



Intergenerational constructions of black feminine identity: Mother-daughter narratives

By

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Declaration

I, Pfarelo Brandy Matsila, declare that this thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation is my own work. Where secondary material was used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the university's requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the university policy and implications in this regard.

Signature.....

Date.....



10 July 2019

Dear Miss PB Matsila

Project Title: Intergenerational constructions of Black feminine identity: Mother-daughter narratives
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Degree: Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 10 July 2019. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

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Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
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Dedication

To my late grandmothers, Thinavhuyo Elisah Matsila and Tshinakaho Elisah Mukosi; my loving warrior mother, Rabelani Sylvia Nekuvule-Mukosi; and my amazing ‘Gogomusikavhathu’, Ndivhudzannyi Sanah Mufunwaini-Nekuvule. Thank you for your prayers and for being the foundation on which I humbly stand.

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Acknowledgment of support in my research journey

This research journey has been one of the most painful, humbling and growth-filled experiences of my life, one I could not have completed without God and the love, support and encouragement of my family, friends, my supervisor and the center of excellence in Human development.

Dr R J Chadwick, you guided, stretched and constructively pushed me beyond my own perceived capabilities. Your words of encouragement challenged me to think critically, analyse in depth and find my own voice in academia.

Mom, and Mani Pfuluwani Nekuvule, thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement. My dear friend, Tina Damane, thank you for being my second eyes, you took time to read through my lengthy research from the proposal stage and gave constructive criticism. Aileen Mckay, words would never be enough to describe how grateful I am to have you as my mentor and tutor.

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To the DST-NRF Centre of excellence in Human development, thank you for helping a black child find her voice in academia. Your financial assistance is greatly appreciated!!!

Luke 1:45 “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!

Abstract

This study is focused on the relationship between mothers and their daughters, and the ways in which this relationship serves as a critical site from which black women (specifically from rural Venda area in Northern South Africa) construct their identities. Within the broad framework of qualitative research, this investigation employs a hybrid theoretical model rooted in black feminist epistemology incorporating standpoint feminism, feminist social constructionism, and intersectionality theory. The study draws on 18 interviews with mothers and daughters aged between 35-55 and 18-25 respectively. Using thematic narrative analysis, various themes, i.e. perceptions of femininity, intersectional nodes of femininity, and tensions between normative and counter normative constructions of femininity are explored to showcase shifts and changes in gendered narratives of femininity.

The research finds that the multiple and varied ways in which identity is constructed is a complex relational process mediated by various social factors such as class, gender and location; and are consistent with the traditional conception of women as respectful, resilient, ‘silent’, and nurturing. Furthermore, findings showed that most mothers played an active role in enforcing patriarchal ideologies of femininity, whereas most daughters actively challenged traditional conceptions of femininity to construct an empowered sense of femininity drawing from their mother’s own lived experiences. The study further illustrates that the critical triangle of the self, motherhood and social location is a messy one that demands complex and dynamic understanding. This highlighted the need to use socio-cultural and socio-economic frameworks to investigate the multi-layered, complex process of femininity construction for women in rural areas, and how mothers and daughters in interaction with each other can become agents of social change in relation to gender relations.

Key words: Femininity, Intergenerational, Black feminism, Social construction, Mother-daughter relationship, identity.

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Glossary

- Khomba -An adolescent girl or young adult
- Musevhetho- cultural initiation ceremony for girls aged between 4 -11 ¹
- Vhusha- Cultural initiation ceremony for teenagers
- Domba- Cultural initiation ceremony for both male and female adolescents and young adults
- Ukwevha- Labia minora elongation
- Tshitavha-Virginal inspection
- Vhukunda- beads (Traditional beads)
- Muvenda- A person who speaks Tshivenda and is born within the culture
- Musadzi-Woman
- Mufumakadzi-Wife
- Musidzana -Girl
- Uphasa/ Thevhula- Ancestral veneration
- Tshivenda- Language spoken by Vhavenda people
- Zwidade- Poems
- Ngano- folktales
- Mbuya Vhuhadzi- a divorcee (traditionally refers to a female divorcee)
- Makhulu- Grandparent
- Makhulu Vha Mukegulu -Grandmother
- Makhadzi- Aunt (Father's sister)
- Musanda- Chief
- Murundu/Mula-Traditional male circumcision school

¹ Age of admission varies according to context

Chapter 1: Introduction to the thesis

1.1 Constructing black femininity within the Mother-daughter relationship.

*Our heartbeats, notes each separate,
but part of the same melody.
The lyrics of our lives Intertwined,
Composed of love,
Will be sung for generations.*

‘The Mother-Daughter Song’ by Cheryl Morikawa
Mothers and Daughters: A

Poetry Celebration

The quote above is an excerpt from ‘the mother-daughter song’ and signifies the importance of the mother-daughter relationship over any other relationship, as it is a complex lifetime union that not only shapes one’s identity as a daughter or mother, but influences how one conceptualises their position and identity in society; especially because the two share a gender and the mother serves as the primary source of socialisation. As such, this relationship is often fraught with periods of conflicts stemming from “tensions between mothers’ and daughters’ sense of separate I, and perception of collective we” (Lerner Cited in Boyd, 1989:283) as their feminine identities often become enmeshed. As important as this relationship is, very little is known within the South African context about this relationship and its importance in relation to femininity construction. To address the gap in conceptual and theoretical understanding of this process, this study is a qualitative exploration of the relationship between mothers and their daughters, and the ways in which this relationship serves as a critical site in which black women (specifically from rural Venda area in the Northern South Africa) construct their identities.

Rooted within black feminist epistemology, the researcher used black standpoint feminism, intersectionality theory and feminist social constructionism theory to discuss the ways these women talk about their conceptions of femininity and their mother-daughter relationship. Through the usage of thematic narrative analysis, this research explores constructions of black femininity across generations, showcasing shifts and changes in gendered narratives; tensions between mothers and their daughters; and the conflicts between normative constructions of femininity and counter-normative constructions of femininity. The study

draws on 18 individual interviews with mothers and daughters between the ages of 35-55 and 18-25 respectively. It is to be noted that in some sections, femininity was used interchangeably with the concept of womanhood. This was rooted in the conception that while femininity is the sum of all attributes that convey (or are perceived to convey) womanhood, womanhood is defined as the state of being a woman.

In the following sections, the researcher will explicate on why the current study was necessary as well as the socio-cultural and socio-historical context of the research.

1.2 Problem statement

Being a black woman and growing up in rural South Africa poses many fundamental challenges. Black women in this part of the world must contend with typical developmental tasks such as: educational progress, reproductive tasks (childbearing and rearing), care for the sick, unpaid domestic labour, navigating a patriarchal culture that undervalues women and unequal access to resources and opportunities compared to both men and women living in urban areas of South Africa (Kehler, 2001; Meena, 1992). Rural black women are not only the poorest of the poor (i.e. socio-economically) in South African society, but they are “burdened with multiple roles concerning productive and reproductive responsibilities, and also subjugated and discriminated both in and out of their homes” (Kehler, 2001:45). In addition, their identity as women is influenced by patriarchal gender norms of what constitutes an ideal African woman, which often seriously restricts their self-expression and actions (Meena, 1992). Although it is not the main objective of this research to focus on inequality within the rural areas of South Africa, it is pertinent to note at this early stage that patriarchal ideologies, which are common in African cultures, are an important foundation for women’s identity-formation and subservient gender roles (Sathisparasad, Taylor & Dlamini, 2008; Makongodza, 2010 Matshidze, 2013).

Historically, the apartheid regime in South Africa perpetuated a racial superiority/inferiority complex through the constant definition of ‘blackness in relation to whiteness’ (Meena, 1992). This continues to be prevalent in the post-apartheid era, as ‘blackness’ often continues to be viewed in a position of aspiring or wanting to be white (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). Despite the notion that self-perceptions were and are continually being transformed in the context of liberation (i.e. post-apartheid era) (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006), the effects of South

Africa's past have had a significant impact on continued ambivalence in contemporary identity construction. For instance, although both women and men participated in the liberation of the country, "power was essentially transferred to few men who inherited the colonial administrative apparatus" (Meena, 1992:9). The administrative power aimed at re-writing black people's culture was, in reality, used to reinvent black masculinity, which was highly subjugated by white masculinity during the apartheid era (Meena, 1992). As such, the majority of current South African research on gender politics is concerned with constructions of masculinity (Ratele, 2013; Ratele, 2017; Smith, Khunou & Nathane-Taulela, 2014; Waling, 2018) or hegemonic masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012).

Nonetheless, a number of studies have contributed to understanding constructions of femininity in South Africa, however these are often situated within the context of reproductive health issues, specifically HIV/AIDS, as well as gender-based violence (Graham, 2016; Pettifor, Macphail, Anderson & Maman, 2012; Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Sanger, 2009; William, Ntini, Gibbs & Jewkes, 2019). Subsequently, these bodies of femininity studies are often 'hidden' in these larger topical areas and not addressed as a topic in its own right, whereas the construction of masculinity is often studied as a topic on its own as discussed above. Thus, there is less research focused on constructions of African or Black femininity in South Africa.

As noted by Williams (2001), the lived experiences of black women in society has remained an area relatively unexplored by formal research overall and especially in relation to African and rural South African women. Most of the literature on black femininities and mother-daughter relations to date has been produced from an African American women's perspective (Everet *et al* 2016; Fox, 1980; Cole & Zucker, 2007; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). In direct contrast to the significantly limited body of research that exists on their demographic, the reality is that the lived experiences of South African women differs widely, especially along the lines of the socio-historical factors noted above: therefore, put simply, the experiences of South African women need more attention (Mama, 1995). This is not only a theoretical concern given that the scarcity of knowledge regarding their experiences perpetuates the oppression of African women (Collins, 2000). Hence, going forwards, there is an urgent need for understanding the constructions of black feminine identities from the perspectives of South African women themselves.

A great number of studies have noted the central role mothers play in the development of their children's identity, constructions of femininity, sexual agency, perceptions of womanhood, perceptions of motherhood and cultural reproduction (Acock & Yang, 1984; Ashcraft & Belgrave, 2005; Beir *et al.*, 2000; Browde, 2010; Chaney 2011; Colaner & Rittenour, 2015; Evert alt *et al.*, 2016). However, these studies are based on daughters' testimonies of their mothers' influence on them, creating a one-sided narrative. To overcome this limitation, this study focused on both mothers' and daughters' narratives in order to create a two-way narrative which offers a clearer picture. The present study will explore how black women construct their feminine identities within the context of mother-daughter relationships. Although authors like Gqola (2017) use a feminist perspective to illuminate the importance of the mother's role in the development of their children's feminist identities by exploring other themes, for example: the beauty of feminist rage (weaving together the shift in gender discourse in South Africa's public spheres); mothering while feminist; and 'becoming my mother' (exploring themes of fear, envy, adoration and resentment in mother-daughter relationships), Gqola is not focused explicitly on intergenerational dynamics in black feminine identity construction.

Using the above as a backdrop, the following research questions were developed:

1.3 Research questions

1.3.1 General research question

- How do black women construct their identities within the context of mother-daughter relationships?

1.3.2 Specific research questions

- How do mothers and daughters speak about their identities as black women?
- How are black women's identity constructions influenced by their relationships with their mothers/daughters?
- How are black femininities constructed across generational lines?

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

1.4.1. General objective

- To examine how black women construct their feminine identities within the context of mother-daughter relationships.

1.4.2. Specific objectives

- To explore how women narrate their own identities as black women in South Africa.
- To explore women's narrations of how their mother-daughter relationship influences their identities.
- To examine generational divergences and convergences in black feminine identity constructions.
- To investigate the intersectional (i.e. raced, classed, gendered) aspects of black feminine identity constructions.

1.5 Rationale of the study

The relative lack of South African research on how femininity is enacted, negotiated, entrenched or resisted in mother-daughter relationships necessitates the present study. It is hoped that the focus on mother-daughter relationships as a key site for understanding the reproduction of gender, specifically femininity, along with its possible re-inscription along more positive and empowering lines will potentially create a new lens through which to explore constructions and reiterations of black femininity and how certain modes of femininity become normalised, or potentially resisted and reimagined.

The present study explores intergenerational constructions of black femininity by comparing mothers' and daughters' conceptualisations, showcasing potential shifts and changes in gendered narratives in rural areas. By exploring black feminine identity constructions from a mother-daughter perspective within a rural South African context and taking cognisance of the residual effects of a patriarchal apartheid regime (Meena, 1992), this study will enable a new understanding of the significance of the mother-daughter relationship in the constructions of blackness and femininity. However, painting the entire relationships' dynamics with broad concepts of 'gender' and 'race' may limit the understanding of this

relationship, hence the reflection on cultural dynamics is fundamental to deconstructing the complex act of femininity construction. In addition, this study grants black women an opportunity to construct and narrate their own identities in ways that voice their lived experiences, thus potentially countering patriarchal ideologies of what it means to be a woman. Ultimately, this could help to improve women's self-confidence by giving them the power to deconstruct problematic views of black femininity and find pride in their existence, irrespective of male-centered validation. Moreover, by placing black women at the center of black femininity discourses, this study opens an opportunity for theoretical and conceptual development.

1.6 Socio-cultural contextualisation of the study

As previously noted, black femininity is not only embedded within the contexts of race and gender, but is significantly influenced by the socio-cultural context within which one's femininity is enacted and challenged. In this section, the researcher will discuss the socio-cultural context of rural Venda, where the study takes place: The geographical location of the study, the gender dynamics within the area and the cultural construction of femininity will be assessed through a discussion of the rites of passage ceremonies. Vhavenda history is complex and there is limited historical analysis of their cultural practices. According to Ross (2017), for reasons of cultural protection and defense, some descriptions are purposefully obscured. However, the researchers' identity as a young Muvenda woman enables the participants to freely share such information with them. Nonetheless, given the complexity of this culture, the rites of passage defined below should not be viewed as an exhaustive account of the cultural construction of femininity within this context. Moreover, women's experiences with such practices should not be viewed as representative accounts of all women in rural Venda, but rather as embodied experiences of the women in the present study.

1.6.1 Location of the study

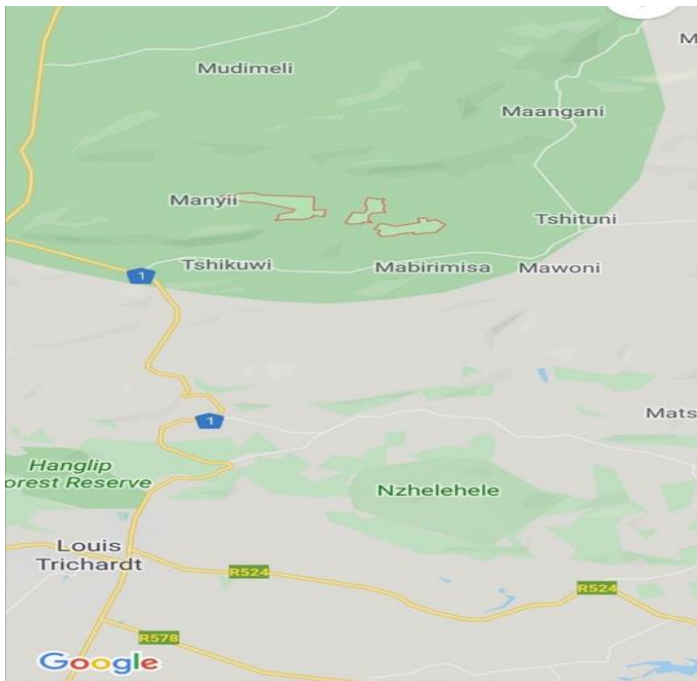


Figure 1: This is an image of the research site in rural Venda, specifically the Vhembe district, Nzhelele via the N1 route (Google Maps).

The study was conducted in Venda, as depicted in the map above, the center of which lies around the Soutpansberg (Mabogo, 1990). Specifically, the study focused on women within the rural Vhembe district. Vhembe is one of the six districts (i.e Capricon, Sekhukhune, Waterberg, Bohlabela, Mopani and Vhembe) of the Limpopo province (Kyei, 2011). During the apartheid era, Venda was a homeland (bantustan) and its capital, Thohoyandou, was named after a chief in the eighteenth century (Kyei, 2011:364). It was declared independent from white rule in 1973, and the former bantustan (Thohoyandou) is now the current capital of the Vhembe district (Kyei, 2011). According to Mabogo (1990), Venda is delineated politically. As such, the Vhembe district remained a predominantly black community even after the demise of the apartheid system. It is for these reasons that people living in the rural areas rarely encounter people of other races unless they travel to work or study in the urban areas. It is possible that such minimal interaction with other races has contributed to blackness being viewed as a minor aspect of the participants' identity conceptualisation. According to Kyei (2011), Vhembe is one of the least developed parts in the Limpopo province and therefore one of the most rural areas in South Africa.

Although the primary location of the participants is supposed to be rural Venda and participants are to be interviewed within the rural context, some mothers and daughters may be students or employed in other contexts, so the research setting is not strictly fixed, however the primary location remains Venda. The Vhavenda people speak Tshivenda and live according to Vhavenda customs and traditions which are characterised by a patrilineal organisation of the society (Mabogo, 1990; Matshidze, 2013). In addition, although the Vhavenda nation might appear to be homogenous from the outside, the truth of the matter is that “this nation is characterised by different origins and customs (including tribes such as Vhangona, Vhambedzi, Vhalembetu, vhatavhatsindi, Vhatwanamba, Vhalovhedzi, Vhakwevho, Vhaluvhu (Singo), Vhalaudzi, and Vhalemba)” (Mabogo, 1990:12). As such, the construction or conception of femininity and womanhood may vary significantly from tribe to tribe. However, the participants in this study were not asked to define which tribe they belong to. Hence, for the purpose of this research, the researcher will not discuss the above tribes’ history and characteristics, opting instead to regard the region more broadly.

1.6.2 Gender and power

Relevant to the current study, the role that women play within the home and the Vhavenda society as well as the power they hold as custodians of cultural knowledge and values associated with femininity must be discussed. In the pre-colonial era, Vhavenda women could individually possess movable property such as livestock, household items, and surplus agriculture (Ross, 2017). The above exemplifies the communal relationship to resources in Vhavenda culture which was not determined by gender, and denotes “women’s agricultural agency in pre-colonial Venda society” (Ross, 2017:64). According to Amadiume (1997), patriarchal or matriarchal concepts are colonial concepts as they have no validity in African contexts, unless power dynamics are interpreted through a western archetype of power which hinges on a gender binary. During the pre-colonial era, women exercised power in both public and domestic settings that influenced the state of their communities, and these women accessed power through gender flexibility (Ross, 2017). For example, these gender theorists – Oyewumi (1997); Amadiume (1997); and Achebe (2011) argue that [a] ‘female father,’ a ‘male daughter’ and a ‘female husband’ (or woman-to-woman marriage) in Africa was not a sex distinction or indicator of sexuality, but alternatively denoted birth order, political power, wealth and status or the absence of a man relative to or suitable for a position. Thus, it is

evident that, pre-colonialism, sexuality and gender did not determine social power dynamics, but rather birth order.

A Makhadzi (the paternal aunt) holds a strong position in Vhavenda families and society at large. According to Matshidze (2013), it is she who decides who becomes king and, should the successor be too young to ascend the throne; a Makhadzi would serve as regent herself until the young person is ready to take over. Although a Makhadzi from the royal family plays a significant role in determining chieftom matters - including but not limited to governance with the chief, public rituals of Uphasa and thevhula, or the liberations and thanksgiving after harvest (Matshidze, 2013) - she also plays a central role in overseeing important rituals pertinent to the “family’s sacred objects, eco-cultural knowledge and communicating with the ancestors” (Ross, 2017:67), which is also a central role played by a Makhadzi from a non-royal family. Furthermore, irrespective of the class distinctions mentioned above, it should be noted that all women in Venda society are respected for being spiritual mediums (Matshidze, 2013; Ross, 2017).

