norms due to their need to belong to a group (Selikow et al., 2009) and (2) the assertion that this is a crucial stage of sexual identity formation (Selikow et al., 2009). Even

traditional cultural practices of sexual socialisation such as rites of passages target this stage after a young woman has their first menstruation (Delius & Glaser, 2002).

The findings of this study, however, demonstrate that sexual socialisation could be a life-long journey and that it does not begin or end during puberty. In the “innocent oblivion” story in the analysis chapter above, there were participant stories of knowing and talking about sex and sexuality from as early as grades two and three (ages between 7 and 10 years). These are the stories that begin the sexual socialisation journey. By the time early adolescents are targeted for socialising conversations, or to have “the talk” they have already been talking about sex among themselves or have some ideas about what sex is from “somewhere” (these different sources will be explored later in this chapter). An example is a participant who in her first memory of sexual conversations remembers being taught by peers that sex was “dirty activities”. This supports the argument by Sharkshall et al., (2007) about early experiences such as parental response to infant masturbation and early communication about how to appropriately interact with other people influencing understanding of sexuality.

In addition to early memories of sexual socialising conversations demonstrating that this sexual socialisation journey starts early, arguments about the life life-long journey of sexual socialisation are further supported by stories about *pivotal* sexual socialising events throughout primary and high school and more messages and events in university that seemed to change everything. Furthermore, these university postgraduate student participants, who have already “gone through the system” reported that there were still ideas they were learning and unlearning when it came to their sexuality. This suggests that the story is not over yet, there is still an opportunity for resocialisation and that perhaps there is no *real* “sexualised individual” destination that the participants will arrive at. Perhaps even the parents and teachers, who are positioned as more “knowledgeable” or “better equipped” to talk to young people about sex, by public health research (cf. Wilbraham, 2009) are still learning and unlearning. It is likely that every new event, such as choosing to have or not have a baby, finding a new sexual partner or losing one, turning older, and menopausal experiences, will teach them something slightly new about sex and sexuality. Arguments for resocialisation were also found in other research studies with university student participants (e.g., Shefer & Strebel., 2001).

5.2.2. Agents of sexual socialisation

One of the contributions of this research study is that instead of focusing on the effects of communication from *particular* sexual socialising agents, it takes a narrative approach, which tries to weave together all the messages from different sources, to explore how individual participants experience and draw from all of them to make one, reflexive story. This produced a complicated story of the collision of different contradictory messages, from many voices, which brought about a variety of complicated feelings of discomfort, confusion, shame, and sometimes validation, excitement, desire, and nurture.

In the early memories of sexual socialising conversations, the dominant narrative came from “authority figures”. These were parents and other caregivers such as aunts, pastors, and teachers at school. Participants described messages from these agents of sexual socialisation as “conservative”. These agents were associated with “not talking about sex” and messages that encouraged abstinence, or emphasised risk and the negative consequences of sex, such as HIV, pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. This has been widely highlighted in the literature on parental communication about sex (e.g., Gumede et al., 2017; Bastien et al., 2011) and studies on Life Orientation sexuality education (e.g., Kruger, Shefer & Oakes, 2015; Shefer et al., 2015).

These messages about the dangers and negative consequences of sex, and participant stories about being punished for talking and engaging in sex, taught the participants that sexual desire and active participation in sex is something to be ashamed of. This is a narrative that they also actively perpetuated, calling the sexually active girls in high school “busy girls” while the non-sexually active girls who projected sex into marriage and university were the good “academically inclined” girls. This coheres with Mayeza and Vincent’s (2019) argument of LO sexuality education being grounded in trying to mould good and healthy girls. Even in the university context, where these women were now “empowered”, they still sometimes apologised for acting out of this “good girl” image by owning their sexual desire and wanting pleasure, showing the difficulty in pushing against the dominant narrative. Interestingly, in the university stories, some of the participants seemed to have also been ashamed of rejecting some of the messages from the university authority figures, such as lecturers, and instead, wanting to be celibate and waiting until marriage to enjoy sex. This was not seen as an “empowered” story in this university context.