With the arrival of colonialism in the 16th century, women’s roles and status began to change as the “political dynamics set in motion resulted in the erosion of the role of Makhadzi through the apartheid and post-apartheid democratic era” (Ross, 2017:67). However, in relation to femininity construction, the women in a society inclusive of Makhadzi and Makhulu (grandmother) “remain an institution of knowledge transfer and a body of indigenous knowledge that stores, transfers and disseminates knowledge and value” (Magoqwana, 2018:75). Therefore, there is an intergenerational succession of femininity conceptualisation from Makhulu (grandmother) to mme (mother), and then to nwana wa musidzana (daughter). According to Magwedzha (2019), it is the elderly women that facilitate the rites of passage to be discussed below, hence the importance of women in the cultural succession of values, knowledge and gender ideologies. In addition, Nwoko (cited in Matshidze & Nmutandani, 2016) posits that women also provide traditional education, conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms within the family. Although these roles are no longer publicly recognised following the colonialism and apartheid eras, these roles were nonetheless preserved by the indigenous knowledge systems; however, they are in constant tension (i.e. power tensions) with recent legislation and policy on traditional governance and traditional courts (Matshidze, 2013).

In summary, women, historically and currently, play a significant role as cultural custodians and spiritual mediums within the Vhavenda context. In the following sections the rites of passage which serve as the formal socialisation into femininity will be discussed.

1.6.3 Vhavenda's traditional construction of femininity

Like any other personal development processes, femininity construction is a lifelong process. As soon as a person is born, their family and society engage in a process of socialising them into various roles and norms associated with their ascribed gender as a result of their biological sex. For a Muvenda woman, they are to go through various initiation processes that bridge the transition from childhood to mature womanhood. During these initiation processes, the young women are taught about sexuality, morals, respectable behaviour, retaining one's honour, how to be an honourable wife, parenthood and how to respectfully interact with other people in various social settings (Sivhabu, 2017). The rites of passage practices are tailored for specific age groups. Although there are rites of passage aimed at teaching young Vhavenda boys how to transition into manhood, this paper is specifically focused on the processes intended for girls. Below are the different rites of passage conducted for young girls at different ages:

Musevhetho

Musevhetho is defined as a rite of passage in which young girls are initiated from babyhood to puberty and this occurs before they begin their menstruation (Milubi, 2000). Normally the girls that participate in Musevhetho are aged between six and thirteen (Magwedzha, 2019). Here the girls are taught how to play games and music (kutambele kwa nwana wa musidzana); discouraged from playing with boys or engaging in sexual intercourse; and versed in (zwidade, ngano na dzi thai) Tshivenda poems and riddles and idioms (Magwedzha, 2019). In addition, these young girls are taught how to elongate their labia minora (Ukwevha) (Madima, 1996) to prepare themselves for Vhukomba (puberty) (ibid.) The practice is believed to increase sexual pleasure in adult years (Martínez Pérez, Bagnol & Tomás Aznar, 2014). Moreover, "well stretched labia minora would afford the little girl some praise from the elders" (Madima, 1996: 9).

“Musevhetho is very important to us as Vhavenda people, because it reduces early sexual debut amongst young girls. Here the girls are taught how to respect elders, how to differentiate between their peers and their mothers or fathers, taught that when one wakes up, they must sweep the yard, they must not deny being sent on errands by their elders or shout when they speak to them. They are taught how to respectfully bow when addressing their elders and that collecting wood, water and cooking is a girl’s job and they must do it with pride.” Magwedzha (2019)

Vhusha/Tshikanda

Upon reaching sexual maturity, marked by the commencement of menstruation, young girls are to undergo the process of Vhusha (Magwedzha, 2019). However, girls from noble families do not undergo this process and instead a special intermediary ritual (Tshikanda) is staged in order to teach them traditional rules in preparation for the process of Domba (Madima, 1996; Phuravhathu, 2019). Here the girls undergo vaginal inspection to ensure that they are not deflowered (Phuravhathu, 2019). Moreover, they were taught good manners, cleanliness, household chores and respect, to gain their full identity as Khomba (a matured young lady) (Phuravhathu, 2019; Magwedzha, 2019). This process is carried out by older women from the community (Magwedzha, 2019).

“As one undergoes the Vhusha process, the elders have their ways of checking down there to see if something has been done or if you are still a ‘good girl.’ The inspection process is called Tshitavha. They will spit on you if you are no longer a virgin, [and] it is embarrassing not only for you as the attendee but for your family as well. We stand in line and go inside the hut one by one. If one is no longer a virgin they would be given red bracelets (Vhukunda) made of beads as a symbol that they are no longer a virgin whereas, those who are still virgins are given the white beads to show that they are ‘good girls’, untouched by men. One is not to take those beads off as they serve as evidence for your family that you went through the process.” (Magwedzha, 2019)

Domba

Domba is defined as a pre-marital initiation that is done for both matured girls and boys (Magwedzha, 2019). The young people participate in traditional songs and dance in a ritual that is conducted every night over a specific period.

Each of these practices are conducted and monitored by elderly women within the community. Music plays a significant role within each phase, as “culture [does] not allow women to open up and reveal their feelings [thus] imparting messages through songs [is] therefore non-threatening for them” (Madima, 1996: 12). The various lessons learned during the day are subsequently reinforced at night through songs (Magwedzha, 2019). According to

Mafenya (cited in Madima, 1996:12), this is one of the most popular songs sung during Vhusha:

“Nandi nwana wa kholomo
Hafha fhasi a hu tsiwi
Kholomo dzibva hanefho
Dzirokho dziva hanefho”

This translates to English as: “Hey child, you dare not go down, for that is where cattle and clothes [bride prize] will come from” (ibid., 196:12). This song warns the adolescent girl not to tamper with her virginity as this will reduce her chances of getting married. Marriage plays a significant role in confirming one’s femininity and, evidently, “you become a woman once you get married, if you have a child, that is when you are a real woman” (Magwedzha, 2019). In addition, Magwedzha (2019) explains that during the process of Domba, both boys and girls are taught the meanings of marriage, how to detect signs of pregnancy and are also taught how to deal with some of the major life challenges they may encounter during the course of their life. The aforementioned practices ultimately enable the preservation of traditional culture and play a significant role in identity formation for those who participate.

These young women are accorded respect and considered to be more dignified than their fellow peers who did not participate in the initiation or those who did not keep their virginity. In addition, “[u]pon maturity, a Muvenda girl is often told: “zwino ni wa musadzi” (English translation: ‘now you are a woman, thus part of the adult world) (Madima, 1996:8). However, due to social changes and evolving constructions of femininity, the above practices are losing their significance in Venda. Moreover, fewer and fewer mothers are encouraging their daughters to partake in these initiation processes. Despite this decrease signaling an erosion of cultural sovereignty over identity construction, according to Sivhabu (2017:22), “an unfortunate consequence of the decline is that elders are no longer instructing youngsters on sexuality, morality, parenthood, good citizenship and growth.”

From this context, it is evident that women (specifically mothers or grandmothers) are viewed as the custodians of culture and morality: they shape their daughters’ constructions of femininity, as informed by the initiation processes. The majority of the mothers in this study underwent the initiation process themselves, and although some would want their daughters to also partake in the process, others advised against participation - for others still, their

daughters actively choose not to participate (this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter five). Through a discussion of normative constructions of femininity as informed by culture and counter constructions of femininity, this study seeks to show how there are generational convergences and divergences in relation to constructions of femininity in rural Venda, at least in part underpinned by adherence to or rejection of rites of passage rituals.

In the following section the organisation of the dissertation is discussed.

1.7 Organisation of the dissertation

This chapter has introduced the study by highlighting the main objectives and the rationale of the study, including the socio-cultural and socio-historical context of the study's setting. The next chapter, chapter two, will highlight the literature about the mother-daughter relationship and femininity construction, reflecting on studies within the African context and worldwide research. Furthermore, this chapter will review conceptions of feminine ideals within African contexts as informed by the notion of Africana womanism. These studies highlight that identity is a relational concept constructed in interactions with other individuals and various social structures. In addition, the studies reflect the complexities of mothers' and daughters' interactions which result in various connections and disconnections.

This is followed in chapter three by a discussion on the theoretical framework, methods and techniques used to collect and analyse the research interviews.

Chapter four is a discussion of the complexities within the mother-daughter relationship drawing from the women's own experiences. The chapter is reflective of the perceptions of femininity and mother-daughter relational dynamics, followed by various sub-themes. It highlights the connections and disconnections between mothers and daughters in relation to their conceptualisation of this relationship and how they define themselves as women.

Chapter five argues that identity construction is not only a relational process, but is influenced by social factors such as culture, class, gender and location. Thus, this chapter is a discussion of how women interact with these factors when constructing their perceptions of femininity.

Chapter six is the conclusion chapter, which integrates the major findings from chapters four and five in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review. In addition, this chapter highlights the major implications of these findings for practice and further research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

Significant studies have accounted for gender constructions from a social constructionist perspective (Cheesebro, 2001; Connell, 2002; Dowling, 2011; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Piller, 2006; Tracy & Scott, 2006), however explorations of black femininity within the South African context are still relatively new endeavors. In addition, of the studies that are focused on the mother-daughter relationship, the accounts are reported from the daughters' point of view (see page 2-3), hence the need for this study to focus on both mothers' and daughters' narratives. In this chapter, the literature most salient to this present study on the construction of black feminine identity within the context of mother-daughter relationships will be discussed. Thus, the researcher begins by explicating on the concept of the family (i.e. its function and form) as a centre for the reproduction of normative gender. Secondly, the importance of the mother-daughter relationship as a critical site within which the conception of womanhood/femininity is mutually constructed and contested as the two women interact over time and space will be discussed. In addition, identity construction will be analysed in relation to the five aspects of social construction of gender proposed by Cohen (cited in Remmo, 2009:5): "gender identity, gender roles, gender displays, gender ideals and gender stratification" (ibid., 2009:5). Finally, feminine ideals will be discussed in greater detail as they pertain to the conception of an African femininity or womanhood over time. This chapter concludes with a critical summary of previous work on the mother-daughter relationship and femininity construction. The following discussion will be framed through the usage of theoretical assumptions of feminist social constructionism and standpoint feminism, which will be discussed in detail separately; under the theoretical and methodological framework section in chapter three (see 35-40).

2.1.1 Family: Functions and form

According to Koen, Van Eeden and Rothman, the family is a universal institution composed of members that live together "in order to undertake various joint activities and to contribute

with the resources necessary for life, and to have children” (2012:343)². Besides biology qualifying somebody as a member of a family, the above definition reflects how the active, social bonds that bring people together under one roof - to interact with, care for and contribute to their communities through engaging in various tasks - also qualifies them as a family. This family system does not exist in isolation, thus as a social institution, the family is constantly affected by various social forces which, according to Bornstein & Chea (2006) and Haralambos & Holborn (2000), may cover political trends, societal values and important public events. Albeit affected by these various socio-political and cultural forces, “the family still remains a fundamental constituent of a society” (Amoateng, Heaton & Kaluele-Sibiti, 2007:43).

In addition, as a societal microcosm, the family unit also contributes to the functioning of a broader society through the socialisation of children, whose influence grows to extend beyond the more closed family orientation and flows out into the very structures of that society at large (Holborn, 2002; Parsons, 1955). Hence, the family has been characterised as a “fixed structure that influences society’s structural and organisational functions” (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998: 407; Mokomane, 2012: 3-6, Gelles, 1995: 40). This fixed structure results in the development of glorified family ideals which give rise to the “idealisation of tight, close and emotionally intimate family arrangements” (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998:440). In terms of the functionalist perspective, the family serves as a central site responsible for the maintenance of order and stability in a society (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). Moreover, the ‘functional’ family is often defined as a heterosexual couple with biological children: a “mother, father and children that fulfil standardised notions of what a family should look [like] and behave” (Gumede, 2015:44). The above conception excludes others forms of families that fall outside the normative conception of a family system. Furthermore, as argued by Paterson (2002:235 cited by Gumede, 2016:44), the family is responsible for a wide range of resources, support, education and protection, intended to steer an individual through their life:

“Provision of resources - such as money, clothing, shelter and food; nurturance, support and life skills - and provision of physical, emotional, social, educational and spiritual development. [The family also] enforces discipline and behavioural standards, such as norms, values and teaches leadership and decision-making skills; and how to maintain ascribed roles in the presence of others. Membership and family formation provides personal and social status, belonging, meaning and direction, as

² The family is constantly evolving, and it comes in various forms and shape. Thus, this definition should not be taken as a universal description of the family system, as contextual differences results in multiple structures of the family. But for the purpose of this research this definition of a family system was chosen as the best fit.

well as a source of love and intimacy; control of behaviour - the regulation of social and sexual behaviour, including the restraint of aggression, antisocial behaviour and the infringement of taboos and protection of vulnerable members - providing protection for those in poor health and the weak” (ibid., 2016:44).

In addition, the family unit can be understood in an economic sense due to the normalised division of labour along binary gender lines: where women perform all the domestic activities and can be active players in the corporate world, hence the double burden of responsibilities. In contrast, men take care of “heavy”-maintenance duties within the home and corporate as well. According to Calasanti & Bailey (1991:34), this binary division has “positive effects on the spouses and strengthens the bond between them, as the gender roles they play in the household are perceived to be functions which are different, yet complementary.” However, a Western feminist perspective would differ, viewing the family as a critical site within which the gender inequality from outside of the home is reproduced within the home through the subordination of girls and women via the gender norms which demand their unpaid labour (Helman & Ratele, 2016) thanks to the perpetuation of male bias that is viewed as patriarchal in nature (Popenoe, 1988). However, it is imperative to note that, within some families, the clear demarcation of social roles within a family may be perceived as a process that actually strengthens the family as a unit by promoting solidarity and may not necessarily be viewed as oppressive, but, on the contrary, as empowering.

Much of the foundational, formal research on the idea of the family unit was conducted in the West, resulting in a conceptualisation of the family as a supposedly nuclear system (Parson, 1955). As such, the dominant academic discourse around the idea of the family is, and has always been, based on the Western nuclear conceptualisation (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). However, as the family system continues to interact with various social forces and culture evolves, families too are evolving on a global level (Koen *et al.*, 2012; Madhavan, Townseed & Garey, 2008). According to Gelderblom (2004; cited by Sooryamonthy & Makhoba, 2016:310), “in pre-industrial times, black families were patriarchal, polygamous, patrilocal and patrilineal.” However, due to the various socio-political and cultural changes listed above, the contemporary black families are “considerably more pluralistic, diverse and fluid than in the past” (Van Eeden-Moorfield & Demo, 2007:1589). In addition, family forms are now inclusive of “nuclear, multigenerational, stepfamilies, polygamous, single-parent households, cohabitation, gay and lesbian couples” (Koen *et al.*, 343). In South Africa, normative family structural changes are attributed - but not limited to - poverty, HIV/AIDS, absent fathers, access to education, increased participation of women in work outside of the

home and in the public sphere and a decrease in childbirth rates (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Makiwane, 2011; Haralambos & Holborn, 2000; Sooryamonthy & Makhoba, 2016).

The family unit is a critical site where children are socialised through the sharing of knowledge and the teaching of skills in preparation for later life and immanent societal demands (Belsey, 2005; Gumede, 2015; Von horn, 2004). Thus, given its dominance and importance in the life of a child, perhaps it is primarily and most immediately within the family unit that a person's psycho-social demands and "emotional wellbeing is met" (Gumede, 2015: 45). Moreover, the contemporary family system may now serve as a critical site of revolution in terms of the empowerment of women and children through the more equal allocation of gender roles within the home environment as well as the construction of more empowered notions of femininity (e.g. independent and strong) and less oppressive notions of masculinity (e.g. peaceful and kind), unlike in the pre-industrial and colonial eras (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). However, families rooted in strict traditional norms may resist the persistence to change.

Given that this study focuses on contemporary African families, it is important to note that this is a context where a family unit does not necessarily mean that children live with their two biological parents under one roof. It is against this backdrop of socio-political change from nuclear forms of family to predominantly single mother headed families, that the researcher undertakes this study of intergenerational constructions of black feminine identity: mother-daughter narratives. The usage of feminist social constructionism and black standpoint theory and intersectionality theory assists the researcher in understanding how factors both in the wider society and the family unit itself affect the individuals (i.e. mother and daughter) in terms of their conceptualisation and construction of their own feminine identities and the roles associated with those identities, as well as the interactions between the two generations.

2.2 Understanding the mother-daughter relationship

The mother-daughter relationship is different from other dyadic relationships, both in terms of its nature and in terms of its influence on identity development (Boyd, 1989). Specifically, Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson and Kaufman (2011:453) argue that "[o]f all familial relationships, the mother-daughter one is most likely to remain important for both parties,

even when major life changes occur, such as the daughter's marriage or mother's illness", thus highlighting the significance of this relationship. Bojczyk *et al.* (2011:453) further note that:

“multiple theoretical perspectives – feminism (Chase & Rogers, 2001; Flax, 1978), psychoanalysis (Chodorow, 1989), life course (Elder et al., 2003), and family systems (Charles et al., 2001) – recognise the mother-daughter bond as lifelong, intimate, and developmentally important.”

The bond between a mother and her daughter remains a lifelong process because, unlike the mother-son relationship, boundaries between mothers and daughters remain less strict (Chodorow, 1989), ensuring its endurance. In addition, girls are less likely to give up their attachment to their mothers in order to form relationships with their fathers, instead “they define themselves in relational triangle with both mother and father” (Chodorow, cited by Crew, n.d:2). Since the mother serves as the primary caregiver and key socialiser (Chodorow, 1989), she subsequently serves as a source of identification for her daughter and vice versa (de Beauvoir, 2011).

Unlike the continuous identification between mothers and daughters, the son's identification with his mother is broken when the son switches to the father as his primary source of identification - or indeed any other male figure (Chodorow, cited by Boyd, 1978). Thus, due to the continuous identification with their mothers, “daughters often perceive themselves as more ‘like’ their mothers than sons are ‘like’ their fathers” (Chodorow, cited by Boyd, 1989: 292). Although Chodorow (*ibid.*) highlights the distinct identification of daughters with their mothers as compared to sons, Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983, cited by Boyd 1978:292) focus instead on the mother's identification with their daughter:

“first, the mother identifies with the daughter because they share a gender and the mother has reproduced herself. Second, the mother projects feelings she has about herself, possibly failing to differentiate herself from her daughter. Third, unconsciously, the mother behaves towards her daughter as she internally acts towards the daughter part of herself. Similarly, Hammer (1976) suggests that a mother, through her daughter, lives out her own childhood and her own mother's identity; by identifying with her daughter, she becomes ‘both her own mother and her own child’” (Boyd, 1978:292).

Here Boyd illustrates the multiplicity of identities within the mother-daughter relationship and how these identities intersect to give rise to plural selves, particularly within the mother. Based on the above reflection of the complexities within the mother-daughter relationship, it

is evident that this relationship is completely different from any other familial relationship. Moreover, Boyd (1989) posits that, due to the consequences of the mutual and intense identification between mothers and daughters, the relationship is marked by periods of conflicts and ambivalence as a result of the need for intra-dyadic separation and individuation. This conflict is often due to the tension between a “daughter’s sense of separate ‘I’ and her perception of a collective ‘We’ ” (Lerner, cited by Boyd, 1989:293).

Research addressing the mother-daughter relationship suggests that adolescent girls’ relationships with their mothers not only affects their gender role identity (Ex & Jamsems, 1998; Steensma *et al.*, 2013), but other aspects of their development too, namely: expectations and attitudes about relationships; sexual behaviour and risk-taking behaviour (Beir, Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky, & Botempo, 2000); formation of daughters’ feminist identity (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015) and perceptions of womanhood and motherhood (Cheany, 2011). Indeed, as argued by Ashcraft and Belgrave (2005:11), “daughters learn directly and indirectly from their mothers how women are supposed to think, behave, and interact with others”. Thus, as a result of their close interaction with their mothers, daughters are able to observe their mothers’ behaviours in intimate relationships, “the topics they discuss and the degree and closeness in the relationship” (*ibid.*). This parental influence plays a significant role in daughters’ lives as they often feel more related to their mothers than their fathers, and mothers may often feel more related to their daughters than their sons - however, these are generalisations and may not necessarily always be the case.