Other interesting, seemingly highly influential agents of socialisation were the first sexual partners. Whether it was a participant who recalled their first sexual encounter as violent, another who recalled an encounter that taught her that sex and love do not go together, or another who recalled their first sexual encounter as “affirming”, participants agreed that these encounters largely shaped how they understood sex and their sexuality. This was not as highlighted in the literature that was reviewed, apart from studies such as those conducted by Harling et al. (2018) who found that sources of social support change over time, and that as people grow older, partners might influence sexual behaviour more than “authority figures” and Mbotho et al. (2013) whose participants who were trying to remain celibate reported being “tempted” by their partners who did not share the same values and wanted to have sex.

Lastly, friends (in different contexts) were also reported as important agents of socialisation. From a young age, when they shared the little that they knew about sex, the friends in high school who formed in and out groups of people who were having sex versus those who were not, to adult friends who openly speak about sexual desire, friends were a positive part of the story and were described as “nurturing”. Interestingly, peer influence has often been seen as negative (e.g., Gumede et al., 2017; Selikow et al., 2009; Thobejana, 2015) or needing scaffolding by parents, as argued by Wilbraham (2009). This is different from the narrative told by these young adult participants, who described friends as more open (in comparison to authority figures and parents) more nurturing (as opposed to shaming and punitive), able to spot and warn against danger (e.g., risky sexual practice) and able give constructive sexual advice. Friends who were young men (although perpetuating heteronormative stereotypes at times) also played an interesting role in skills sharing, which was a welcomed counter-narrative to the authority figure’s way of mainly sharing abstract theoretical sexual knowledge about sex, as argued by Shefer and Ngabaza (2015). There were, however, no stories about these young women giving their men-friends sex advice about what women want. This could be a result of heteronormative stereotypes about sex being for the man and him not needing to learn from women or the pleasure of the woman not being a priority in the sexual experience.

Finally, friends also consumed media together and could have conversations that were critical of the representation of female sexuality in the media they consumed or work together to reject the standards of beauty that were set up for them (such as being ‘light-skinned’ with a ‘flat stomach’). This demonstrates the social consumption of media (Strelitz, 2004) and how media messages are filtered through the real-life experience of culture, to make sense of them

(Nuttall, 2003; Strelitz, 2004). The participants of the study also reported scrutinising and filtering through (with friends) messages from parents and teachers in the past, and messages from current intellectual authority figures and feminist narratives. This demonstrates how young people can find and associate with peers that share their worldview, and this becomes their source of support and the people they are largely influenced by, as seen in Mbotho et al. (2013). This is an empowered story.

5.3. Young adult women narratives

Another major contribution of this research study is enabled by the methodology that was used. A narrative study such as this one, investigating young adult women narratives, allowed participants to reflect on the *entirety* of their sexual socialisation, rather than *aspects* of the journey, such as parental communication or communication from LO, as mentioned above.

This kind of narrative study resulted in the collection of personal narratives that were more complex and nuanced, while also demonstrating how sex and sexuality are negotiated in the tension of contradictory messages from different sources (as explored above) in different cultural contexts (which will be explored in the next section of this chapter) and despite intergenerational “silences” (cf. Delius & Glaser, 2002) and sex and danger heteronormative messages (cf. Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Shefer & Ngabaza, 2015). This study allowed the emergence of counter-narratives, through stories of empowerment, where participants reported intentionally surrounding themselves with peers who encourage them to “reauthor” their sexuality narratives. The findings of this study were empowered stories, that demonstrated “what worked” rather than stories of vulnerable participants in risk-saturated areas.

MW methodology (Willig, 2001) was also useful because it allowed these young adult participants to use where they are in their sexual socialisation journey, and the knowledge they have acquired to this point, to reflect on how their sexual identities were constructed in various cultural contexts. This allowed the participants to see gaps in their knowledge while giving them the space to safely reflect on how existing patriarchal and heteronormative structures may have shaped their sexuality and their participation in this. Hence MW being a form of consciousness-raising for the participants (Willig, 2001).