Although the patterns outlined above might offer some foundational understanding of the mother-daughter relationship in a general sense, the above conceptualisation is fundamentally problematic as it is predominantly based on psychoanalytical Eurocentrism. Due to the exclusion of black feminist writers within the topic of mother-daughter relationships, the conception of those relationships - along with the dynamics of femininity and motherhood - has been a universalisation of white, Eurocentric ideas and ideals. As a result, motherhood has been conceptualised as a “site of ambivalence, unhappiness, and obligations”; and black mothering “a site of anger and tenderness,” (Nash, 2018:703). However, Rich (cited by Nash, 2018:703) exposed in her memoir that black mothering is actually a site of “intense spiritual and political meaning, a space where the self is powerfully remade through the sacred bond between mother and child”. In addition, a black feminist writer (Nash, 2018) further conceptualises black mothering as a space of crisis and loss, as well as redemption (Nash, 2018). This relationship is loaded with symbols and metaphors: it is an embodied experience

as well as a political location in which positive blackness may be re-defined. Thus, Joseph (cited by Crew, n.d.:2), argues against “analysing conceptions of motherhood and mother-daughter relationships from white psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives without taking into account the differences of race and culture.” Rather, for Joseph (ibid), the mother-daughter relationship is to be discussed “within the context of the black family network instead of the isolated dyad of mother and daughter which is the object of study in psychoanalytic theoretical writing.

2.3 Femininity construction

“One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes in society; it is civilisation as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine” (de Beauvoir, 2011:330).

In the quote above, De Beauvoir (2011) emphasises the notion that womanhood is socially constructed in interaction with others, cultures and social systems. Butler (1988:519) concurs with de Beauvoir, echoing how “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - and identity is instituted through a stylised repetition of acts”. Furthermore, Butler (1988:519) argues that gender is also instituted through the “the stylisation of the body,” meaning that it must be understood in the interrogations of “bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds that define the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (ibid:519). It is in line with this understanding of gender that it is argued that if gender is conceptualised through flexible ways of enacting bodily gestures or bodily praxis, and social interactions within a society, then gender is in itself is “a constructed identity” (Butler, 1988:520), enacted through time and space in relation to various social forces and constantly evolving.

Through this conceptualisation of gender as a fluid social construct, this research will show how gender serves as an important factor in structuring social relations within a society - particularly because of the complex power interplay at the centre of its construction and performance. The complex power interplay that constitutes gender is kept in place by “social sanctions and taboo” that seek to ensure conformity to the normative gender practices in a particular time and space (Butler, 1988:520). Hence, gender serves as an important factor that structures all social relations within a society, particularly those between men and women

(Zhou, 2015). Moreover, since Deegon and Hill (1987:4) posit that each person “is taught the meaning of gendered behaviour and in turn that person passes the lesson to others,” it is evident that “being a man or a woman is a social definition that is learned by individuals throughout their lives” (ibid.).

Femininity construction is under-conceptualised, and under-researched in the current literature on gender (Budgeon, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yeomans, 2016), including that which is related to Black femininity (Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, Agboh, Enjaian, Geyer Lue & Wu, 2018; Gqola, 2017; Shorter-Goode & Washington, 1996; Steck et al., 2003). While there has been considerable investigation into how we understand different masculinities and the relationships between them, the same attention has been lacking in the theorisation of femininity (Francis, Archer, Moote, Witt & Yeomans, 2016; Helaman & Ratele, 2016; Paechter, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to note that “most research into how we might understand gender, and in particular into dominance in gender relations has not included specific and detailed consideration of femininity as a concept” (Paechter, 2018:121).

In her study based in the Yoruba context, Oyewumi (1997) posits that the absence of femininity/womanhood studies may be as a result of the fact that the so-called ‘Woman Question’ is based on an exclusively western perspective. Specifically, she argues that during her research process it became evident that the absence of such studies in African contexts may be due to the fact that the “fundamental category ‘woman’ - which is foundational in western gender discourses - simply did not exist in Yoruba land prior to its sustained contact with the west” (Oyewumi, 1997:Xi). Although the researchers’ goal is not to universalise Oyewumi’s research experience as applicable to the Vhavenda context, it is important to understand that the cultural logic of western social categories - which is based on an ideology of biological determinism- results in the constant binary categorisation of bodies based on “opposition to another category” (Oyewumi, 1997:Xi-X).

In concurrence with Judith Lorber’s argument that “gender is so pervasive in western society that we assume it is bred in our genes,” Oyewumi (1997:X) suggests that this may be the reason why the majority of gender-focussed research has been conducted in the western context (a context mistaken as a universal one). Thus, we should be careful not to assume that the conception of the body is universal or that it serves as the foundation of social roles and identity or exclusion (Oyewumi, 1997). Therefore, since western ideological dominance uses

“bio-logic” (Oyewumi,1997:Xiii) as the basis for its socio-cultural understanding of gender, there is a great need to interrogate the socio-cultural understanding of gender from an African perspective in order to avoid foreign distortions of interactions and the reduction of all socio-cultural interaction to oppressive transactions where women are “powerless, disadvantaged, controlled, and defined by men” (ibid.Xiii). Nonetheless, we should also not be blind to the fact that although gender may not serve as the historical foundation of social order in African contexts, it has now become truly pervasive in a deeply unequal manner, hence the need for the interrogation of the process of gender construction, especially in relation to femininity and how it is enacted.

The foundational work on socially dominant gender forms has mostly focused on masculinities, with a strong emphasis placed on hegemonic forms of masculinities, with definitions of femininity as the counterpart or subordinate of masculinity (Carrigan, Connel & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1987a; Connell, 1995b). Other major theorists - such as Salo and Davids (2009) and Gqola (2017) - have concentrated on femininity more generally, but not within the context of the mother-daughter relationship in rural South African society (rather, these studies were conducted in urban settings). Moreover, a considerable African-American body of work that investigates specific forms of femininity among children conceptualises the notion of hegemonic femininity as locally dominant and definitively rooted in the theorisation of masculinity (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Allan, 2009; Blaise, 2005; Evaldson, 2003; Jackson, 2004).

In South Africa, there is a limited body of work on the construction of Black femininity. However, in a South African study conducted by Lesch and Kruger (2005), the authors argue that mothers are powerful agents in young women’s constructions of their own sexuality and show how mothers’ influences contribute to their daughters’ limited sense of sexual agency. The quality of the aforementioned relationship also plays a significant role in the daughter’s perception of sexuality construction as their mothers are viewed as their primary source of socialisation (ibid.). Although this was conducted in the South African context, it is based on daughters’ recollections of their mothers’ role in the development of their own sexual agency.

In addition, Gqola’s fourteen-essay book (2017) uses a feminist perspective to discuss Black femininity within the South African context from a personal viewpoint, reflecting how mothers and grandmothers play a fundamental role in the development and conceptualisation of their daughter’s femininity, particularly in relation to feminism. However, Salo and Davids

(2009) have taken a more comparative approach to understanding the feminine gender identities and sexualities of young women from working-class schools in coloured Wynberg, Cape Town. Specifically, they show how matric balls are used as a rite of passage during which desirable femininity is inscribed, “through global discourses and media scopes of consumption intersecting with local gendered heteronormativity”: here, mothers invest in their daughter’s social debut through their own desires of romance and marriage for their daughter (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2009:10). Salo and Davids (2009:11) also focus on the importance of the mother’s role in the formation of gender identity, demonstrating “how race, space and gender intersect in new and localised ways and how mothers are major mediators in the above process.” Although each of the aforementioned studies (Lesch & Kruger, 2005; Gqola, 2017; Salo & Davis, 2009) are significant in understanding femininity within the South African context, they are not specifically focused on intergenerational dynamics, narratives of Black femininity or mother-daughter relations, indicating a need for new research to address these gaps.

2.3.1 Conceptualising femininity construction concepts

As previously mentioned, gender is conceptualised as a social construct. As such, this section will discuss five organisational aspects of gender construction, namely: “gender identity, gender roles, gender displays, gender ideals and gender stratification” (Cohen, cited by Remmo, 2009:10). These concepts are significant for the purpose of analysing the transmission of feminine gender identity between the mothers and daughters in the present study. As Remmo (2009) argues, these concepts enable the examination of specific ways in which women enact and talk about their femininity with their mothers/daughters.

According to Lorber and Farrell (1991), the social process of constructing gender is comprised of multiple concepts which are associated with the roles and expectations “given to a particular sex” in accordance with gender norms (cited by Remmo, 2009:10). Gender identity is defined as the understanding one has of oneself as either male or female (Cohen, cited by Remmo, 2009). Simply put, it is the conceptualisation of one’s own sense of self in relation to how they view themselves, as well as the attitudes and expectations they create in relation to their gender.

While gender identity can be understood as an individual aspect of one's being, on a societal level, it is gender roles which serve as the various "prescription[s], or ways to act in given situations' (Cohen, cited by Remmo, 2009:10). In relation to the socialisation process, we are taught how to behave and interact with others and, subsequently, translate the given guidelines of behaviour into our manifestation of our own identity by allocating specific gender roles to a particular gender identity. Therefore, this internalisation of socially-prescribed gender roles can be defined as gender display (Remmo, 2009). It is important to note the mother-daughter relationship as fundamental for all behaviour found within gender display interactions, thus, the ways in which we construct our gender identity often exemplifies the ideals of femininity both as taught by our mothers and assigned by society.

Moving outwards from the notion of gender display to the notion of gender stratification, feminist theorists - such as Collins (2004) and Connell (1987) - classify it as the cultural practices and ideologies associated with femininity, specifically in terms of how they serve as a reflection of gendered power structures within which "women are subordinate to men, and in turn, some women attain higher status than other[s] through their successful enactment of a prescriptive set of normative feminine behaviour" (Cole & Zucker, 2007:1). According to Collins (cited by Cole & Zucker, 2007:1), the following elements constitutes dominant or 'ideal' femininity: "[b]eauty, demeanour, marriage and family arrangement, sexuality and (white) race". These ideals are not only perpetuated within the mother-daughter relationship, but through social networks and cultural institutions, including mass media, schools, voluntary associations and family units (Chen, cited by Cole & Zukcker, 2007). As a result, women often engage with these ideals as they construct and perform their gender in order to fit into the hegemony of desirable femininity (Cole & Zucker, 2007). However, the perpetuation of a dominant femininity which is mostly accessible to white upper-middle class women and educated middle-class women results in the devaluation and social exclusion of other women who may not necessarily fit the description of 'ideal' femininity.

2.3.2. Black feminine ideals

Feminine ideals are defined as "shared beliefs or models", of womanhood which a society as a whole accepts and upholds (Remmo, 2009:19). However, as outlined previously, it is important to note that most existing studies of feminine ideals are - implicitly or explicitly - conceptualised from a Eurocentric standpoint (Davis, 2017). This is crucial because, as

explained by White (1985) and Woods-Giscombe (2010), black women are likely to have distinct expressions of womanhood based on their unique history and experiences and, therefore, will require concepts and vocabulary to match in academic discourse. Hence, although a number of modern researchers have focused on unravelling the fundamentally under-represented topic of Black femininity and producing multiple conceptualisations of this complex issue, it remains true that “there is no clear answer as to what Black femininity is, nor the norms that comprise it” (Davis, 2017:1).

As Angela Davis contends, although black women in the United States may experience some of the same feminine expectations as white women, the dominant, Eurocentric interpretation of femininity may not be wholly applicable to black women (Davis, 2017). Due to black women’s distinct racial and gender socialisation experiences, many theories suggest that black femininity may be different to white women’s conceptualisation of their femininity, meaning that there is an urgent need for a greater understanding of black femininity (Collins, 2000; Davis, 2017). For example, Chaney (2011) argues that the norms of strength, independence and perseverance are fundamental to black women’s conceptualisation of their femininity, in addition to more traditional norms such as “familial care, investment in physical appearance and self-respect for one’s body and life in general” (Davis, 2017:1). Therefore, although there are feminine norms consistent with a universal sense of femininity, as Kiguwa (2001) argues: women’s lives are always shaped and influenced by their cultural perception of womanhood and since each culture has its own version of what an ‘ideal womanhood’ is and looks like, only deeper exploration of cultural norms specific to black women will yield a more comprehensive and accurate delineation (Davis, 2017). It is with this maxim in mind that this study begins its exploration of femininity construction within a Venda context, with the idealisation and processes of that construction discussed in Chapter one.

As previously mentioned, the fact that black women have had different experiences of gender roles and racial socialisation from white women leads to the usage of Eurocentric conceptions of feminine norms being problematic (Davis, 2017; Collins, 2004). In her qualitative study of the perceptions of womanhood of fifteen Black women aged between eighteen and fifty-five, Chaney (2011) found that the subjects defined womanhood in terms of feminine attitudes inclusive of sensitivity and sensuality; and their feminine behaviours in relation to familial care, physical appearance and self-care. In addition, traditional qualities such as strength,

independence and leadership were viewed as “counter notions of hegemonic femininity” (Chaney cited by Davis, 2017: 4).

In a study exploring the notions of femininity amongst a group of black women in rural Venda, Makongodza (2010) found that women’s conceptualisation of their womanhood was strongly linked to their upbringing and society’s expectations of how a woman should behave. For some of the participants this included being raised to aspire to marriage and prioritise their children and husband (ibid.). Additionally, these women expressed how important it was for them to teach their children moral values (especially sexual fidelity) and serve as moral guardians through teaching them how to behave, dress and address their elders (ibid.). In relation to their self-construction, the women used personal achievements as a measure of their femininity. The ability to do things (i.e. becoming educated and joining the workforce), which were previously reserved for men, meant that they were now independent and responsible beings. However, for some participants, traditional constraints and parental influence meant that they could not achieve their goals and wishes, as they were raised to be inconspicuous and modest (ibid.).

Using the above as a backdrop, it is evident that idealised gender roles for black women in the present day “encapsulate [both] traditionally feminine norms associated with nurturing as well as non-traditional norms associated with economic instrumentality and providing” (Littlefield, cited by Davis, 2017:4).

Although it is not the main objective of this study to theorise the notion of hegemonic femininity, it is imperative to note that the power structures of hegemony are significant in the maintenance of social norms, specifically in terms of constructing hegemonic masculinities and femininities (Francis *et al.*, 1988). Since gender is defined as a set of hegemonic forms and ideologies which influence how people identify and behave (Paechter, 2018), the context of gender is defined as a space of constant struggle between power and resistance throughout a society in relation to whatever constitutes hegemonic femininity. As such, conceptions of femininity and masculinity change over time and place, as interactions and resistances require constant local negotiation and re-justifications (ibid.). However, powerful social formations pertaining to femininity that are maintained not by force, but by consent (however tacit) and “underpinned by ideologies that present the status quo as the natural order of things” (Paechter, 2018:123), function as regimes of truth. These can be

rejected, re-defined and accepted by women (individually and collectively) depending on context and time.

Since dominant hegemonic femininity conceptualisation is reflective of the experiences of white middle-class women and devalues the racial and cultural identities of African women (Davis, 2017), Weems developed the term “Africana Womanism” in order to define an African femininity that is consistent with the African worldview and cultural practices. According to Weems (in Davis, 2017:15-16), Africana Womanism is characterised by the following distinct characteristics consistent with the African worldview and cultural practices:

“1.) Self-namer, 2.) Self-definer, 3.) Family-centered, 4.) In concert with males in struggle, 5.) Flexible roles, 6.) Genuine sisterhood, 7.) Strength, 8.) Male compatible, 9.) Respected, 10.) Recognised, 11.) Whole, 12.) Authentic, 13.) Spirituality, 14.) Respectful of elders, 15.) Adaptable, 16.) Ambitious, 17.) Mothering and 18.) nurturing.” (ibid. 2017:15-16).

This conceptualisation of Africana Womanism may serve as a frame of reference for the socialisation of a girl as she matures towards womanhood. These serve as feminine values or ideals one ‘should’ aspire for in the African context as highlighted via the Vhavenda’s cultural rites of passage into womanhood. However, this framework is also problematic as it denies the girl, child or woman the agency to define herself in her own terms. With this discussion of femininity construction slightly more complete, attention will now be shifted towards various mother-daughter research studies.

2.4. Empirical (mother-daughter) studies

Research addressing the mother-daughter relationship “has come from many disciplines” (Boyd, 1989:293). However, very few of these studies and theoretical commentaries have explored this relationship through an intergenerational perspective of both mothers and their daughters, used qualitative research to explore the topic or have been conducted in the African context. Nonetheless, these studies are fundamental to understanding this complex, yet significant relationship between mothers and their daughters. Therefore, in the following sections, previous research on the mother-daughter relationship and identity construction will be explored.

2.4.1 Self-concept and identification

The family is a complex and interactive social system in which gender is reproduced (Boyd, 1989) and identity is constructed, challenged and reconstructed as a result of the relationship between the family members, their interaction with their culture and other people within their society. Before interacting with the outside world, a child's first frame of reference is their parents, who play a significant role in their identity development through the process of socialisation (de Beauvoir, 2011). For the girl, her first - and lifelong - frame of reference is her mother. In support of this argument, Theodosious-Tryfodiou explains that:

“The very construction of gender identity is related to the set of social experiences and expectations of the tween girl which is primarily attributed to the domestic sphere, given that the relationship between the tween and her mother is strong as indicated by contemporary studies, but also in the public sphere as well” (2016:1) .

Since the mother is a primary socialiser of her children, they are often tasked with the role of transforming their daughters into becoming women (Theodosious-Tryfodiou, 2016). The role of the mother as the primary source of socialisation guides the way she behaves towards her children from birth; in fact, it is this behaviour and other family relations that shape women's lives from the earliest stage. Although it is true that other social institutions such as the school, media and peers may serve as strong sources of identity construction, this study is particularly interested in the relationship between the mother and daughter since it is usually the earliest and most immediate social interaction a girl has.

Since every mother has her own definition of what it means to be a woman “according to the referent standards that have been established and the way she perceives the values contributed by culture in each of the two sexes” (Theodosious-Tryfodiou, 2016:1), the mother shapes her daughter's development of the self and identification through their “expectations, desires, principles, beliefs, perceptions but also through her socio-economic position, cultural level, occupation, education, lifestyle values and standards” (Stogiannidou, Sakka & Deligianni-kouimtzi cited by Theodosious-Tryfodiou, 2016:2). This means that a mothers' social location and cultural understanding of womanhood may contribute to conformity with normative constructions of femininity or construction of counter notions of femininity, specifically how they influence their daughters' constructions of their own femininities.

In an attempt to understand the place of the body within the mother-daughter relationship, specifically in relation to how the two forces interact in shaping the daughters' identity, Bowde (2010) interviewed three black women and three white women between the ages of

twenty-one and twenty-five in a South African university. In her study she discovered that multiple unconscious desires and fantasies- i.e. rectifying their childhood through their children (which are predominantly rooted in the mother-daughter relationship), shape these young women's relationship with their bodies and how they engage with dominant discourses regarding the body while constructing their feminine identity (ibid.). Additionally, the young women in the study found it hard to define themselves as separate from their mothers, because they struggled to achieve their own autonomy (ibid.). As they transitioned into adulthood these daughters unconsciously held strong desires to be like their mothers as their mothers served as the “makers of their own feminine self and destiny” (ibid.: 54).

Speaking to the development of self-esteem, self-worth, resilience and coping strategies, a study by Evert alt *et al.* (2016) found that daughters perceived their mothers as playing a significant role in their development of the ability to cope with stressors and to be resilient amid chaos. Specifically, these daughters expressed that their mothers served as a primary frame of reference for such qualities which ultimately informed their self-concept - structured around inner strength as a source of positive self-identification (Acock & Yang, 1984; Ashcraft & Belgrave, 2005; Everet alt *et al.*, 2016; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). In relation to coping mechanisms, mothers used themselves as models of womanhood and utilised their life lessons as a means of transmitting messages of resilience, strength and pride in one's blackness to their daughters (Everet alt *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, daughters found it easier to emulate their mothers' coping mechanisms when their mothers created structured family environments defined as “supportive and cohesive” in order to facilitate the positive development of their daughters' self-conceptualisation and identity construction (ibid.:344). This study was conducted in an African American setting with seventeen black mothers. As important as it may be in the understanding of the mother-daughter relationship, the study gathered its data from the daughters' voices, meaning that there is a lack of understanding of the mothers' conceptualisation of this relationship. Nonetheless, in comparison with other studies on femininity construction, the results from Everet alt *et al.*'s study suggests that black mothers exercise agency when they raise their daughters to think positively about themselves as humans, value their self-worth and to be proud of their race as part of their self-concept and identification (Ashcraft & Belgrave, 2005; Chaney, 2011; Colaner & Rittenour, 2015; Everet alt *et al.*, 2016; Gqola, 2017).

According to Cross and Gore, cited by Shu-Chun (2005), the concept of individuation is closely related to the traditional view of identity in that it is deemed essential for the

development of a socially integrated individual with a healthy, stable and mature identity. In this sense, individuation also refers to the achievement of autonomy and a unique identity (Cross & Gore, cited by Shu-Chu, 2005; Kruse & Walper, 2008). In relation to the present study, the researcher conceptualises individuation as the process in which the mother or daughter is able to differentiate themselves from the other, without rejecting the innate characteristics of that other which may be different from their own. As Shu-Chu (2005) argued, the process of achieving one's identity by being able to view oneself as distinct from others does not equate to the abolishment of relationships, but rather is characterised by the revision of such relationships.

For women, the process of becoming autonomous and establishing one's distinct identity is challenging (Glasman, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 1995). These difficulties are a result of the difficult process of separating from their mothers since they are the daughters' first frame of reference and serve as the primary intimate relationship of both women's life experience (Shu-Chun, 2005). Since mothers reproduce themselves in their daughters - which makes it easy for them to project their motives, wishes and hopes onto children of the same sex (de Beauvoir, 2011; Phillips, 1991) - it is significant that the process of individuation is not only expected from the daughters, but from their mothers as well. By separating herself from her daughter as a woman, the mother will enable the daughter to actively engage in the process necessary for a positive individuation of identity, thus effectively providing her daughter with permission to become an independent adult (Flaake, 1993). Nonetheless, it should be noted that the process of separation and disconnection may not necessarily be what the daughter wants and, instead, it can result in a breach of trust in the relationship rather than strengthening the daughter, leaving her feeling abandoned (DeBold, Wilson & Malave, cited by O'Reilly & Abbey, 2000).

This process of separation-individuation as understood through the psychoanalytic framework above is objected to by many feminist theorists (Glasman, 2001). Indeed, Jordan (cited by Glasman (2001) posits that when considering the separation-individuation process in women, it is pertinent to recognise that women may not fully separate from their mothers due to the complexity of their relationship, hence the need for an alternative construction of women's self-development that is less binary or final. Nonetheless, Glasman (cited by Shu-Chun, 2005:36) argues that identity development is a life-long process in which a woman struggles to negotiate between the "feminine ideals of nurturance and care taking on the one hand, and the masculine ideals of autonomy and achievement on the other".

Based on the above arguments, it is evident that the mother and daughter relationship is characterised by both ambivalence and challenges, yet at the same time it can be “extremely close and possibly enmeshed” (Shu-Chun, 2005:36). According to a study conducted by Frank, Butler and Laman (1988), young women were more connected to their mothers, but their relationship was also characterised by conflicts. Furthermore, in an in-depth qualitative study consisting of seven African-American women, McCarter (1999) noted that adult daughters who perceived similarities between themselves and their mothers felt and reported a positive attachment, while those who perceived themselves as different from their mothers felt and reported a less positive attachment between themselves and their mothers. Although some of the daughters reported a positive attachment, these daughters also reported the experience of on-going tensions between themselves and their mothers (ibid.). This continued ambivalence was further supported by Glasman’s (2001) study conducted in an African-American context to qualitatively explore feminine identity development within the mother-daughter relationship, she found that mothers significantly influence their daughters’ self-development, which is mostly manifested in whether or not the daughters reported a desire to be similar to or different from their mothers. Those with closer relationships with their mothers were more likely to identify themselves as more similar to their mothers than those who expressed a disconnection from their mothers (ibid.).

2.4.2 Interactional patterns

In relation to the interactional patterns that occur between mothers and daughters, several African-American qualitative studies have noted that mothers are more consistently positive about their relationship with their daughters than daughters are about their relationship with their mothers (Fingerman, 2003; Smith, Hill & Mullis, 1998; Walters, 1999). This gap signifies the generational disconnect in the perceptions of their relationship, in terms of whether it would positively or negatively influence the construction of their self-concept and identity as women. Located in South Africa, Burn’s (2006) study focuses on the mother-daughter relationship as a friendship in order to explore the ways in which this conceptualisation might illustrate the broader concerns of feminine subjectivity. The results suggest that through conceptualising their mother-daughter relationship as a friendship, the intimacy between the mother and daughter results in easy disclosure of the self to the other, and “affords women important measures for relational support” that challenges “masculine

versions of parenting, generational authority and the centrality of autonomy and separation in the developmental process” (Burn, 2006; ii).

Although the majority of the research outlined thus far has shown the importance of the mother-daughter relationship with regards to identity formation, specifically the “life choices and attitudes of [the] daughters” (Blee & Tickamyer, 1987:205), comparatively little is known with regards to how the mother and daughter talk about sex and sexuality - as well as how that dialogue or lack thereof might form part of their identities as women (Lesch & Anthony, 2007). In terms of research into the field of femininity construction, rural communities have been neglected. In fact, in their study conducted in a low-income Western Cape community (South Africa), Lesch and Anthony (2007) found that mothers expressed unease about having discussions with their adolescent daughters on the topic of sexuality. For these mothers, “the onset of their daughters’ menarche signalled the beginning of a dangerous phase in their lives. They could not talk about or acknowledge pleasure and desire as aspects of sexuality” (Lesch & Anthony, 2007:135). Correspondingly, the daughters in this study expressed that their mothers had a deep desire to control their daughters’ sexuality as a method of protection (ibid.). These daughters also explained that their mothers often resorted to the usage of “warnings, threats of emotional disconnection, and suggestions of contraception” (ibid. 139-140), which made it harder for the young women to openly communicate with their mothers about their sexuality, especially if the relationship between the mother and daughter was already negative or fragmented (Lesch & Kruger, 2005).

While Lesch and Kurger’s 2005 study was fundamental to understanding discussions (or lack thereof) between mothers and daughters pertaining to sex (as part of their identity formation in the South African context), this study and the majority of studies in this literature review were conducted from the point of view of daughters. Gumede (2013) has explored conversations about intimate relationships between African mothers and their daughters in the Mangaung township of Bloemfontein South Africa. In this study she discovered that the mother-daughter conversation about sex often occurs in households where there is no father (Gumede, 2015). Additionally, although both parties recognise their conversations about sex and reproductive health as significant, both mothers and daughters were reluctant to talk about these topics with each other - and when this talk did happen, it was prompted by the event of a pregnancy or after watching television programmes (ibid.). Moreover, these conversations “were characterised as didactic, confrontational, and instructional and framed by cultural mores. The mothers’ focus was to warn, threaten and discourage their daughters

from sexual activities.” (ibid.2). Therefore, while the mothers were preferred as the primary source of information by both members of the dyad, in reality daughters tended to talk more openly to their friends and felt that they received more information about sex from their school’s sex education syllabus (ibid.).

To summarise: although femininity construction and hegemonic femininity is currently gaining increased attention, research in the rural African context is still very much lacking. Of the research focused on the mother-daughter relationship outlined above, the majority has been constructed through the voices of *either* the mother or the daughter and predominantly in an African-American context. Thus, there is a lack of understanding of the interactional role played mutually by both mothers and daughters in terms of identity formation and perception of feminine ideologies. As such, there is a yet unmet need for research which explores mother-daughter relationships through the perspectives of both women within the rural African context.

2.5 Conclusion: critical analysis of the chapter.

A review of the literature indicated a number of important issues to consider for this study. For example, the process of individuation and valorisation of identity via separations between the mother and the daughter is indicative of a male-centric view of subjectivity, whereas Chodorow (1989) argues that female subjectivity is more relational and intertwined in relation of the self with others. In relation to femininity construction, research shows that the understanding of normative femininity is from a Eurocentric vantage point which may not be applicable to black women’s experiences. Moreover, the discussion of femininity construction further illuminates how African constructions of normative femininity are informed by a combination of both traditional and unique cultural-specific norms and counter notions of femininity, encompassing independence and provision. In addition, most studies on mother-daughter relationships are embedded in psychoanalytic frames and cannot be applied across cultural and racial differences, hence the need for socio-cultural frameworks which are specifically focused on context as a site of meaning making.

Although some of the referenced research was from an African-American context, due to the intersectional identities tied to culture, class and gendered racial socialisation of black women in South Africa, the African-American context-based studies may not be applicable to

femininity construction in South Africa. In terms of the empirical literature on mother-daughter relationships, much of the work has been conducted from the daughters' perspective, with one study by Gumede exploring mother and daughter communication in relation to sex as part of their feminine identity. Moreover, it should be noted that within the black family network, mothers do not "shepherd their daughters through developmental tasks alone, rather this is a collective responsibility, one that involves other mothers" (Everet *et al.*, 2016:347).

In this chapter the researcher has detailed existing literature relevant to the discussion of the construction of femininity. In addition, the significant role played by the mother-daughter relationship in relation to the development of feminine identity, roles, ideals, displays and gender stratification has been discussed (Remmo, 2009). Finally, the chapter has discussed the interactional patterns within the mother-daughter relationship and how they affect identity formations; particularly since they often occur in fragile homes characterised by the absence of fathers (Gumede, 2015). The presence of multiple mothers in black family units illustrates the presence of multiple sources of socialisation and sources of feminine ideals that defines the gender dynamics in black communities. In the following chapter, the theoretical and methodological frameworks guiding the present study will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Feminist research approach: theory and methods

Rooted in the feminist standpoint epistemology, the present study seeks to narrate black women's experiences through women's voices as they can explicate on the construction of their existence better than anyone else. As Collins (1990:209) argued, when making knowledge claims about women, it is imperative to always consider the fact that it is "women's concrete experiences that provide the ultimate criterion for credibility". Therefore, grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology, in the following section various theoretical frameworks shall be discussed, namely: black feminist standpoint theory drawing on the work of Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality theory and Feminist social constructionism, as the theoretical frameworks guiding the inquiry of the present study. Following the discussion of the theoretical frameworks, the methodology- through which the research questions and aims of the present study are answered – will be explained.

3.1 Feminist epistemology

According to Harding (1987), epistemology is defined as an overarching theory of knowledge which investigates the standards used to assess knowledge, or why we believe what we believe to be true. In addition, as an overarching theory of knowledge, epistemology influences "what, how we can know and who can know" (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019:4). Historically, research was androcentric and the power to produce knowledge exclusively rendered to men (Collins, 2000). As such, not only were women excluded from knowledge production, their experiences were not regarded as credible knowledge, and neither were they given opportunities to voice out such experiences (ibid.). In addition, men were regarded as the norm and women "irrelevant for understanding human experience" (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019:2). Based on androcentric means of knowledge production, women are stereotyped as "inconsistent, emotionally unstable, lacking in strong conscience or superego, weaker, 'nurturant' rather than productive, 'intuitive' rather than intelligent, and if they are at all 'normal', suited to the home and the family" (Stacey & Thorne, cited by Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019:2). To counter the negative constructions of women's reality, feminist scholars seek to deconstruct the sexist and androcentric biased conclusions through the usage of feminist epistemology to guide research proceedings (ibid.).

Based on feminist standpoint epistemology, which requires that women are placed at the center of research processes (Brooks, 2007), women's lived experiences are regarded as the critical starting point from which to build knowledge. Therefore, these experiences are used as lenses through which power relations and social orders are examined, subsequently serving as a base from which change may occur (Collins, 2000). Women's experiences are conceptualised as "what women do" (Brooks, 2007:56), and are manifested through the wide range of activities they engage in as part of their daily lives, including but not limited to their participation "in civil society and in paid employment" (Collins, 2000:257). These serve as lenses through which one can analyse and produce knowledge about how women construct a concrete identity and unique sets of skills in interactions with various social forces. In relation to black women, Collins (1990) argues that black women's socio-political history serves as the base through which their knowledge is produced and validated, and "when such knowledge is shared and [passed from one generation to the next] it becomes collective wisdom of black women standpoint" (Collins, 2000:257), hence, black feminist standpoint epistemology.

3.2 Black feminist standpoint theory

Black feminism is aimed at giving black women a voice to reflect on the varying subjugations they have had and continue to experience (Collins, 1990). This perspective emphasises the exploration and expression of black women's experiences in the creation of knowledge (Few, Stephens & Rose-Arnett, 2003). The above view posits that black women have needs, concerns and interests that are different from white women due to their racial and gender socialisation and experiences of marginalisation. Therefore, it is aimed at the emancipation and empowerment of black women by challenging their oppressions (Collins, 1990). Simply put, "Black feminist thought is a standpoint that reflects black women's reality, honours their identity, and privileges their voices" (Everett *et al.*, 2016: 335). Exploring the specificity of African-American women's experiences, Collins (1990) argues that black women's experiences are grounded in intersecting inequalities, including the marginalisation from authoritative knowledge production. Thus, a black feminist standpoint seeks to illuminate these intersecting inequalities through the voices of black women. By placing black women's experiences at the center of knowledge production, standpoint theory is able to analyse contentious issues about how experiences can be known and how

connections can be claimed between experiences, knowledge and reality (Collins, 2000), and what social relations exist between the experiencing object of knowledge and the knowing feminist (researcher).

Through the usage of standpoint theory, the aim is to give rural black women the power to articulate their reality with the social tools that inform their existence. Standpoint theory argues for perspectival difference based on one's social location (Grasswick, 2006). Specifically, standpoint theories claim epistemic privilege over socially and politically contested social issues on behalf of the perspectives of systematically disadvantaged social groups (Anderson, 2011). For instance, the scope of the aforementioned scope of standpoint theory are the following:

“First, it claims to offer deep over surface knowledge of society: the standpoint of the disadvantaged reveals the fundamental regularities that drive the phenomena in question, whereas the standpoint of the privileged captures only surface regularities. Second, it thereby claims to offer superior knowledge of the modality of surface regularities, and thus superior knowledge of human potentialities. Where the standpoint of the privileged tends to represent existing social inequalities as natural and necessary, the standpoint of the disadvantaged correctly represents them as socially contingent and shows how they could be overcome. Third, it claims to offer a representation of the social world in relation to universal human interests.” (Ibid, 201: np).

Unlike the standpoint of the disadvantaged, the standpoint of the privileged represents social phenomena only in relation to the interests of the privileged classes, thus ideologically misrepresenting these interests as a reflection of universal human interests (Anderson, 2011; Grasswick, 2006). Evidently, black feminist standpoint theory opens up different ways of understanding “that potentially will be more enabling and empowering for those on the margins of society” (Wigginton & LaFrance, 2019:8). Therefore, pertinent to the present study was the black women's standpoints which stem from black “women's [consciousness of race and gender oppression,] which are rooted in real material conditions structured by social class [and culture]” (Collins, 2000:191). While an oppressed groups' experiences may put them in a position to view things differently, “their lack of control over the apparatus of society that sustain ideological hegemony makes the articulation of their self-defined standpoint difficult” (Collins, 2000:185). Nonetheless, it was hoped that engaging women in conversations around how various standpoints may affect their construction of femininity and articulation of lived experiences will enable the women to make critical links between social issues and their lived realities. In addition, the women in the study will be able to understand the problems they encounter within the home and how they are subsequently passing on

oppressive or empowering notions of femininity construction on to their daughters, and daughters will be able to understand how culture, class and gender informed their mothers' articulation of femininity. However, it is important to also note that the various standpoints of women are not all experienced as tools of oppression, instead they may serve as tools to enrich women's conceptualisation of being.

While standpoint theory is crucial to understanding the lived experiences of women in a particular context and time, it is important to note that women are not a unified category, but are divided by, for example, "real relations of racialised power, heterosexism, globalisation or ablebodism" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002:75) and other social factors. Therefore, it is imperative to assess how these standpoints intersect to inform women's conceptualisation of femininity, and how their collective understanding of oppression in a masculine society enables them to make connections between social relations and their subjugation. In the following section, it will be discussed how intersectionality theory serves as a tool for assessing the interlocking nature of various standpoints in the construction of black women's lived experiences.

3.3 Intersectionality theory

According to Davis (2008), the concept of intersectionality is rooted in black feminist theory. This concept was initially coined by Kimberlee Crenshaw in her critique of the erasure of black women's experiences in legal contexts (Crenshaw cited by Davis, 2008). This concept is significant in the inquiry of how particular people are positioned differently and marginalised in a society (Staunaes, 2003). As described by Distiller and Steyn (2004:4), "it is more accurate to conceptualise the self as a matrix, a complex, shifting and interconnected series of strands". Thus, by illuminating the various standpoints that inform women's constructions of femininity, this complex matrix of existences is unravelled by women for women.

As Davis (2008:67) posits, intersectionality is defined as "the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination". This concept illuminates how certain subject-positions are multiply impacted by oppression, as in the case of black women due to sexism and racism combined, and how power relations in multiple positions, such as that of the position of black women, can be considered (Davis, 2008). In addition,

intersectionality is an approach that focuses upon “mutually constitute forms of social oppression than on single axes of difference” (Hopkins, 2019:937) or isolated standpoints.

Intersectionality theory is pertinent to the present study as it will aid in the understanding of identity as multiple and continuously changing, as individuals negotiate and re-negotiate their identity depending on context (Distiller & Steyn, 2004). In addition, since intersectionality theory is not only about multiple identities, “but is about relationality” (Hopkins, 2019:937), it will enable the critical analysis of the social context, the power relations shaping women’s construction and performance of femininity and social justice and inequalities. Of particular interest to this study is the concept of how particular mother-daughter constructions of femininity intersect; how their encounter with culture informs their construction of femininity; how class, marital status and geographical location informs their ability to make the links between social institutions and their lived experiences.

According to Distiller and Steyn (2004), an intersectional perspective of identity is necessary in the South African context as the South African past has created a society that is not only separated along racial lines, but also along class, gender, location and others as well. Therefore, it is pertinent to not look at these constructs separately, but as intricately linked in mothers’ and daughters’ positions in South African society. Thus, with the position of black women in society due to triple oppression (Kiguwa, 2001), the concept of intersectionality is particularly useful in relation to black feminist epistemology.

According to Collins (2000), knowledge does not simply arise from experience and experience is not simply individual, therefore in the following section feminist social constructionism theory will be discussed in order to show how identity and lived experiences are relational concepts.

3.4 Feminist social constructionism

Based on the well-documented work of Berger and Luckman (1966), the major theoretical framework that supports the arguments of this study is the social constructionism theory. A social constructionism perspective is based on the notion that ‘reality is constructed’ between individuals and their immediate social context (Berger & Luckman, 1996: 27; Gergen, 2011). As a result, meaning is interpreted in a social context and the knowledge that results is sourced from the perspective and position of an individual within that context (McKay,

1997). In addition, the feminist social constructionism perspective posits that there is no objective reality or construction of existence (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019), instead, reality/identity construction is located in a particular time, space and place (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Thus, through the usage of feminist social constructionism, the aim of this study is to show how mothers and daughters construct their femininity in interactions with each other and broader social structures.

According to Burr (cited in Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019:5), “social constructionists examine language as a vehicle of representation and reality.” The usage of language serves as a “repository of our prejudices, our beliefs and our assumptions” (Adichie, 2017:26). Hence, it is pertinent for this study to question not only the language of mothers and daughters, but the underlying social factors that constitute their voices in relation to femininity construction. Since every statement/construction of identity is reflective of assumptions that stem from socio-economic factors, cultural factors and dominant powers within a specific society, it is important to interrogate how women engage with such assumptions in weaving their fabric of reality or existence.

In the present study, assessing language in relation to identity construction serves as a tool through which women’s embodied experiences and internalised inferiority are questioned and assessed to see if they display any cultural prestige within a Venda context, and if so, “why are women/men always behaving in [a] culturally prestigious manner” (Adichie, 2017:26), as well as why women are potentially reinforcing such culturally prestigious ways of being, irrespective of how they may contribute to the continuous silencing of women in a society. As Berger and Luckman (1966:69) argued, roles are performed within a variety of societal and institutional settings, meaning that “by playing roles, the individuals participate in a social world. By internalising these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to (him)” [him problematised as sexist]. The above assertion is also fundamental to the construction of the present study, as it examines the role of motherhood and daughterhood, thereby examining roles unique to women that may help present a clearer picture of the ‘social world in which women interact’ (Remmo, 2009).

In the next section, the methodological tools used to conduct the research are discussed. Based on Collins’ (2000) framework of feminist epistemology, the principles of lived experience, dialogue, ethics of caring and ethics of accountability are observed throughout the research process (see the methodological section below).

3.5 Methodology

According to Harding (cited in Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019:11), methodology is defined as a “theory or analysis of how the research does or should proceed”. It is through the methodology that feminist research differs from other traditional sociological research approaches - specifically, feminist researchers have criticised traditional research for being male-centered, resulting in the exclusion of women as credible sources and subjects of knowledge production (Collins, 1990; Smith, 2004). Furthermore, Smith (2004:22) argued that the “methods, conceptual schemes and theories” within the traditional research approach are androcentric, thus women struggle to recognise or voice their experiences within this framework. Therefore, from a male perspective, “sociology discredits other experiences of the world”, particularly the exclusion of women’s experiences (Zhou, 2015:43). In response to the above critique, Smith (cited in Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019:4) argues for a research process that starts with women’s experiences of their everyday lives”.