5.4. Cultural narratives

The findings of this study demonstrated two major ideas about culture, that will be explored here: Multiple ways of conceptualising culture, and culture as dynamic and hybrid.

5.4.1. *Multiple ways of conceptualising culture*

In the study, participants understood and used the concept of “culture” in different ways, to express different ideas or to “do” different things. When asked about “cultural experiences” *all* the participants made sure to distance themselves from traditional African “cultural practices” by using defensive statements like “my family is not traditional at all” (p. 19-26) before proceeding to tell “cultural narratives”. This shows an understanding of culture as negative stereotypes of “exotic” practices, an understanding that Green et al. (2009) have criticised public health research for prioritising when thinking about African cultures. So, these empowered and educated university participants distance themselves from such cultural practices, before proceeding to talk about them (quite critically) in stories like extract 17, where the practice of *ukhupha izothe* is discussed in the analysis chapter above. This distancing from the “traditional culture” story is similar to the story in the Wilbraham (2008) study, where Western expert-mothering techniques were seen by black middle-class mothers as “progressive” and “enlightened”.

Secondly, culture referred to taken-for-granted values and practices shared by groups of people (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Within this definition, participants used “culture” to criticise the dominant narrative, about how to perform their belonging to these groups. For example, participants referred to “black culture” in relation to (implied, dominant) “white culture”. This was not necessarily assuming that “black culture” was homogenous (cf. Idang, 2015; Nwoye, 2017) but to assert a resistant counter-narrative (Squire, et al., 2014). So, participants told stories about “black culture” valuing education and financial independence before getting married, for example, which was contrary to what they saw their race-white friends doing. They told stories about “liberal culture” or “university culture” which were presented as a counter-narrative to the dominant “conservative culture”; and they also told stories about how “fitness culture” was taking over as the dominant media narrative, which problematised ordinary bodies and set unrealistic standards about what “healthy” and “sexy” looks like. This “fitness culture” story was told to resist that narrative.

5.4.2. Culture as dynamic and hybrid

The findings of the study demonstrated that cultural conversations about sex and sexuality could shift over time and that there were variations in the cultural contexts. For example, participants drew distinctions between the “conservative culture” at home and in church – which taught them that sex was dangerous – and the “liberal university culture” which was seen as more enlightened and permissive, and taught them that sex was good and to be experimented with. The thematic narrative analysis that was conducted, however, suggests that this distinction is not as clear. Some participants noted that as they grew older, the “sex is dangerous” and “do not even touch boys” narrative that was prevalent in the “conservative culture” began to shift, with stories of authority figures who were described as more “open”, asking about partners, and when these young women were going to have babies (now seeing them as sexual beings, rather than innocent). This feature of culture as dynamic is in line with Ratele’s (2017) view of African cultures as complex, dynamic, and hybrid. This was also seen in Green et al. (2009) study, where participants asserted that African cultures were not rigid, and could adapt and evolve due to changing health needs. Participants in this study proceeded to tell stories of “conservative” authority figures saying “revolting and vulgar things” about sex, showing aspects of hypersexuality, even in this cultural context. This demonstrates variations within the “conservative culture”.

The “liberal culture” was as complex. At first, this cultural context is presented as empowering because it “gave” these participants language for their past experiences, encouraged them to experiment with their sexuality as they saw fit, and reminded them how to use their voices and take control of their sexuality. Over time, however, participants criticise the so-called liberal culture for only prioritising certain voices (those that want to experiment with sex outside of the context of relationships and love) and labelling as “not empowered” women who chose to be celibate, who want to fall in love or those who do not want to experiment with non-heterosexual activities. This liberal culture can thus also have elements of policing. Again, this shows that this culture is not homogenous. This is also in line with Ratele’s (2017) view of African “cultures”. Even in this “liberal” university culture, which is known as a place to experiment with sex (Mbotho et al., 2013), the findings of this study showed that there were sub-cultures that had people who believed that sex was sacred and for marriage. These are counter-narratives that demonstrate that there are variations in this culture as well.