Against this background, this research aims to examine women’s articulations in order to understand how their identity is constructed, their realities organised and the ways in which social relations, particularly the mother-daughter relationship and other societal structures, inform their experiences. Of utmost significance in this section is, firstly, a discussion of the research design used to unravel women’s gendered experiences of identity construction. Secondly, the data collection process (collected through dialogue), inclusive of sampling and data analysis, will be discussed. Lastly, the researcher will reflect on how their positionality influenced the research process, including the shifting power dynamics between themselves as a researcher and the participants.

3.5.1 Research design

Research design is defined as an overall plan through which conceptual research problems are connected to the empirical research process. Specifically, Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006:271) argue that the research design articulates “what data is required, what methods are to be used to collect and analyse this data and answer the research question.” For the purpose of this research, an exploratory qualitative research design is used as the overall research strategy to integrate the different components of the present study in a logical way that answers the research questions. This approach is aimed at applying new words, concepts,

explanations, theories and hypotheses to reality “with the expectation of offering new ways of seeing and perceiving how reality works” (Reiter, 2017:139). In addition, an exploratory research design is pertinent to the present study in that it allows the researcher to use participants’ understandings to inductively generate theory or “patterns of meaning during the course of the research” (Creswell cited by Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Hence, this approach is advantageous as the use of participants’ own constructions of identity could potentially unveil subjugated and liberated perspectives of femininity construction. In addition, the interpretivist nature of this research design will allow for broader social inquiry and deepen an understanding of issues (Levitt, Bamberg, Creswell, Frost, Josselson & Suarez-Orozco, 2018) of identity construction within the mother-daughter relationship.

Qualitative research design has been noted as the best methodology to address questions orientated towards “exploration, discovery and inductive knowledge” (Few, Stephens & Rose-Arnett, 2003: 206), as it allows for deep engagement from relatively small samples. By employing a qualitative approach, the focus will be placed on “creating depth, detail, nuance and context to the research issues” of how women attach meaning or talk about their own experience of identity construction (Sarantakos, 2013:39). By placing women at the center of knowledge production through the usage of qualitative research approaches, this study engages in the process of challenging the androcentric bias that has resulted in the limited research on black femininity construction. In the following section, the method used to sample the participants for the present study is discussed.

3.5.2 Sampling

Since this study is a qualitative exploratory study which is not aimed at generalising the results, a non-probability sampling approach is used to recruit the participants (Babbie, 2010). In particular, the snowball sampling method was utilised, as this sampling approach is purposive in its orientation. A purposive sampling technique is defined as a participant selection method in which units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researchers’ judgement about which ones will be the most useful in terms of fulfilling the goals of research (Babbie, 2010; Durrheim, 2006). This sampling approach is suitable for the present study as it will ensure that the participants recruited are relevant to the study aims

According to Tongco (2007), there is no cap with regards to number of participants recruited via purposive sampling. Therefore, the main aim is to ensure that the participants recruited yield the information required. Seidler (cited by Tongco, 2007) argued that at least five informants are needed for the data to be reliable if bias in selection is lessened in order to enable variation in the data collected. The study aims to target ten pairs of mothers and daughters, accumulating to twenty interviews, however as a result of challenges encountered (i.e. participants pulling out at the last minute) in recruiting the original sample, the number of participants was reduced to nine pairs of mothers and daughters aged between 35-55 and 18-25 respectively. I used my personal connections and that of my mother as the first point of reference for participant's recruitment. Specifically, I asked friends of mine to recommend their friends and mother, as well as asking my own mother to ask her friends if they could participate with their daughters.

The following purposive sampling criteria was used:

- Participants should be black South African mothers/daughters
- The daughters must be aged between 18 and 25.
- The mothers must be aged between 35 and 55.
- The mothers could be employed or un-employed
- Participants have their primary residence in the rural areas of Venda.

While the first method of using personal networks was effective in recruiting the first four participants, the variation in participants needed to be increased, especially because various contextual issues such as their location within the chosen district may affect their responses and perceptions of femininity construction. Thus, the snowballing technique was utilised, whereby participants were asked to recommend other mothers and daughters in different villages who might be interested in participating in the study (Babbie, 2010). The main condition for recommendations was that the dyad had to reside in a different village from the rest of the participants. However, it should be noted that participation in the study was voluntary. Therefore, each member of the mother-daughter dyad was given an individual opportunity to choose to participate or not and withdraw without an explanation or justification (Ummel & Achille, 2016). In order to ensure that the members of the dyads did

not feel pressured to participate in the study based on the consent of the other member of the dyad, the invitations were sent out individually to both the mothers and daughters.

3.5.3 Profile of participants

A total of eighteen women within the Vhembe district were recruited and interviewed. One of the dyads (Joyce and Phathutshedzo) were in the process of relocating from Ha-Mudimeli (rural area) to Louis Trichardt (urban area of Vhembe district), and as such this dyad could offer rich information in relation to how location variations intersected with their identity construction process.

The mothers' group included a married qualified high-school teacher, a married traditional healer, two married stay-at-home mothers, a divorced domestic farm worker, two divorced self-employed mothers, an unmarried domestic worker and an unmarried voluntary worker (works at a community-based old-age program). The ages of the mothers ranged between 35-55 (see table 4.1). The names of the participants were altered for reasons to be discussed in the ethical consideration section. The daughters' group is composed of four higher education students, a 25 year old stay-at-home university graduate with two children, three high school learners aged 18 and a 23 year mother of two children who was pregnant with her third child during the research process. Four of the daughters stayed with both of their parents in the same household while the rest had absent fathers physically, emotionally and financially. Although all of the participants, including the mothers, identified their own mothers as the strongest frame of reference for identity construction and support, Tshimangadzo, a 19 year old student, expressed that she is closer to her grandmother than she is with her own mother because “[her] *Mother had [her] when was young and my grandmother practically raised me*” (Tshingadzo, 19). Tshimangadzo's upbringing is reflective of the nature of black family networks whereby grandmothers actively engage in the mothering process of their grandchildren (To be elaborated upon in chapter four).

Table 3.1: Demographics of participants (mothers' group)

Pseudonym	Age	Marital status	Occupation
Caroline	54	Unmarried	Volunteer
Thilivhali	44	Married	Teacher
Sarah	55	Married	Traditional healer
Joyce	47	Married	Stay-at-home mom
Tshisikhawe	40	Divorced	Self-employed
Matodzi	35	Unmarried	Domestic worker
Musiwa	39	Single mother	Self-employed
Thifhelimbilu	47	Married	Unemployed
Pfuluwani	36	Divorced	Domestic farm worker

Table 3.2: Demographics of participants (Daughters' group)

Pseudonym	Age	Number of children	Occupation
Ndangulo	21	1 boy	Student
Mutshizi	25	2 (a boy and a girl)	Graduate
Mashudu	23	0	Student
Tshanduko	23	2 (a boy and girl)	Stay-at-home mom
Phathutshedzo	23	0	Student
Ndivhuwo	18	0	Grade 12 learner
Mukundi	18	0	Grade 11 learner
Khano	18	0	Grade 11 learner

3.5.3 Data Collection

The main means of data collection used in this research is semi-structured interviews. To further enhance the findings, observations of each discussion (i.e. the way the participants expressed their meanings) are made and noted by the researcher in order to illuminate the

nuances underlying the narratives of the participants. According to Sarantakos (2013), the interviewing process refers to a meaning-making partnership between the interviewers and their respondents. Semi-structured interviews are suitable to this study, given that they allow the space for researchers to not only ask questions guided by the interview guide, but also to follow the directions respondents take (Hennink *et al*, 2011). The interviewing process approximated an informal conversation, enabling both the researcher and the respondents to build rapport as this study is focused on unearthing personal information regarding the construction of black feminine identity in relation to the mother-daughter relationship.

The interviews lasted for 45-60 minutes. According to Morrow (2005), the process of understanding participants' constructions of meaning depends on numerous factors including culture, context and rapport. Therefore, as a means of establishing rapport, the participants were asked to describe their personal childhood and reflect on how they would change their childhood if possible. This question allowed the researcher to establish a strong rapport with the respondents and served as a strong foundation from which the other questions followed, including discussions about the mother-daughter relationship. In addition, for the comfort of the participants, the interviews were conducted in their homes in the absence of the other member of the dyad. In addition, the interviews were scheduled on the same day but at different times, thus preventing the participants from having any contact in between interviews. Since both mothers and their daughters were native Tshivenda speakers, interviews were conducted in either English or Tshivenda, depending on their choice. All of the mothers opted for interviews in Tshivenda while four of the nine daughters were interviewed in English. Of those interviewed in Tshivenda, a translator was hired to translate the transcripts from Tshivenda to English, and the researcher translated them from English to Tshivenda in order to ensure their validity.

Ummel and Achille (2016:809) identified two main methods of collecting data from dyads, namely "separate or joint interviews", with many variations existing along this continuum of separate or joint interviews. For the purpose of this study, the data was collected through separate interviews with each member of the dyad to minimise contact and discussion between the members in-between the interview sessions. Since the main priority was to access as detailed information as possible from both mothers and daughters, the researcher was the only person who interviewed each member of the dyad separately. To ensure that the participants were comfortable sharing information, they were assured that the other dyad member would not have access to their responses (Ummel & Achille, 2016). Since many

biases can creep into the data collection process when a relationship exists between research participants, the researcher took rigorous reflexive journal notes throughout the data collection process “to maximise” their awareness of “the potential threats to confidentiality and continuously think about how to best protect each member’s confidentiality” (Ummel & Achille, 2016: 809). Furthermore, no information was shared from one member to the next.

3.5.4 Data collection: Some challenges

Like any other research process, this one was not without its own challenges. For example:

- Two of the mother participants were uncomfortable with having the researcher enter their homes, so the interviews were conducted outside which affected the quality of the audio recording, however, despite the background noise the researcher was able to make sense of what the participants were saying.
- One of the participants (a daughter) had arranged for an interview, but when the researcher arrived at her home she was not there, so the interview was rescheduled for a different day, thus there may have been a discussion between the daughter and her mother about the process as her mother was interviewed before her.
- For Phathutshedzo, time constraints and her busy schedule resulted in the interview being conducted over the phone (recorded cell phone conversation via an app) as she could not physically meet.
- Due to the irregular transportation system in the rural areas, the researcher was late for one of the interviews, however new arrangements were made for the same day and the interview still took place.

3.5.5 Data analysis

In the following section, the methods employed for the purpose of analysing the collected data is discussed. Taking into account the principles of feminist epistemology (See page 35), the researcher will firstly discuss the transcription of interviews, thematic narrative analysis and the reflexivity process.

3.5.5.1 Transcription of interviews

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed in Tshivenda except for the four interviews which were conducted in English. After transcription, the researcher translated the interviews to English, and then asked someone else to translate them back to Tshivenda in order to assess the validity of the transcripts before analysis. The translator signed a confidentiality form- this ensures that the person does not disclose the information they read. In addition, the transcripts were sent to the translator under pseudonyms. Moreover, the translator did not stay in the same region as the participants which mean that they were unable to identify the participants through the responses they gave. This process transformed the interview data into a valid written form that allowed the analysis to commence.

3.5.5.2 Thematic Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis was employed as the mode of data analysis for the present study. Narrative analysis is defined as the process through which main narrative themes within the accounts of people are used to unearth how they understand and make sense of their lived experiences (Thorne, 2000). Since a narrative method of analysis is focused on content, structure and the form/s of storytelling that people use to talk about their lives, it will enable this study to explore how both mothers and daughters narrate gender identities and femininity (Chadwick, 2017; Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Moreover, narrative analysis is relevant to the present study as it has the capacity to situate “stories within broader social-cultural discourses and everyday relations of power as embodied in the lives of individual selves” (Chadwick, 2017:5).

Since narrative approaches have been critiqued for being overly preoccupied with the specific experiences undergone by individuals (Chadwick, 2017) and ignoring the multiple collisions and relational articulations of power and structural oppressions, the present study will specifically use a thematic-oriented narrative analysis method. The thematic approach is defined as a process through which data is unearthed and salient themes across different levels illuminated, structured and organised in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2008). This allows a comparative analysis of both members of the dyad’s responses in order to show the generational convergences and divergences in their constructions of femininity. Through this approach, the argument is that narratives of femininity construction within the mother-

daughter relationship are “multi-voiced and co-constructed” (Riessman cited by Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015:545) by the two members of the dyad in interactions with broader social structures.

According to Braun and Clarke (2008), the process of thematic analysis requires one to firstly familiarise oneself with the transcribed data. Therefore, in conjunction with the process of listening adapted from Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998) voice-centered relational method of analysis, the researcher read through the transcribed interview scripts three or more times. According to Mauthner and Doucet (1998), this thematic analysis is achieved through multiple readings, namely a reading process of familiarising oneself with the interviewees’ responses and researchers’ reaction to the interviewees’ responses; reading for the interviewee narrative and illustrating this narrative [individuals’ perception of their own identity]; reading for the relationships [mother-daughter relationship influence]; and reading by placing interviewees’ accounts and experiences within broader social, political, cultural and structural contexts [intersectional nodes of femininity construction].

Following the completion of the reading process and code development, the following themes were developed:

- “My femininity”: Perceptions of femininity
- Mother-daughter relational dynamics
- Normative vs counter normative constructions of femininity
- Intersectional nodes of femininity

Once the data analysis was concluded, the researcher discussed the above themes through different sub-themes (see chapter Four and Five). These results are reported on an individual, mother-daughter, and in broader social, political, structural and cultural contexts. The above data analysis method is pertinent to the present study as it enables the researcher to show how femininity often becomes transfused into the mother-daughter relationship, resulting in “paradoxical and contradictory forms of subjectivity” (Eiskovits & Koren, 2010:1646).

In the following section, I unpack how my positionality influenced the research process, including the shifting power dynamics between myself as a researcher and the participants.

3.5.6 Reflexivity: Our research journey

If anyone could have asked me before I started this research to define myself as a young black woman, I would have told them:

“my identity rests solely on the fact that I am my mother’s daughter, I am who she has dreamed I would be. I would tell them, that unlike the women in my entire lifeline, I am the first of my kind. The first to break generational curses by being the first to make it to university, and the first to have a voice. If the same people continued to ask me why I have such a strong drive to succeed, what keeps this fire inside burning? I would probably tell them, it is my mother’s failures, her unfulfilled dreams, her silence when she should be screaming to be heard, the opportunities she was denied based on her social location; but also her hardworking nature, her resilience, and her ability to make the best out of every situation that make me thrive in any situation.” (P.B. Matsila, 2020, Reflection journal).

The short quote above reflects my awakening as a young black woman. It was through my relationship with my mother, and the strong resonance I had with her as woman that I was interested in understanding the mother-daughter relationship. I wanted to know if other mothers and their daughters also had overlapping ways of constructing their identity as informed by their relationship. My own relationship with my mother is defined as friendship; this understanding played a significant role in how I viewed the mother-daughter relationship between my participants. As such, I had to be mindful to not be judgmental towards mothers and daughters who had different conceptualisations of their relationship compared to mine. Nonetheless, I had to constantly interrogate this notion as my perceptions of how a mother-daughter relationship should be may affect how I analyse the transcripts and what information is prioritised for the framing and communication of findings.

Taking the principles of reflexivity into consideration, I recognised that my position as a 23 year old black masters’ student from the rural area of Vhembe district, who previously studied in Cape Town, Northwest and now currently in Pretoria, means that I am in a position of privilege. Particularly because I see myself as a feminist, critical thinker, resilient and fully supported by my own mother and all the women around me. Therefore, when interacting with the daughters it was important that I make rigorous attempts to not project my own understanding of femininity, nor judge them on the different life choices we made. For example, during an interview with Tshanduko, a 23-year-old mother of two who was pregnant with her third child during the interview, she seemed uncomfortable:

“She walked into the room, sat on a chair and faced the wall. I asked her why she was sitting like that? And she said she is a shy person. While it was important to ensure

that she was comfortable and to establish a good rapport, I had to allow her to sit in a way that was comfortable for her. We were able to reach a consensus and she moved the chair around but answered while looking down. Tshanduko never made any eye contact. Only when we were concluding was she able to look at me and say she is proud of me and wishes her daughter can be like me”. (P.B Matsila, 2019, Reflection journal).

Reflecting on my own position, I realised that looking at me might have been a mirror image of what she hoped or had dreamed to be. Here was a 23-year-old just like her, yet our realities were different. Although we both had absent fathers in our lives, and both our mothers work on farms; due to personal reasons, Tshanduko was unable to complete her education whereas I continued- both with valid reasons for our choices. While our daily realities and struggles are different, we both see our mothers as our best friends and pillars of strength.

While I had to be understanding with the daughters and have an informal conversation with them to ensure the flow of the interview, with the mothers I had to be respectful and constantly ask them to speak to me as if I was one of their daughters (this helped them open up, as they had to take on the rightful role of a mother in this context). Nonetheless, the researcher and participant roles were clearly demarcated, and the mothers did not lead the interview, I did. I had to be humble; however, I found it difficult to look at them in the face as the interview was conducted - in my culture, looking directly in the eyes of an elder as they talk is a sign of disrespect. Nonetheless, with each interview I found myself being passed from one mother to the other:

“I found myself as a daughter to Musiwa; Caroline; Thilivhali; Pfuluwani; Joyce; Sara; Tshisikhawe; Matodzi; and Thifhelimbilu. All of them with their own parenting methods, their own conceptualisation of femininity. With Thilivhali, I felt that I was talking to my peer, a feminist just like myself but found it hard to understand why she said her relationship with her daughter was a good one and she wanted her to succeed while her own daughter mentioned that she is not supporting her independence. With Caroline, her constant referral to God as the giver of wisdom on how to be a virtuous woman, made me realise that Black mothering is not only political, psychological and social, it is also a religious process. What I see about myself and my mother in this perspective is how faith and grace has enabled us to overcome the social constraints that seek to keep us sidelined in a society of the privileged. For Pfuluwani, Musiwa, and Tshisikhawe, their bad experiences in their marriages shaped their perceptions of femininity and the way they parent their children. These women were against the aspiration of marriage and wanted their daughters to strive for financial independence through education. Admitting their own failures and mistakes; and accomplishments as responsible mothers, they took me along and through the spiritual, emotional, cultural, political and financial peaks and valleys of their daily realities in rural areas.” (P.B Matsila, Reflection journal).

According to England (1994), identity is negotiated, contested, and defended in and through space. In the context of this study, femininity construction is not only mediated through the mother-daughter relationship but also through the cultural practices that affirms ones femininity, taking into account the fact that most of the participants have gone through the cultural initiation process, I had to constantly question my own reasons for choosing not to participate and respect the perceptions of the participants. While there are participants who did not participate in the cultural ceremonies, as the researcher, I also had to be objective and avoid neither framing the conversation nor reducing the cultural practices to oppressive practices. As noted in chapter one, the information on what happens during the traditional ceremonies is normally obscured or not shared with outsiders. However, my identity as a Muvenda young woman made the participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences, particularly because they expected me to respect our customs and practices, which I attempted to do at all the stages of the research process.

During the research process I noted that I tended to agree with participants who viewed unequal gender-role distribution within the home as oppressive, especially because I believe that by virtue of being human, everyone should play an equal role in the sustenance of their livelihoods and no other person should individually carry the burden. Conversely, the perceptions of mothers and daughters who viewed gender roles as the significant qualifier of their own femininity; aspired to be good wives and good mothers before anything else; and who were comfortable with the social order of things, elicited difficult emotions for me. These opinions were difficult for me to accept as true and valid as they made me question what they meant for my own femininity construction as a young woman who grew up in the same living conditions and fought for more. Hence, I had to constantly be aware that the participants who had similar context in terms of education, age and views could over-identify with me and vice-versa, in order to protect the validity of the data collected and shield it from my own personal bias. All of the participants were regarded as experts of their own realities and I remained open to their perceptions and realities contradictory to my own, despite the above feelings stemming from these views.