Overall, the sexuality of the participants seems to have been impacted, on some level, by *all* these cultural messages. Their stories have aspects of loveLife messages, “conservative” messages, messages from the patriarchal culture, heteronormative messages, feminist messages from university, “liberal” messages and media messages that can be perceived as “good” or “bad” depending on the context and the consumer. All of these “cultures” operate simultaneously, and the participants continue to do the work of weighing up these contradictions and collisions, to keep writing a story that is comfortable for them.

5.5. Conclusion

In this discussion chapter, I referred to the literature that was reviewed, to interpret the findings of this study, and to highlight the contributions of this research. The major findings were that sexuality is a life-long process of socialisation, taking place in different cultural contexts. Through different agents of socialisation, girls hear different messages which may agree, disagree, or even change over time. As they grew up, the young girls (now young adult women participants) were able to work through these different messages, while also taking responsibility for the story that they continue to write. Being exposed to different messages – in different cultural contexts – seems to have produced awareness, which can be healthy and empowering. Perhaps the different voices were all needed because they brought something unique to the story. So, the risk warnings from authority figures (for example) were as important as the skills sharing from friends, and the so-called liberal messages from university. Perhaps the challenge is not entirely “intergenerational silence” around the issues of sex and sexuality, but that there are too many messages which in different contexts, tend to collide and contradict. This means that parents are not “silent”. Rather, they are not talking about sex in a particular way, which is seen as “appropriate” in today’s context, by expert-mothering techniques derived from western-based psychological theories and nuclear-family ideologies in better resourced contexts (Wilbraham, 2009). Perhaps what young people need are skills to navigate these collisions. This point about context and skills to navigate collisions will be picked up in the conclusion chapter that follows.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Summary

The story of this research study began in 2018, with a staff-led honours group research project, which investigated young women's stories of communication with their mothers (or maternal caregivers) on a variety of topics, including sex and sexuality, which was my part of the group project (Ludidi, 2018). Due to ethical reasons – better explained in chapter one – researcher/participants' cultural, racial, or sexual identities could not be reported, and “cultural” contexts, in which sexual socialising conversations occur, could not be explored.

So, this current study investigates these “cultural” stories of communication about sex and sexuality and tried to widen the lens on mother-daughter communication, by exploring how black, young adult university participants experienced forms of sexual socialisation through various communications, in South African cultural contexts. Findings demonstrated that sexual socialisation was a life-long process, with different socialising conversations, in different cultural contexts and from different socialising agents, which included parents, teachers at school, peers and media.

6.2. Limitations

The friend participants of this study produced rich material of complex stories of socialisation, and they were able to openly discuss contradictions and tensions between and within their cultural narratives, and how they worked through them, and reauthor their stories. This sampling strategy made this research personal, because it is my story that is being analysed, together with my friends' stories. Although this was intentional and beneficial in different ways, and for the trust that facilitated this rich material, it could have been interesting to see how these stories would have slightly differed (or not) if the researcher was not familiar with the participants, and if the participants were not acquainted with each other.

On the other hand, it would have also been interesting to see how the stories would have shifted, had all the MW methodology guidelines been followed. Meaning, if there was an opportunity to form a MW group of researcher-participants who would work collectively on the project to completion (group analysis, rewriting the stories together and joint publication). This was addressed in the discussion part of the focus group, where the group participants

had the opportunity to comment on each other's narratives and jointly discuss the themes that were emerging.

6.3. Contributions

In response to the “Global-North” or “western” psychological narrative of how sex “should” be spoken about, this research tried to add to the culturally sensitive voice in the research on sexual socialisation and embrace the various cultural practices of communication about sex and sexuality. The findings of the research also demonstrated that African cultures were not limited to “exotic” sexual practices, and that these cultures were complex, dynamic and hybrid, simultaneously influencing sexual socialisation.

The findings demonstrated that even though the participants did not receive “right” messages from “right” agents of socialisation, with exposure to different cultural contexts and messages, there is opportunity for resocialisation. The findings also demonstrated that there was no real “perfect” message from a “right” source either, as there were variations of messages which were sometimes contradictory. Even *within* cultural contexts, there were variations of messages which could be understood as both “good” and questionable.

Although these participants do not represent *all* black voices in South Africa, this sample was chosen to add to the authentic voice of black women, in research about black sexualities in South Africa, and to present a counter-narrative to the research with young adolescent girls in risk-saturated areas. This research attempted to highlight stories of empowerment by highlighting “what worked” rather than the gaps in sexual socialisation. These gaps were not concealed, but the focus was how participants navigated their sexuality, despite the gaps, and how they are able to reauthor their narratives.

On a more personal level, this research study allowed my friends and me to have a closer look at our own sexual socialisation journeys, without only focusing on the problematic teachings that we were exposed to in some contexts. This allowed us to talk about our sexualities on a level beyond the abstract intellectual understanding that we usually hide behind, in the university context of ideas. I was able to identify growth areas in my own thinking about the topic of sex and sexuality, and confront, in a safe space, my fears and insecurity. As a collective, my friends and I were also able to celebrate the different ways in which we have grown and continue to grow as these sexual socialisation stories continue to change.

6.4. Recommendations

Due to the findings that sexuality is an ongoing process of socialisation, interventions that aim to reduce GBV and other epidemics such as AIDS and unsupportable pregnancy in South Africa could widen their scope and target younger children, and adults, past puberty. Young adolescents, for example, have been targeted with interventions that teach on condom use and sexually transmitted infections, to protect them from the *physical* dangers that could result from unsafe sex. Young adults, on the other hand, seem to have the tools that protect from these physical dangers, but desperately looked for tools to protect them from *emotional* dangers of sex, such as being vulnerable to the point of losing themselves, or emotional exploitation. In the university stories, participants seemed to fear relationships (even when they wanted them) because of the potential emotional danger; and of thus losing their committed focus on their educational preparation for professional careers that meant so much to them personally and to their families. This suggests that there could be a need for ongoing relationship skills.

Future research can investigate these relationship skills, and the cultural contexts (such as university) that tell this narrative of sexual relationships being emotionally unsafe. In the university context, stories emphasised the biological aspects of sex, such as desire, and encounters that made student participants question how to perform their sexuality as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, for example, but not enough on how to negotiate the desired safety (mostly emotional) in sexual relationships. So, for example, how to ask for a more committed intimate relationship, when one desires this; how to negotiate autonomy and solitary time in a relationship; how to work through heartbreak, or fall in love; how to work through sexual encounters which might be awkward, embarrassing, funny or unsatisfactory; how to negotiate different styles of sexual or romantic relationships; or even how to negotiate getting naked in front of one another and what pleasure looks and feels like, for oneself and the other specific person. Relationship skills could also be useful for younger adolescents, who find it hard to negotiate consent and condom use in their sexual relationships. Furthermore, research could also investigate the skills that are needed to successfully navigate the many contradictory messages of sexual socialisation.

Further research might also include participants who had sexual experiences that were not heterosexual. This was a short story in this research. Non-heterosexual sexual experiences would be a way to complexify and diversify the heterosexual and binary gender stories. This

could include participants who do not identify as heterosexual, or participants who had non-heterosexual sexual experiences that influenced how they relate to their sexuality, even though identifying as heterosexual.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



Human Ethics subcommittee
Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee
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NHREC Registration no.: 1261-2012-042

21/08/2020

Zizipho LUDIDI

Email: g1514000@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2020-1351-3591

Dear Professor Lindy Wilbraham

Title: Sexual socialization: Young adult women storying how sexual activities were discussed in South African cultural contexts

Principal Investigator: Professor Lindy Wilbraham

Collaborators: Miss Zizipho Ludidi, Professor Catriona Macleod

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC). Your Approval number is: 2020-1351-3591

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloging number allocated.