“While I am seen travelling with these women, in different villages, different houses with different rules, going from the first pair to the next, getting long rich interviews and short but enough information, and participants who struggled to open up, these women saw me and I saw them. In their multi-faceted femaleness and blackness, I saw them, and they saw me. After the completion of the study, if someone came back and asked me to define my identity as a young Black woman from the rural area of Venda at Ha-Matsa village, I would simply tell them, I am the one my entire life line

was waiting for, a strong Black woman with something valid to say. A Black woman who constantly interrogates her social location, her privileges and social constraints that contribute to her complex fabric of reality, but most importantly, I am my ancestor's master piece-their voices and identities as strong resilient women embraces me as I embark on my own journey. I am a Black woman who is charting a path for the future women in her lifeline, never again will they shrink when they should be standing" (P.B Matsila, Reflection Journal).

In the end, I am walking away with the understanding that similar to their identity, mine was strongly influenced by the woman who served as my nurturer, my cheerleader, but most importantly my anchor - my mother. However, this is not fixed in stone as, similar to the daughters in my study; I am slowly forging my own identity in interactions with various social systems and people. Although I am still rooted in the strong bond I share with my mother, I am becoming my own empowered story. In the following section the ethical considerations which were considered in order to ensure the validity of the research, and to protect the research participants from any harm they may experience as a result of their participation, are discussed.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This section sets out to discuss the key ethical concerns for dyadic inquiry that arise as a result of the proposed research design and how they will be addressed. There are ethical issues pertinent to social research that involves qualitatively investigating relationships from the perspective of more than one member, in this case mothers and their daughters (Forbat & Henderson, 2003). The ethical concerns discussed in this section include confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, justice and non-maleficence, all have been observed to ensure the feminist principle of accountability and ethics of caring (Collins, 200).

3.6.1. Confidentiality / privacy

Confidentiality is defined as one of the cornerstones of research involving human participants (Ummel & Achille, 2016). Therefore, it is the main role of the researcher to ensure that the privacy of the participants is guaranteed by providing a safe context for participants to express themselves. According to the American Sociological Association Code of Ethics (cited by Ummel and Achille, 2016: 805), "confidentiality can be broken down into traditional (or external) confidentiality and internal confidentiality". The former is aimed at ensuring that participants are not identified when the content they share is published or

appears in any other forum for results dissemination (Tolich, 2004). Whereas internal confidentiality refers to “the possibility that research participants involved in a common study will be able to identify one another on the basis of published information” (Ummel & Achille, 2016:805). Since the present study seeks to explore the experiences of mothers and daughters in relation to their personal narratives of femininity construction, the information provided by the mother was not disclosed to the daughter and vice-versa during the interview process. Moreover, not disclosing the information between members will ensure that the participants do not encounter emotional harm as a result of learning about information that was not intended to be shared.

3.6.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent

Including both members of the dyad (mother-daughter relationship) may be challenging as subtle pressure may be felt if one of the members agrees to participate but the other is unwilling or unsure. This could result in the intrusion of the relationship into the recruitment process (Forbat & Henderson, 2003). As such, to ensure that participation is voluntary, each member of the dyad was given an “opportunity to choose to participate or not, and to withdraw without explanation or justification (Shanazarian, Hagemann, Aburto & Rose: 2013:3; Ummel & Achille, 2016: 808). As previously noted, independent invitations were sent out to mothers and daughters in order to create a context in which both parties could freely decide for themselves.

After receiving the responses for participation, I selected the participants in which both dyads agreed to participate in the interviewing process. Moreover, before the commencement of the interviews, the participants were informed of the limits of internal and external confidentiality and given detailed information with regards to the research process in order to ensure informed consent. Since committing to protecting the confidentiality of both members of the dyad (mothers and daughters) limits the dissemination of the findings, it was explained to the participants that the confidentiality is limited, meaning “that there is a risk that some verbatim or other information contained in a publication could be recognised by other member of the dyad” (Ummel & Achille, 2016: 809). This was clearly explained to participants as part of informed consent and they proceeded only if they agreed to this risk. This is in line with the approach taken by other dyadic research designs (see Eisikovits &

Koren, 2010; Ummel & Achille, 2016). External confidentiality was thus protected and participants were informed about inherent internal confidentiality risks (Ummel & Achille, 2016).

3.6.3 Anonymity

Anonymity is strongly linked with internal and external confidentiality, as extra care must be taken to ensure that details are rendered sufficiently anonymous to prevent either party from being exposed (Ummel & Achille, 2016). Due to the nature of the research project and its interest in tracing the mother-daughter relationship in relation to feminine identity constructions, it is not possible to fully disguise such a relationship. Therefore, external confidentiality was guaranteed by using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. As explained in the confidentiality section (page 54- 55), the risks to internal confidentiality inherent in this kind of study were explained to participants as part of the informed consent procedure. Upon the completion of data collection, it was noticed that some participants disclosed personal information which may harm their relationships; hence, in order to protect the mother-daughter relationship of the participants, names were altered to increase internal confidentiality, although they had consented to the usage of their real names. In addition, the use of pseudonyms is aimed at ensuring that the participants are protected from prejudice based on the information they share (Ummel & Achille, 2016).

3.6.4 Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence is an ethical issue that supplements the autonomy principle and “requires the researcher to ensure that no harm befalls research participants as a direct or indirect consequence of the research” (Wassenaar, 2006:67). Although there were no significant risks of participants being harmed during the interview process, it is important to note that the harm may not necessarily be physical, but could be emotional as some participants may reflect on the challenging relationships they have with their children or mothers. Therefore, it was ensured that the participants were comfortable. Following the completion of the interviews, each participant was debriefed and was given a counselling service toll-free number for further emotional and mental support.

Even with the utmost care taken to ensure that no harm befall any of the participants, at the end of the interview, some mothers expressed that they felt that the interview provoked feelings of shame and inadequacy, whereas daughters mentioned that the interviewing process was a good way to verbally express their goals and aspirations and talk about their relationships with their mothers. For some daughters, the interview illuminated a great need for them to sit down and communicate with their mothers about various challenges they face on a daily basis. Both parties were encouraged to take advantage of the toll free counselling number and to invest in nurturing their mother-daughter relationship.

3.6.5 Justice

This philosophical principle requires that the researcher treats all the participants with fairness and equity during all the stages of the research process (Wassenaar, 2006). As a researcher I ensured fairness, equity and avoided conflict of interest by addressing the main effects of influence on the interviewing process. For instance, since the interviews were conducted independently, there was a high risk of narratives being heavily guided by discussion within the first interview (Forbat & Henderson, 2003). Since some participants introduced an area of interest to which the other makes no reference, it was imperative that although the area of interest was relevant to the research question, the participants were treated as independent thinkers who embodied various experiences throughout the research process (Forbat & Henderson, 2003).

Every research is guided by ethical principles, to protect the interviewees and ensure ethical proceeding of this study, the researcher communicated and addressed all of the principles with the participants before and after the interviewing process.

3.7 Conclusion

As Collins (2000) argued, research based on feminist epistemology is characterised by the principles of lived experiences, dialogue, ethics of caring, and ethics of accountability. These principles were observed in the following ways, namely by placing women's experience at the center of knowledge production, using interviews to facilitate dialogues and applying various ethical considerations throughout the research process.

As noted in the preceding sections, it was important for the researcher to remain cognisant of the subjective nature of the current research project. Therefore, this chapter details the various steps taken to ensure the validity, and that participants are safe and respected at all stages of the research process. Through excerpts taken from my research journal, the various factors stemming from my own emotional involvement and level of investment in the topic; my presumptions about the topic and "opinions that develop during interaction with existing literature as well as interaction with participants [that can] obstruct impartial data collection and interpretation" (Molongoana, 2015:59) are discussed. The reflection process revealed that the interview process is not objective, neutral or one-sided, but that it is a complex process through which knowledge is co-constructed and challenged throughout the process. In addition, the research process revealed that femininity construction is socio-culturally located, hence the shifting power dynamics in conversations with mothers and daughters.

In the next two chapters the key findings of the study are presented and the themes stemming from the individual interviews with the mothers and daughters are discussed.

Chapter 4: The mother-daughter relationship: complexities

The mother-daughter relationship is defined as a complex lifelong relationship characterised by periods of conflicts stemming from the tension between mothers' and daughters' "sense of separate I and [their] perception of collective we" (Lerner, cited in Boyd, 1989:283). Since the two women share a gender, their interaction results in multiple identities of femininity that intersect to give rise to plural selves as the two strive for intra-dyadic separation and individuation (Boyd, 1989). For the purpose of this study, the mother-daughter relationship is defined as the most critical site through which femininity is constructed and reconstructed. To understand how the mother-daughter relationship is fundamental to femininity construction, the participants were asked to define their own identities and reflect on their relationship with their own mothers/daughters respectively. Therefore, in this chapter, women's perceptions of their femininity and the relational dynamics between the two members of the dyad will be discussed, as well as how these dynamics contribute to their individual conceptualisation of femininity. The discussion is a cross-generational comparative analysis in order to illustrate the disconnections and connections in their perceptions of femininity and conceptualisation of their relationship - with a focus on both their own voices and the fundamental socio-cultural notions that influence their definitions (i.e. feminine / womanhood ideals and respectability-politics).

4.1 “My femininity”: perceptions of femininity

Significant studies have accounted for gender constructions from a social constructionism perspective (Cheesebro, 2001; Connell, 2002; Dowling, 2011; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Piller, 2006; Tracy & Scott, 2006) and these studies have confirmed the argument put forward by Berger and Luckman (1996) that, similar to reality, gender identity is constructed between individuals and their immediate social contexts. This means that there is no objective construction of existence; hence, identity is fundamentally a relational concept (McKay, 1997). As discussed in the literature review section, explorations of gender identity in relation to black femininity within the South African context are still relatively new endeavours.

However, scholars like Gqola, Lesch and Kruger, Salo and Davids, amongst others previously discussed, have noted that femininity construction is rooted within the mother-daughter relationship as mothers serve as the primary source of socialisation for their daughters. In addition, in her study within the rural Venda, Makongodza (2010) concluded that femininity construction is established in interactions with various socio-cultural factors that may prohibit or enable the construction of empowered femininity, with parents playing a significant role to ensure that socially desirable femininity is enacted. While the above observations hold true to the current study, in response to their own perceptions of femininity, the most apparent groupings of sub-themes in the perception of femininity for daughters were: “I am a mother”; comparison to own mother and undefined. Whereas for mothers, the following sub-themes were recorded: “responsible women” and comparison to own mother.

4.1.1 Comparison to own mother

In both groups of participants, the first noteworthy finding - repeated and consistent comparison to their own mother - reflects how they constantly interrogate (both consciously and unconsciously) their being in relation to other beings. In this way, identity perception is conceptualised as a product of the encounter between the individual and their immediate environment (Alvarez, 2008). Specifically, these perceptions are shaped through mother-daughter encounters because mothers serve as the primary frame of reference for their daughters since the mother is most often the first other female human that the daughter knows

in her life. Below are the responses that the mothers and daughters gave in terms of making a comparison to their own mothers. These perceptions were reflective of how similar or different the interviewees think they are to their mothers (including the admission of possessing some of the negative or positive qualities that their mothers have):

Khano (18): “mmmh, OK, my mother can get angry without saying why she is angry, but as I am, I can be able to say why I’m angry. When she asks me what’s wrong, I can tell her what’s making me angry, I can answer.”

Here Khano expresses how personality differences between herself and her mother makes their interaction a challenging one, as she never knows what it is that makes her mother angry. However, Khano also illustrates how she is completely different from her mother as she can convey her grievances verbally. Interestingly, Khano’s mother (Pfuluwani) used the same personality attributes to define herself as distinct from her own mother. She explained:

Pfuluwani (36): “I am very different from my mother. The difference between me and my mother is that she doesn’t know how to solve matters; she has that thing of solving matters by taking/picking sides for someone she loves. But a person must live in the truth without taking sides [...] what I love about my mother is that she doesn’t divide her children, so if I go there and say my elder sister has wronged me, she will say, ‘now, what should I do to her? She is your mother’s child, and if you don’t unite now, how will you live?’ [...] this is the most important thing that I learnt from my mother. It taught us unity and love.”

Pfuluwani’s description of the differences between herself and her mother was somewhat contradictory: at first, she mentioned that her mother does not know how to solve matters as she constantly takes sides. However, she further states that she also loves her mother for not dividing her children, especially if there are conflicts between siblings - which implies that, to maintain peace, she may be a neutral individual and neutrality does not always result in resolution. Pfuluwani further explains that, unlike her own mother, she is able to communicate her feelings (although her daughter had stated otherwise):

Pfuluwani (36): “I know how to maintain peace with my children and when someone is wrong, I am able to tell them straight: ‘I don’t like what you are doing.’ It is not taking sides but telling people when they are wrong.”

Through her response, Pfuluwani is able to show how her own mother shaped her parenting methods and how she interacts with her children. She previously described her own mother as a peacemaker, and it is evident that in each generation, starting from Pfuluwani’s mother, Pfuluwani and Khano, that these women’s life stories are intricately influenced by more than language and feminine ideals, but their socio-cultural perspectives on how to interact with

others and ideas unfolded out of each other's lives - whether they are actually able to achieve these in practice or not.

Unlike Khano, who can communicate when she is not feeling comfortable, Mutshidzi would rather keep herself occupied or sleep to avoid any confrontations (although her own mother is very outspoken). This way of dealing with problems informs her identity as a daughter, as a mother and as an individual in her society:

Mutshidzi (25): "my mom talks a lot, she is very outspoken, maybe that is why everything is easy for her, she is not intimidated by anyone [...] she can talk for herself. So, me, I close my mouth even when I have a problem. I cannot share with anyone; I just keep quiet [...] and it becomes my own problem to keep."

Mutshidzi goes on to explain her coping methods:

Mutshidzi (25): "well, I do all the household chores, but the issue is that every time when I have issues I will clean and then sleep. Sleeping kills me a lot. Like, I sleep a lot."

Mutshidzi's inability to express anger or aggression intersects with traditional conceptions of femininity which define a woman as a peacemaker. In this instance, the women are silent and retreat into solitude in order to avoid 'making noise'. However, Mutshidzi talks about her own mother (Thilivhali) as a woman that is not afraid to call attention to her problems, unlike Mutshidzi, who would rather sleep instead of expressing her dissatisfaction or pain, Thilivhali is described as someone who does not suffer in self-sacrificial silence which is described by the women as an 'ideal' way of dealing with problems a woman should use, instead she speaks up. This makes Thilivhali's ability to firmly state how she feels an admirable aspect of her femininity as her daughter mentioned.

Similar to Mutshidzi's mother, who (in her daughter's view) is able to stand up for herself, Joyce, a forty-seven-year-old married mother of three expressed that:

Joyce (47): "haaa! My mom is a person who does not like talking too much, so even if someone hurts her, she will not say anything, you see. But I speak a lot [laughs]. If, let's say, there is something I don't like, or if someone does not treat me well [...] or at our home if my mother does not treat me well, I speak. I love speaking because it is in speaking that we can solve our problems and there will be peace. That's what makes me a great woman [...] I stand up for myself."

It is evident that being able to defend herself is something Joyce is proud of, as she mentions that it makes her a "great woman". This ability (or inability) to solve problems or deal directly with conflicts by voicing problematic issues seems to be a recurring theme in relation to the women's self-perception as compared to their mothers. While most of the daughters were able to locate clear points of diversion from their mothers, some daughters addressed

their process of comparative self-perception with mixed feelings. For instance, twenty-three-year-old Mashudu said:

Mashudu (23): “well, my mom is very outspoken and sometimes she is harsh and I feel like sometimes when I am talking to people I do feel that, hai, noooo, here it is not me who is talking but my mom [...] even when she is angry, or when she is not, I guess it is the way she is or what she is used to [...] OK, in the kitchen we cook the same because she is the one that taught me... she is still teaching me. And even when someone hurts her, she says it right there, right then and I also do the same [...] when I feel that someone has hurt me, I tell them right there, ‘I don’t like the way you treat me.’”

Mashudu’s response is reflective of the fact that although the gendered body recognises itself as separate or different from the world or others, the interaction between the individuals is still able to permeate these self-imposed boundaries or disconnection from others, therefore informing “the conscious and unconscious split of the subjects” (Alvarez, 2008:4). Evidently, Mashudu’s response illustrates how the interaction between mothers and daughters results in overlaps of existence, particularly as expressed through voices: multiple times throughout the interview she would mention that she feels her mother’s voice comes through, or that it was not her who was speaking, but her mother.

While some mothers were described as vocal by their daughters, Ndivhuwo, an eighteen-year-old high school pupil, explained that her mother is too silent and, as such, people tend to maltreat her within the home by taking advantage of her kindness. Thus, although Ndivhuwo does not explicitly express how her personality differs with her mother’s, she knows that she would want to be a different woman - one who would speak out for herself.

Ndivhuwo (18): “My mother is too quiet; she does not speak up for herself. They make her work too much, she just keeps quiet even when she is tired. Her husband does something bad; she just keeps quiet. I don’t want to be like that, I think it is because she is not working, but I will study hard, work and be able to have a voice in my house. I will not keep quiet when I am hurting and allow people to walk all over me. Even men abuse you if you are too quiet, you see. I don’t want that.”

From Ndivhuwo’s response we can deduce that a lack of financial independence or employment is associated with diminished agency in terms of expressing one’s daily struggles. But most importantly, this quietness contributes to continuous patriarchal oppression and women’s inability to voice their difficulties may contribute to a sense of marginalisation. Moreover, their (in)ability to voice their oppression simultaneously signifies how they derive their shared identities as women as peaceful, silent beings. The multiplicity of their identities in interaction further highlights how subjectivity is “intimately intertwined

with the concept of agency” (Alvarez, 2008:2), or, simply put, the agency to express themselves. In addition, the challenges experienced by women in interactions with each other may result in the ability to have open communication about various factors that contribute to their femininity construction.

It was also interesting to note how there were so many more similarities between the mothers and daughters than they disclosed in their interviews - for example, the mother group often expressed that they differ from their own mothers because they can voice their grievances, yet their own daughters expressed that this was not the case. The above disconnection is reflective of how intergenerational coping mechanisms or interactional patterns may be passed from one generation to the next: while mothers think they are constructing a separate sense of identity from their own mothers, they instead reproduce the very same personality traits and ways of being. To sum up, these women are more similar in interaction than they think they are. Specifically, the concept of verbal agency is used as a means of comparison between mothers and daughters.

4.1.2 “I am a mother” and a “Responsible woman”

In talking about who they are as young women, the daughters who already had children of their own told their stories heavily laden with traditional understandings of the roles of motherhood (i.e. loving, nurturing, providing and caring, etc.). Three of the participants had children by the time this interview took place. Tshanduko (23) has two daughters and was pregnant with her third child when she was interviewed. When asked to define herself, she responded:

Tshanduko (23): “being a woman to me means that I am a person who is now grown, I tell myself that I am now called the ‘people’s parent,’ I have to know that when I have children, I have to buy them food, and buy them clothes and give them the full support that a child expects from a parent or living in a home just like other kids.”

When asked to explain what she admires in other young women, as a way to find out how she describes herself separate from her role as a mother, she referred to how she interacts with her friends on a daily basis and what they learn from each other:

Tshanduko (23): “it’s only after I have sat down with those girls or women and tell that friend to buy their child food, before you get your hair done - a friend has to buy clothes for the child before winter approaches. Your child must not lack when you

have money, using it on useless things like buying alcohol, gambling, that's what we advise each other about, and what I love to be cautioned about, when I am seated with others. A woman to me puts her children's rights before her own."

The response above reflects not only how Tshanduko's motherhood role is deeply ingrained in her femininity conceptualisation, but also how through her interaction with her friends she is able to express a more 'feminine' way of experiencing life a women must embody after childbirth, by putting their children's needs before their own, reflecting selflessness. Here motherhood is central to femininity conceptualisation and results in the establishment of a community of women whose lives are connected by this aspect of identity.

Mutshidzi is a mother of two like Tshanduko - she is a twenty-five-year-old who describes herself primarily as a mother and named motherhood as one of her proudest achievements in life:

Mutshidzi (25): "argh, it is my children. Here I am, I am Jessica's mother."

This sense of pride is echoed by Ndangulo (21), as her identity as a young mother means that she provides monetary and emotional support to her two-year-old son:

Ndangulo (21): "I am a mother, a good mother. I really see myself as a good mother, because to my child, anything that my child needs, with the little money that I get plus grant, I can do for him."

It is evident that for these young mothers, parenthood is deeply ingrained in their self-perception, hence the struggle to define themselves independent of their roles as mothers. This shows that their femininity is intimately intertwined with the concept of mothering. Thus, with an acknowledgement of motherhood at the center of femininity, it is evident that for these young mothers their identity construction is an ongoing process that is mutually influenced by subjective and constructed experiences which subsequently connect them to their own mothers.

While motherhood was central to these daughters' conceptualisations of femininity, for their mothers, respect and responsibility - both as women and mothers - was central to their complex perception of existence. All nine of the women interviewed in the mothers group referred to themselves as 'responsible women' in one fashion or another. The key descriptors for this category included: being responsible to their children by providing emotional and monetary values; being responsible with their own bodies; and being responsible in terms of how they interact with others. For one of the married mothers, being responsible meant being

loving to her husband and taking good care of her in-laws. The recurrence of this theme was noted in individuals' narrative of their self-perception and across the mothers' data set.

For example, a thirty-six-year-old single mother of two daughters said:

Pfuluwani (36): "a woman is seen as peaceful, in fact a person who is respectable and responsible with her children, when they say a person is a woman. What I am most proud of is that I have my own house, which, when I look, I can see that it is good, to make my eyes sparkle and my children happy. I'm proud of that because I built it alone without any help. And when my children look at me, they *respect* me like a woman." [emphasis mine].

Similarly, a thirty-nine-year-old single mother of three said:

Musiwa (39): "when someone is said to be a woman, they're talking about someone who is a pillar of the household, a person who can stand her ground, someone who takes care of her children and is *respectable*. The fact that I support my children gives me pride. I have built a home for them and they know that even when they're living their own lives, this is the place to lay their heads down [...] eh! Being a woman is about taking care of your children, putting your children's rights before your own." [emphasis mine]

Pfuluwani emphasises peace as a significant aspect of femininity, as she previously expressed when she was comparing herself to her own mother. In addition, she talks about how she independently built her children a house they are proud of. Like Pfuluwani, Musiwa explains that womanhood is intricately linked with provision, respectability and prioritising children over ones' personal needs. While the process of provision is traditionally conceived of as being a 'male' role, for these women, their ability to provide is a source of empowerment, and also represents the centrality of selflessness to femininity.

To echo the importance of respect as part of the femininity conceptualisation, a fifty-four year-old single mother of three spoke about 'respect' as part of how she articulates her sense of responsibility to herself, and maintains her dignity and worth as an unmarried woman. This self-respect also in turn enables her to raise respectful children:

Caroline (54): "According to the Venda customs when they say this is a woman, it would be directed to someone who is married, yes! If she is not married, then she isn't a woman. Ending up unmarried as you are! Just like myself, I live alone and I'm unmarried. I must make/protect my own worth and dignity. Just as I'm raising my children alone, my children are so *respectful*, Pfarelo. I'm not trying to brag/gloat/show off or anything like that. Thiathu [her son] as he is, you won't find him speaking to me in whichever way he likes. He speaks with me in a *respectful* manner because I raised him by law. Yes, he grew up *respecting* me because I also showed him *respect* as I raised him." [emphasis mine].

Note how when she defines herself, the concept of respect is dominant. In addition, respect means a great deal to her as an unmarried woman who must play both the roles of ‘mother’ and ‘father’. Specifically, since she needs to take on the traditionally ‘male’ role of disciplining her children, it is important that they respect her.

Caroline (54): “The most important thing as I look at myself, I’m the kind of person who stays alone here, in my own house. The most important thing is that I have raised my children all alone and my children know the rules very well. Manners/rules/law and *respect* to me are the most important. I gave them a good life that even some people with fathers do not have. As I am, my children understand me very well.” [emphasis mine]

By being the embodiment of respect, Caroline is able to create a ‘homely’ environment for her children in which all of the family members understand each other and conform to the house rules. Similar to Caroline, Sarah, a married mother of five children (of which three are girls) defined herself in the following way:

Sarah (55): “A woman is called a woman when she is responsible for her household. No matter what happens, she holds on and stands strong. I am that woman because I stand for everything, I am responsible and *respectful*, so I am a good woman.” [emphasis mine].

For Sarah, respectability and responsibility are equated to her conceptualisation of a “good woman”. In addition, her definition of a woman as someone who “no matter what holds on and stands strong” is reflective of resilience as part of femininity construction. Like the women in the study of Chaney (2011) about black women’s conceptualisation of femininity, perseverance, independence and strength are central to the above women’s femininity - expressed through the notion of provision, speaking up and respectability.

Both the mothers’ and the daughters’ conceptualisations of their femininity and identities as mothers are reflective of their moralistic discourses around respectability and responsibility. These discourses are rooted within the ‘politics of respectability’ - a term developed by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her 1993 book, *Righteous Discontent: the women’s movement in Black Baptist church, 1880-1920*, to describe the social and political changes in the black community during this time. As she argued, this term describes how members of marginalised groups promote the notion of respectability in order to portray their personal social values as continuous and compatible with dominant values (Higginbotham, 1993). In doing so, these members of the marginalised groups conform to stereotypes associated with their groups so that they can be respected (Pickens, 2015). In relation to women, the expression of gender in alignment with ‘respectable’ behaviour results in access to certain

rights and benefits accorded by the socio-cultural systems of hegemonic femininity (Harris, 2003). In addition, these may afford them respect in a masculine world system.

For both the mothers' group and the daughters' group, the most consistent adjectives that defined their sense of respectability were related to motherhood, provision of monetary and emotional support for their children, respecting their bodies and their children. For example, Tshanduko, a twenty-three-year-old mother of two, explained that in conversation with her friends, she advises them about putting their children's needs before their own. While it is important for women to speak into the existence of other women's conceptualisation of femininity through motivation, Tshanduko's act also reflects motherhood as central to femininity through being responsible to one's children; beyond this, behavioural decorum is also associated with motherhood, serving "a gatekeeping function, by establishing an entrance fee to the right and respect and the right to full [membership into her group of friends]" (Harris, 2003: 213). Caroline, a fifty-four-year-old unmarried mother of three, explained that, according to Vhavenda customs, marriage accords one full and automatic access to womanhood and respect, hence, for unmarried women, there is a remaining need to conform to feminine ideals such as being dignified, upholding strict sexual morality and raising their children with respect in order to be accorded the respect that other (married) women receive. This double standard may contribute to stratification within the womanhood system, as unmarried women may be viewed as lesser than married women.

At the intersection of respect and motherhood is the feminisation of childcare. None of the women above reported or received any help from the fathers of their children. This feminisation of childcare results in fathers not being held accountable in their roles as parents. As Caroline (54) explained, she was obliged to play a double role of being both a mother and a father, hence the need to ensure that her children respected her at all times. While motherhood is central to their conceptualisation of femininity, Mutshidzi's (25) self-perception as just a mother to her daughter was a difficult thing to accept, particularly because she is an educated young mother with a multifaceted identity and yet could not conceptualise this multi-layered fabric of her existence beyond motherhood. However, her conceptualisation as "just a mother" may also reflect how she prioritises her children as much as other women in the study, implying that she wants to ensure that her children respect her at all times.

So far, both the mothers' group and the daughters' group were able to articulate their self-perception of femininity, with the clear notion of respect as firmly central to their existence. In addition, the mothers derived a strong sense of femininity from perceiving themselves as good mothers who provide for their children to their best ability. Therefore, it is in a degree of contrast that the following section details young women (daughters) who are more confused about their identities or are in a state of uncertainty.

4.1.3 Undefined

The participants' descriptions in this sub-theme illustrated that understanding womanhood was something they felt they had yet to achieve - an incomplete process (Fomaniak-Turner, 2006). Indeed, some of the daughters who did not have children explained that they did not know how to conceptualise their own femininity and that they were, or they are, still working to find out what it means as they grow older.

For example, Tshimangadzo (19) is currently taking an educational gap year. When asked to describe herself as a young woman, she struggled to give answers:

Tshimangadzo (19): "Uhmhhh, I don't know."

Thinking that the question was not making sense, the researcher rephrased it and asked her to talk about herself, but she was still unable to articulate her self-perception:

Tshimangadzo (19): "Uhmhhhhhh, it is not something I think about, I think."

As a way to probe further, she was asked about what she was most proud of as a young woman, whether it be her accomplishments, what she sees in the mirror or how she thinks of herself. To this Tshimangadzo responded:

Tshimangadzo (19): "I don't know, I don't really think about it. But I am proud of my family. The way they raised all of us. We are all good people, although we do not have much, we have each other. And everyone here always accomplishes all their dreams."

From these comments, it was evident that, due to the strong familial bonds, the achievements of one family member automatically translated into the self-perception of another (specifically, a sense of pride). Moreover, there is a sense of collective identity as Tshimangadzo's family fundamentally means a great deal to her.

Very much like Tshimangadzo in terms of her initial hesitation, when asked to define herself, Mukundi said:

Mukundi(18): “I don’t know [laughs]. Uhm mmmmm, I don’t know.”

As with Tshimangadzo, the question was rephrased and she was asked to tell the researcher a little bit about herself:

Mukundi (18): “Okay [...] I wish for myself to be like a girl, you see [...] Okay, I don’t know how to say it.”

Although the inability to describe ones’ self-perception may be based on the fact that it is a fundamentally incomplete process (Fomaniak-Turner, 2006), some of the participants simply found it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings in words. For example, Mashudu (23) said:

Mashudu (23): “Eeeeeeeeyh! It is unexplainable; I mean, I don’t think I can put it into words, you see?”

To explore further, the researcher asked her: “let’s say I am interviewing you... Or want to be friends and I ask you, ‘can you please define yourself to me?’ - what would you say?”

She answered:

Mashudu (23): “well, I would tell you that I am Mashudu, the child of the traditional healer. That is all. Nothing more, nothing less.”

She describes herself in relation to her parents, and to make sure that she was not probed further she closed off the discussion by saying “nothing more, nothing less” and thus this tangent was dropped. This uncertainty was reflected yet again when Ndivhuwo (18) said:

Ndivhuwo (18): “I cannot put it into words. I am still working on it, you see, but I know what I don’t want to be - I don’t want to be a girl or woman who depends on men.”

Both Mashudu and Ndivhuwo’s responses reflect their commitment and deep longing for independence as a fundamental part of their sense of self.

4.2 Mother-daughter relational dynamics

The mother-daughter relationship is a unique relationship different from any other familial bond (Boyd, 1989). It is argued that the significance of this relationship lies in the fact that: “[o]f all familial relationships, the mother-daughter one is most likely to remain important for both parties, even when major life changes occur, such as the daughter’s marriage or mother’s illness” (Bojczyk *et al.*, 2011:453). However, like any other relationship, the mother-daughter relationship also goes through periods of conflict and tension (Lerner, cited by Boyd, 1989). Therefore, this section will discuss the disconnections and connections in mothers’ and daughters’ conceptualisations of their relationship/interactions and how these may contribute to their broader conceptualisation of femininity. Through a thematic analysis of the relational dynamics between mothers and daughters their feelings about their relationship; their interactions in terms of boundaries and communication and, last but not least, the expectations that both parties have of their relationship and of their expressions of femininity as a whole will all be discussed.

4.2.1 Mother-daughter relationship emotions

In Gqola’s book, *Reflecting Rogue: inside the mind of a feminist*, the mother-daughter relationship was characterised by feelings of fear, envy, adoration and resentment (2017). For the mothers and daughters in this study, this relationship was deeply fraught, particularly with a feeling of invisibility, with both parties expressing that the other dismisses them, their embodied experiences and their counsel. In addition, there was also a clear sense of loss and longing for a better mother-daughter relationship.

4.2.1.1 Unseen/unheard

From the present study, it can be inferred that when given a daughter to raise, black women are focused on ensuring that their daughters do not make the same mistakes they made when growing up, but most importantly, that their daughters develop a sense of self that prepares them to independently stand on their own two feet against anything that threatens their existence and position as black women in a society. As Nash (2018) argues, black mothering is a political process. The mothers in this study, mostly unemployed or working on farms,

strongly believe that it is through education that their daughters can emancipate themselves from poverty and possibly escape the shackles of ‘unhappy’ marriages. However, as important as it is for the mothers to ensure their daughters develop a positive sense of self, these mothers often feel unseen or unheard when their daughters do not heed their motherly advice; and, simultaneously, daughters feel the same, as their mothers do not necessarily see them as independent beings with a separate sense of self or having the agency to define and live out their own femininity on their own terms.

The feeling of invisibility through being “unseen” and “unheard” is manifested in relation to the communication between the mother and her daughter or vice-versa.

For example: Joyce (a married forty-seven-year-old mother of two daughters and a son) explained:

Joyce (47): “my child and I, we used to sit down and talk, and we would reach an understanding, that is why you hear me saying that you guys going to school has ruined you. Now when I speak to her she laughs at me, in my heart it hurts, it’s like she does not see me as a person. And she does say to me: “Mom, I am supposed to tell you everything. Why are you like this? You are supposed to be my friend.” But I will tell her, “don’t eat with your feet on the couch” and she will laugh at me and do it anyway. I tell her, “don’t eat in the bedroom, you will find the plate there.” I mean, she should hear me, that is what I am doing - my mother does not like it, you see.”

While Joyce feels that her daughter does not see her or hear her as a result of having gone to school, Phathutshedzo, her daughter, mentioned that she finds it difficult to talk to her mother due to the blurred lines between her mother and father, and she feels caught in the middle. Specifically, she said:

Phathutshedzo (23): “My relationship with my mother since a young age has been a good one. She was a mother of love, always showing me love and taking care of me but, when I was getting older, I noticed that there were challenges when I spoke with my mother. Sometimes when I would tell her important information, she would include my father and it didn’t sit well with me because, as a female child, I would like to have a conversation with my mother, just the two of us, so we can understand one another because, as a female child, I would like to have a secret with my mother. I would like for her to just sit with me, give herself time to spend with me as her child so we can just talk, just the two of us so she can tell me, “my child, as you grow up, these are the challenges you are going to come across in life and you should deal with them in this way without my father involved.”

Although Phathutshedzo stays with both her mother and father, she clearly longs for a separate relationship with her mother, in which what they discuss is not shared with the other members of her family, especially her father. This reflects what Chodorow (cited by Crew (n.d)) argued: although daughters are less likely to abandon their attachment to their mothers

in order to form relationships with their fathers, they define themselves in a relational triangle with both the mother and father. In addition to Phathutshedzo being in a relational triangle with both of her parents, her mother is also in a relational triangle where she must be a mother, wife, and parent - and that includes being able to communicate with her husband with regards to their children, hence, the diffusion of privacy between the mother and daughter.

The mother-daughter relationship is also fraught with ambivalence and conflicts that stem from the tensions between the individual “I” and collective “we” (Lerner, cited by Boyd, 1989:293). This tension stems from the women’s inability to conceptualise an identity independent from each other, resulting in overlaps and the daughters feeling “unseen” or “unheard” in such a way that they struggle to attain their autonomy, while the mothers struggle to separate from their children as a result of the deep friendship between the two.

For example, Caroline, a mother, explained:

Caroline (54): “I love my daughter very much. I want her to have a lovely family, but it will be hard. I can feel it, it will be very hard. I’ll be losing a friend because I don’t think the son-in-law will allow me to always come and visit. Aaaah! Maybe if the son-in-law can accept me as his mother and understand that I have only one daughter... in fact, this person who is with my daughter knows very well that my daughter and I cannot be separated. Even if she has gone to where her man is, we always phone each other every day. If she leaves now, the moment she arrives you’ll hear her say “Mom, I’ve arrived.” I also feel happy knowing that she travelled well. I just can’t live without her.”

As argued by de Beauvoir (2011) and Phillips (1991), mothers reproduce themselves in their daughters which makes it easy for them to project their motives, wishes and hopes onto their children of the same sex as themselves. In the same way, daughters find it easier to relate to their mothers than their fathers. Evidently, both the mothers and daughters in this research define the mother as the most important person in their lives. This was true for all of the daughters except Tshimangadzo who had a stronger relationship with her grandmother than she did with her mother, as well as for some of the younger mothers: Tshisikhawe, Joyce, Pfuluwani, Matodzi and Musiwa. However, for the older mothers: Sarah, Caroline, and Thifhelimbilu, their relationships with their own mothers was a challenging one as they were unable to establish strong bonds nor talk with them as easily as they could with their daughters. As previously mentioned, the definitively mutual mother-daughter relationship results in the daughters’ need for confirmation from their mothers and community, as well as support as they establish their own identity. Clearly, the relationship between the mother and

daughter can become “extremely close and possibly enmeshed” (Shu-Chun, 2005:36), therefore, the need for independence is not only relevant to daughters, but to mothers too.

While friendship between the mother and daughter is important, the mother’s denial of the daughter’s independence is also a manifestation of the sub-theme responsible women, in which a mother prioritises her mothering role, however this becomes problematic as the mother struggles to let the daughter individuate. For Mutshidzi (a twenty-five-year-old single mother of two), her mothers’ denial of her independence is a hindrance as she struggles to provide for her children and is afraid she will not be able to do so in future should her mother, Thilivhali, pass away if she is not allowed to look for a job herself. What was particularly interesting about Mutshidzi and her mother is that Thilivhali herself was previously denied the ability to finish school after giving birth to Mutshidzi (as mentioned in the normative and counter-normative construction of femininity section: page 94-98), yet now she is doing the very same with her own daughter. This denial of agency and independence seems to be based on the need for the mother to have control over her daughter, or perhaps mothering the daughter part of herself. Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983, cited in Boyd, 1978) argue that the mothers’ identification with her daughter may result in the mother unconsciously behaving towards her daughter in a way that she internally acts towards the daughter part of herself - in this way, she is living out her childhood as a young woman who encountered challenges when trying to establish her independence. Thus, she sees her ability to support her daughter as a process that should not end simply because her daughter is now a mother. Therefore, it is evident that there are deep tensions between the perception of the separate “I” and collective “we” that comprise the mother-daughter relationship (Lerner, cited in Boyd, 1989).

4.2.2 Expectations: loss and longing

The mother-daughter relationship is a complex web where feelings become enmeshed and filter into the very quality of the relationship, hence the direct effect on the relational dynamics between the two members of the dyad. While it is important to address how each individual felt about their interaction, it is also pertinent to describe what expectation these women have of their relationship, as well as the construction and expression of femininity. As the interview transcripts will show below, both members of the dyad often long for a better mother-daughter relationship - as well as an empowered expression of femininity as informed by education and independence. However, these desires are intertwined with the expression

of a sense of loss, specifically in relation to affection as both parties go through various developmental stages such as puberty, sickness, old age and childbirth.

4.2.2.1 Mothers' expectations

As mentioned in the femininity construction section, most mothers in the present study defined femininity in relation to marriage, children, being responsible and maintaining ones' dignity. Therefore, it was not surprising that when asked to reflect on the expectations that they have of their mother-daughter relationship, most of them based their conceptions on the aforementioned traditional prescriptions of femininity.

For example:

Caroline (54): “uhmm... just to see a wonderful person, that I love very much for her to have a lovely family.”

Joyce (47): “I want her to have her own family, to be loyal and respectful to her husband. If he is doing something wrong, tell him. I don't want my daughter to cheat on her husband because she will be ruining her reputation and her body. They must sit and talk, she must just have a good family.”

Sarah (55): “There is no-one who does not want nice things for their children. I would want my children to have my heart, a strong heart that is resilient during whatever challenges life may throw at them. Even when they are married, they must remain respectful, humble and persevering. Everywhere they must be resilient even at work. Nothing comes easy.”

Musiwa (39): “I expect her, now as she already has children, to not lose hope because [...] come little by little... so that she can work and build a home just like me, her mother... in a good way and to tell her children the truth about what there is in life or what life entails. Just as I tell her the truth”

The above women's expectations of their daughters are reflective of the African construction of femininity which is informed by traditional and culturally specific norms. Linked with the cultural constructions of femininity as discussed within the Venda context, respect is a predominant self-descriptor of a woman and these mothers expect this trait to be fundamental to their daughters' conception of femininity. Therefore, it is expected that the mothers play an active role in enforcing sanctions should their daughters not conform to the above expressions of femininity. The similarities in the conceptions of femininity expressed by the mothers reflects the notion that feminine ideals are shared beliefs or models (Remmo, 2009) which society and women accept and reproduce in interactions with each other. Remmo's

identification of feminine ideals as a societal construct is similar to a study by Chaney (cited in Davis, 2017), in which widely admired qualities - such as strength, resilience and persistence - are found to be central to black women's femininity. Furthermore, in the context of rural Venda, the expectations of mothers were linked to both their upbringing and society's expectations of how a woman should behave, particularly being raised to aspire for marriage and to prioritise their children and husband (Makongodza, 2010).