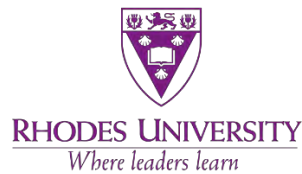
Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb

Chair: Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee, RU-HEC

cc: Mr. Siyanda Mancele - Ethics Coordinator

Appendix B: Invitation to participate



To Whom it may concern

Re: Invitation to participate in a research project on communication about sexual activities in South African cultural contexts

I am a second year Masters in Counselling Psychology student, carrying out a research project (under the supervision of Professor Lindy Wilbraham and co-supervisor Professor Catriona Macleod) on the stories of communication about sex, told by young adult women from South African cultural contexts. This involves how we talk about sex “in my culture” and who these conversations happen with, as an attempt to sexually socialise women. This focuses on ordinary kinds of communication and screens out instances of trauma or psychopathology.

A narrative (qualitative) methodology will be used, where I will gather together a group of young adult women, who are my friends, to participate in a focus group discussion where we share these stories of communication. This discussion will be led by the following thematic questions and later analysed using narrative thematic analysis:

1. *Where did you first hear about sex?*
2. *What has been your experience of communication about sexual activities?*
3. *How are sexual activities discussed in your culture?*
4. *What would you say shaped your sexuality?*
5. *What other cultural practices about sex and sexuality have you been exposed to?*

This research offers you an opportunity to remember and reflect on your own experiences of communication about sex, while also gaining qualitative research experience and adding young adult women’s voices to the current research on the sexual socialisation of women.

I am hereby writing to invite you to be part of this focus group discussion. Participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research at any point, should you wish to do so. I will be doing individual check-ins with you after the focus group discussion, to see if you are comfortable with what was discussed, to give you the opportunity to

withdraw from the study and to see if you would like a referral to the counselling centre. The 2-hour long once-off focus group will take place in a secluded quiet place to respect our privacy, and all identifying information that comes up during the focus group will not be shared with anyone, ensuring that confidentiality is maintained. Our group discussion will be recorded for me to transcribe at a later stage and when this is done, the audio recording will be destroyed, and the transcription (with pseudonyms) will be kept in a password protected folder for research purposes. This project is an extension of Professor Wilbraham's research on Mother and Daughter communication, so the data that comes up may be used in her further research.

It is worth noting, that to keep in line with the Interpretivist research paradigm, the interpretations that will be made will be **my own** interpretations. When I have completed the thesis, I will provide the "themes and discussion" chapter for you and will also grant you access to the thesis, should you want this.

I hope that you will consider taking part in the research. Feel free to contact me with any questions at all, and definitely contact me if you are interested.

Warm Regards

Researcher:

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Appendix C: Individual Consent form



PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION (Participant)

Project Title: Sexual socialisation: Young adult women storying how sexual activities were discussed in South African cultural contexts

Zizipho Ludidi from the Department of Psychology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to explore how sexual activities were discussed in my cultural context.
2. The Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/ may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing to the current research on sexual socialization by adding the voice of young adult women's cultural narratives to the conversation while also gaining qualitative research experience.
4. I will participate in the project by sharing stories of how sexual activities were talked about in my cultural context in a focus group discussion.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
7. There may be risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that

- a. The following risks are associated with my participation: Talking about sex is an intimate and sensitive topic that can be potentially triggering.
 - b. The following steps have been taken to prevent the risks: I will have the discussion questions before the focus group discussion so that I can be prepared. The researcher will also have a check-in with me to check if I do not need to be referred to the counselling centre and to offer feedback after the focus group discussion.
8. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of a thesis. This research is an extension of a staff project, so Professor Lindy Wilbraham may use the data from this project in further research. The data from this research will also be filed in the CSSR repository folder for research use. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.
 9. I will receive feedback regarding the results obtained during the study will be provided to me through informal feedback during individual “check-ins” that the researcher will have after the focus group discussion, a themes and discussions report, and access to the thesis if I wish to see it.
 10. The researcher requests a voice recording for the focus group discussion
 11. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by Zizipho Ludidi (email g15L4000@campus.ru.ac.za, office phone: 0466037071).
 12. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
 13. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document’s contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....
Participants signature

.....
Witness

.....
Date

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics

Ethics Coordinator: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za

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Appendix D: Group Consent form



GROUP INFORMED CONSENT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

Project Title: Sexual socialisation: Young adult women storying how sexual activities were discussed in South African cultural contexts

Zizipho Ludidi from the Department of Psychology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the focus group discussion for the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of this focus group and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. I will be a member of a focus group discussion where we share stories about our experiences of communication about sexual activities. This discussion will be facilitated by Zizipho, who will be the researcher and the one of the participants.
2. I understand that this research is non-therapeutic and focuses on ordinary stories of communication about sexual activities in my cultural context and how this has shaped me as a young woman. The information about the study has made it clear that students with explicitly abusive or pathological stories of communication about sexual activities are discouraged from participating in the research project, because it is a credit-bearing academic requirement for a Master's degree and cannot provide a specialist, supportive therapeutic context to hear, work through or contain in severely troubled and complex and painful feelings associated with communication about sexual activities.
3. My participation means being able to share and discuss my experience of communication about sex in my cultural context with the rest of the focus group members and the researcher. I will share what is comfortable for me to share and withhold anything that I do not want to share.
4. The group discussion will be conducted in a way that is respectful towards group members' experiences, feelings and contributions. I agree to abide by respectful communication with focus group members.
5. If I am feeling concerned, conflicted, distressed or embarrassed by having to tell stories of communication about sexual activities of offended or hurt by reflections during the focus group discussion or distressed when thinking about these issues, I agree to mention these issues explicitly to the researcher. Zizipho will discuss with me various remedial measures which may include withdrawing from the research and/or contacting the Rhodes University Counselling Centre for further therapeutic

support. I agree to monitor how I am feeling (psychologically) during this focus group discussion and to take proactive responsibility for my well-being.

6. The research touches on sensitive material and this can bring up complicated emotions. I understand that this may produce feelings of vulnerability. I agree to uphold confidentiality about other participant's stories, and that what is talked about in the focus group discussion, and I trust that my fellow focus group members will display similar confidentiality about the experiences and opinions that I share with them. Confidentiality means that we do not talk about each other's experiences and contributions to the group discussion outside of the focus group.
7. The focus group guidelines have been explained to me. The format is as follows: I will be given paper and asked to write a short story about the first memory of talking to someone about sex, the context of this conversation, the people I interacted with and what I was feeling at the time. I will read this story to the group and they will be asked to comment on my story and I will do the same when they read their stories. This will happen for all thematic questions that were shared with me in the invitation to participate letter.
8. I consent (in writing, by my signature) to the recording of the group discussion by Zizipho, on a digital voice recording device (e.g. smartphones). I understand that this discussion will be transcribed and Pseudonyms will be used to consider ethical considerations around anonymity for research participants beyond the focus group.
9. Extracts from these recordings will be subject to similar conditions of anonymity; and must be cited as "quotes", acknowledging the different participant's contributions and Ideas.
10. This is an extension of Professor Wilbraham's research on mother-daughter communication about sex and relationships which will run for several subsequent years to gather further and enough material for publication. Thus, I consent to allow my anonymised stories to be reused in a broader research study.
11. I consent to the anonymised transcription of the focus group discussion to be kept safely by the researcher and her supervisors (Professor Lindy Wilbraham and Professor Catriona Macleod) for at least five years.

I, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the focus group discussion.

.....
Participants signature

.....
Witness

.....
Date

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