Mothers shape their daughters' development of the self and identification through their "expectations, desires, principles, beliefs, perceptions but also through [their] socio-economic position, cultural level, occupation, education, lifestyle values and standards" (Stogiannidou et al., cited by Thedosious-Tryfodiou, 2016:2). While the above mothers expressed normative prescriptions of femininity as the main expectations they have of their daughters, Pfuluwani had different expectations of her daughter:

Pfuluwani (36): "my expectation from my child: I wish for her to prosper and have her own family. I'm not saying a man and children, I wish for her to be independent by herself, and have a voice. Have a beautiful home and everything good. I don't want my child to end up like me. I always work for my children - everything I make goes to my children... I wish for her to enjoy her money and not always compromise her dreams and goals for children."

Pfuluwani's expectations are consistent with the conceptions of African womanism. Moreover, she is using her own embodied experiences as a way to nurture a positive, empowered and independent black femininity. Hence the argument that black mothering is a socio-political process (Nash, 2018) and cannot be discussed in isolation through psycho-analytic perspectives. Linked with the above conceptions, Thilivhali further argues that it is important for mothers to play a central and active role in the development of their children:

Thilivhali (44): "I expect them to be children with manners. Other people should be proud of them and want them to be theirs. Like we should not be saying that kids of today are not controllable when in reality we are the ones that are being passive in terms of raising them. I expect them to have good things. White people don't have good things because of magic, it's because they know how to control and raise their children appropriately. Us Vhavenda, we are losing it because we no longer play an active role in the upbringing of our children, we just say it is "kids of today." We need to be in control. A child must be given boundaries... "When I do this, I am offending my parent." You have to tell them, but if you don't tell them, they will not know the right way to live."

Although Thilivhali's argument in relation to parents playing an active role in the upbringing of their children is important, the emphasis placed on the need to control children in order to mould them into specific beings reflects the daughters' sense of dismissal. They argue that

their mothers do not see them: control reflects the idea that these children are blank slates on which mothers project their own views of femininity and existence (this was particularly evident when the mothers were asked what they learned from their children and they all expressed that they had learned nothing, except for Matodzi who said that she “*learns how to be spiritually and persistent*” from her daughter, Tshimangadzo). However, daughters are individuals with socio-cultural, socio-political and economic experiences of existence that also shape the role Vhavenda parents play in their children’s socialisation. Specifically, as daughters interact with various social structures in a society, they alter their conceptualisation of existence which filters into their interactions with their mothers as mothers also re-adjust the way they interact with their children to account for the changes. As previously mentioned, the family landscape varies according to context.

4.2.2.2 Daughters’ expectations

Unlike the mothers, who mostly base their expectations on traditional forms of femininity expression and the performance of normative gender practices, the daughters longed for a deeper and stronger relationship with their mothers - a confidant who could guide them through life and its challenges. For example:

Muriel (25): “being supported in everything, everything in life, I need her support. I really need her support. Because when I try to be independent, she does not allow me to. Even if I tell her that I want something... she does not allow for my whatever-I-want, yet she also does not want me to go look for a job. When I ask for things, she tells me, “I have nothing, I don’t have anything”... but when I tell her I want to go work says “no.””

Phathutshedzo (23): “What I would like my mother to change would be for her to have a friendship with her female children. At least she should talk extensively about relationships, just a conversation between a mother and her daughters, not a situation where we will be talking to her about certain matters only for her to involve our father. I just wish her mind would return to us so she can just talk to us without including my father or brother.”

Khano (18): “What I wish could change with all my heart is this relationship/friendship we have. I don’t like it. I want a relationship in which she will be like a friend to me, with whom I can share everything. If I can’t get help from her, who will I get it from? Other people will mislead me, so I want to be able to talk with her about everything.”

Ndivhuwo (18): “I want a better relationship with my mother, but I understand that she has to share her love with all of us. I know it hurt her when my sister fell

pregnant, but she never sat down with me and talked to me about my own challenges, you see.”

While the above participants longed for a better relationship with their mothers within which they can discuss life challenges and gain an in-depth understanding of their own existence as feminine beings, some participants expressed satisfaction regarding their mother-daughter relationship. For example:

Tshanduko (23): “the relationship that I have with my mother is good, she is someone who is easy to understand. I understand her as we are living together. I’m not the kind of person who wishes to fight with my mother or argue with her. She also respects me. We treat each other well and my children also treat her well. We live together very well, just as a daughter is supposed to live well with her parent. There really isn’t any problem.”

Ndangulo (21): “My mother taught me what it means to be a woman. we are best friends.”

Mukundi (18): “I want my relationship with her to continue as it is, I don’t want her to give up on me because if she gives up on me, things will fall apart. I just want her to continue the way she has been.”

Like any other relationship, the mother-daughter relationship goes through periods of transitions as each or both members of the dyad undergo major life milestones. These may contribute to the relationship being altered to accommodate the changes. For Mutshidzi, the birth of her children negatively affected the fragile relationship she had with her mother. She stated:

Mutshidzi (25): “[our relationship] was negatively affected because all the love she had for me was transferred to my son. Like, she gave it all to him and only left a little bit for me (*laugh*). Eee! I am jealous because he got all the love and I didn’t get any [...] when I had my second child... all the love was gone. I feel that the little love she had left has now been taken by my daughter. Although Jessica did not get too much love, my first born is really number one in this house.”

While for Mutshidzi childbirth led to the loss of (or a decrease in) the affection her mother had previously showered her with, in contrast, Tshanduko (a mother of two) experienced a stronger bond with her mother after childbirth, as discussed in the class section. Specifically, her becoming a mother resulted in both women joining forces to strengthen their identity as a ‘responsible’ black woman who provides monetary and emotional support to her children. While Mashudu had a stronger relationship with her father than with her mother while growing up, when her mother experienced betrayal and heartache as a result of the fathers’ infidelity, she drew closer to her mother, realising that her mother was alone:

Mashudu (23): hmmmmm, mmm, my relationship with my mother... we were not that close, but I knew that she was my mom [...] I was much closer with my dad [...] until when? ... uhm, this other year when another woman came into this house [*voice goes low and sad*], some other woman, my father's woman, like when she came she was being initiated. It went further than that. She became his woman, I guess, then I became closer to my mom [...] yooo! (*lowers voice again, sounding hurt*). Yoooh, Mom was hurt at that time, and the way she would speak I could feel that she was hurt and she was being hurt by the truth. It hurts [*voice goes lower*]. Yeah, I mean, yeah. We are good now. *Simunye* [we are one]!"

The excerpt above reflects a shift in roles - normally, the mother protects, anchors and cares for her children, but here the daughter takes on that role in order to serve as a support system, upon noticing her mother's pain. This specific pattern of daughters feeling obligated to protect their mothers at all times, despite it not being something that they are told to do, was prominent in this study. For example, Khano (18) was only five years old when she protected her mother from an angry and hostile father during a domestic fight:

Khano (18): "Eish! Things got really hard. It affected me badly. I don't ever forget these things, the way they were fighting, beating each other, I'll never forget it [...] it pained me a lot, it's just that I was still very young - in grade R - and couldn't understand why the man I respect turned into a beast [...] I was a child so I couldn't do anything. What I did do was to bite my father, so that he would leave my mother, and I could go with her. I even picked up a stone and hit the car. My mom was stepping out, then we ran and even jumped over the neighbours' fences and then we were gone. I couldn't even do a thing. I was a child... I was a child... I was very young, it caused me a lot of pain. I felt as if it was my duty, because even though I was young and I knew that my strength was limited or not enough, I was not going to allow myself to just sit and watch my mother being beaten. That's when I had to fight for her."

From Khano's experience, is evident that through the process of being mothered, daughters as young as five already feel a deep connection to their mother in such a way that they would do anything to ensure their mothers' safety. Similar to how mothers previously expressed that it is was their responsibility to put the needs of their children before their own, Khano chose her mother over her father- who in this case no longer represented a symbol of protection.

4.3 Conclusion

The mother-daughter relationship is indeed a space characterised by crisis and loss, as well as redemption (Nash, 2018). In the present study, crisis was presented through the disconnection in how mothers and daughters communicated. For example, their inability to voice out pain

and daily struggles resulted in there being tensions within the relationship. While some daughters expressed that they differed from their mothers due to their mothers being outspoken, these daughters expressed a sense of admiration of their mothers' ability to not suffer in silence. Most of the mothers reported that they were better at communicating their dissatisfaction, yet their daughters explained that this was not the case. Therefore, a sense of longing in the mother-daughter relationship was expressed in relation to both parties wanting better mother-daughter relational dynamics.

In addition, this relationship is loaded with symbols and metaphors: It is an embodied experience as well as a political location in which a positive sense of blackness may be re-defined, hence a site of redemption. Most importantly, the interviewees above agree with Everet *et al.*'s 2016 study whereby mothers used themselves as models of womanhood and used their life lessons as a means of transmitting messages of resilience, strength and pride in one's blackness and existence. Similarly, Mukundi (Tshisikhawe's daughter) explained that she does not want to "see her mother cry," hence she works hard to develop a self-concept structured around inner strength as a source of positive self-identification (Acock & Yang, 1984; Ashcraft & Belgrave, 2005; Everet et al., 2016; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013).

The traditional understanding of femininity construction required that these women adapt themselves to a masculine world view. These women often defined themselves through patriarchal lenses. For example, femininity was often associated with peacekeeping, which was defined in relation to a woman being silent and perseverant in any situation. In addition, for the mother group, independence, respect, marriage and motherhood were central to their conception of femininity and they passed this onto their daughters as reflected through their daughters' conceptions of their own femininity.

Freed from a masculine lens of womanhood, Pfuluwani and Musiwa were able to independently build houses and provide monetary and emotional support for their children while Caroline had to take on the double role of being a mother and father. According to the women, the success of their empowered sense of femininity was based on their ability to respectfully interact with various social structures in their societies and their own children. Rather than the women's narratives being stories of women's subjugation, the mothers and daughters in this study constructed or are constructing empowered femininity, with education as the key out of the margins of society.

In the present study, the women's construction of femininity reflected how identity is a relational concept. Through their relationship with each other and their individual life experiences, the women in the study are connected in a complex fabric of reality - although it is rooted in a masculine world. In the next chapter, this study will discuss how various social factors intersected in the lives of these women as they constructed their femininity.

Chapter 5: Intersectional nodes of femininity

Due to the ‘asymmetrical divisions and attributes’ (Mbilinyi, 1992:49) that characterise modern society, women are often marginalised and oppressed or limited through gender ideologies, roles and expectations imposed by a male-centered society. As previously mentioned, the intersectional identities of black women tied to culture, class and gendered racial socialisation results in the inability of Western studies to capture the complexities of black female identity, especially in African contexts. Therefore, in this section, the self (identity) as a ‘matrix of complex, shifting and interconnected series of strands’ (Distiller & Steyn, 2004:4) will be discussed through the various intersectional nodes of black femininity, namely gender, class and location. These nodes of intersection are not an exhaustive list of the strands that intersect during femininity construction, but they were the most pronounced nodes in the current study, hence they emphasise the complex socio-cultural and socio-economic factors that contribute to the participants’ conceptualisation of their femininity within the mother-daughter relationship. Crucially, these intersectional nodes should not be viewed independently of each other, but as intricately and unavoidably linked in mothers’ and daughters’ occupations of their socio-cultural positions.

5.1 Gender

As explained in Chapter two, gender as a significant aspect of ones’ identity is also conceptualised as a social construct through which various ‘gender ideals, displays, roles’ (Cohen cited Remmo, 2009:10) and cultural initiation processes are internalised in order to establish a ‘desirable’ femininity. Through this process of socialisation, young women are taught how to behave and interact with others in the particular time and space that they have been born into. Similar to a study by Lorber and Farrell (1991) on gender construction, it became apparent upon data analysis that for the women in this study, their gender identity was significantly institutionalised in cultural and social statuses, which often results in social stratification of society along gender lines. With these forms of stratification and socio-cultural constructions (See chapter one) in mind, the gender roles, ideals, and cultural

initiation processes that intersect within the mother-daughter relationship or are mediated by the relationship between the women as they construct their femininity will be discussed.

The gender identity of an individual is a conceptualisation of ones' sense of femaleness or maleness (Cohen, cited by Remmo, 2009). However, on a societal level, gender roles are defined as prescriptions associated with a particular gender, especially in relation to the role they are supposed to play (ibid.). In practice, this means that within the family system, girls and boys are taught various specific behaviours and given rules on how to interact - resulting in the children behaving in socially inscribed manner associated with their biological sex (Remmo, 2009). However, since the gender roles are developed and enforced in an unequal system - a patriarchal system - feminists, such as Collins (2004) and Connell (1987), have argued that gendered power structures in a society result in the perpetual subordination of women by men, and that some women may attain a higher status than other women dependent on their successful enactment of a prescriptive set of normative feminine behaviour. Hence, the power division in this case is not only in favour of men, but also the women who successfully- intentionally or otherwise - perform their allocated, prescriptive gender roles in the context of the time and place that they occupy. Linking with the black feminist perspective, the above power division may result in not only inequality within the home, but the community as well, as other women are valued on a higher scale than the rest.

In the present study, stratification was rooted within the home, stemming from an unequal distribution of gender roles in caring for the home and the family members. Although for some women these roles were important, some experienced a lot of challenges as they could not express their pain when their hard work was "*not appreciated*" or when they were "*overworked*" (Joyce, 47). In The following section, it will be discussed how gender roles and ideals are used to maintain an unequal power relation within the home.

5.1.1 Caring for the home: household chores

Phathutshedzo, a twenty-three-year-old student, grew up in a household with a lot of extended family members (both male and female) and, as such, the household roles within the family were allocated according to gender. This reflects the lived experiences of all of the other participants in the study, meaning that the women were expected to do all of the household chores, including but not limited to: "collecting water, cooking, laundry, cleaning,

collecting firewood and caring for the sick and old relatives who cannot care for themselves in the house” (Phathutshedzo, 23; Khano, 18; Tshimangadzo, 20; Caroline, 54; Sarah, 54; Pfuluwani, 36; Joyce, 47; Thilivhali, 44). On the other hand, boys and men in the same community were expected to “herd goats and collect water sometimes” (Mashudu, 23; Thifhelimbilu, 47; Tshisikhawe, 40). The clear demarcation of gender roles within a traditional family system is used to establish order and stability. However, this system is evidently not always functional, as some members of the family (i.e. women) have to carry the burden of doing most of the labour required to maintain a functioning household. Below are the expressions of mothers and daughters pertaining to their roles within the home:

As Phathutshedzo, a twenty-three-year-old student, explained:

Phathutshedzo (23): “The house I was living in had a lot of girls, so it was a challenge on me because I would find that on my allocated day I would have the task of waking up to cook and I would do so, but on the day allocated for my aunts I would find that the person meant to do the cooking for that day [...] would say she cannot cook. And it would hurt because her mother would defend her with the excuse of her having lived in urban areas for too long which resulted in her inability to cook. Hence, others would be instructed to cook, and she would only clean the house and so it was hurtful, but I would bite my tongue to silence myself. At least I had a roof over my head! But there were others who would help and others who would wake up and do nothing. My grandmother used to constantly yell at them to work in order to help the other children, but they still wouldn’t do the work. So, if you didn’t work, you would not receive food. They were denied food and those who worked along with young children and men of our household would eat.”

Like her daughter, Phathutshedzo, Joyce also grew up in a big family.

Joyce (47): “I grew up in a polygamous family. I had an older sister and younger sister. We would share household chores on a weekly basis - like if it is your turn to cook, you are also supposed to collect firewood and then we must use our own wood to do the cooking. Meaning that if it is my turn to cook, and I don’t have wood, I would have to ask from my mother. And if my sister does not have firewood, I would borrow her. She was not my mother’s child, but we lived well, and the system worked for us with my younger siblings, I would wash their clothes at the weekends and collect water with my older sister. We would eat in the same plate and it was nice.”

When she got married, Joyce’s fate as the carer of the family did not change - she was married into a big family and was the oldest female besides her mother-in-law.

Joyce (47): “The house I was married in, the oldest female-child was twelve years-old which meant that I had to get there and be the first born. Growing up in my parents’ house had prepared me, and my aunt had told me that marriage is difficult, I must persevere, she told me sometimes they will even accuse you of witchcraft, but you must bite your tongue and stay the course of the marriage. So, when I got to that house, I bit my tongue, even when I was in pain. I did not speak nor complain. There

were seven or eight boys. I had to iron, cook and clean for them. When you are married it is hard. I remember some days I would go to collect water, then when I came back someone would have taken it to bathe, then I must go back again, then another person would do the same. It was hard. That time there was no water for cooking or washing clothes. But I always remembered what my aunt told me, and I would not complain.”

I asked Joyce if the boys had any roles to play within the family, and she said:

Joyce (47): “no, back in the olden days, boys did not do much, besides herding the livestock. But now I would complain [...] back in the day I would just tell myself that as long as life is going forward it was OK.”

Like Joyce, Tshisikhawe, a forty-year-old mother of five girls, mentioned that in the family she was born into, her brother did not do much due to there being a lot of girls (i.e. she had four sisters).

Tshisikhawe (40): “at home there was only one boy, and we [girls] were many. We were five so there was no work he could have been doing. His only job was to herd goats. In the way I was raised, what I could take back! I would really say to take back, because things of the past do grow together with your mindset. But now I’m growing there is a lot that I see going forward, because at this point there isn’t anyone who fends for me, but I work for myself.”

In the excerpt above, Tshisikhawe was explaining how she would change the way she was raised, or how she would have had she the power to do so, particularly in relation to the gender roles within the family. She argues that she would not change the order of her parents’ house as it has shaped her into the woman she is today. In contrast, Mashudu, a twenty-three-year-old student, grew up in household where everyone had to play an equal role in the functioning of the family.

Mashudu (23): “we all had the same chores, as girls we were even responsible for herding the goats. [laughs] Ey! [laughs] I did not enjoy herding goats at all. [laughs] I really did not like that role. We were beaten as well [...] I mean, if the goats did not return home on time we would be beaten. Actually, I have to wake up early and go find them [...] after being beaten. If it’s 9pm you [still] have to leave the house and go to look for them and come back home with all of the [...] otherwise you would be told that you will not eat at all because the goats are not back home.”

What was particularly interesting about Mashudu’s explanation of the equal gender roles system within her home was that her own mother, Sarah, had specific expectations for a girl child but not the same for a boy child. Specifically, Sarah, a fifty-five-year-old traditional healer, expressed that the prescribed gender role extends well beyond the family into which a girl child is born and raised – onwards into her matrimonial home. She listed the following expectations that parents have of their daughter as she enters into marriage:

Sarah (55): “We give rules that you are going into other people’s homes, so you must treat them the way you treated us. You must treat everyone with respect; pour water for them; clean the yard; do laundry; respect them; honour them; and respect your husband; you must be able to differentiate between your in-laws and your husband

and treat them accordingly. You must not talk too much or complain when they ask you to do something. We worked. Yoooh! And I can feel that if my daughters do things the way I did them, they will be able to enjoy and have long lasting marriages. They will live well with their husbands. Marriage is difficult, and one must endure it. Nothing is peaceful and comfortable or perfect, you must persevere. You guys don't persevere anymore."

From the above, it is evident that Sarah is a strong advocate for traditional normative gender construction and expression. Similar to Sarah, Tshisikhawe (40) mentioned that in a marriage one must be able to cook for her husband in order to keep him and not lose him to other women (including those from other cultures) as a result of them taking better care of him. However, Tshisikhawe further elaborated that the men in Venda culture may not be appreciative of this and they move on to other women, while men from other cultures may feel the need to be with Muvenda woman because of the very same servitude characteristics:

Tshisikhawe (40): "Check when we are seated with (X people), their lives and ours are not the same, we tend to think that they are way too smart and we are not, because with (X people) if you check carefully will seem much smarter than I, who is a Venda if she finds a Venda man. And you'll find me treating a man in the way that I was shown by culture. Because we grew up knowing that when you are married, you have duties to get up early to prepare water for your in-laws, now the (X people) don't know any of that. Now when we see our men not coming back, we just think that maybe the (X) woman gave my husband a love potion, only to find that it's dependent on the way she treats him which she learnt at her home where she comes from [...] we don't just say 'I have found a man from the city and desire him,' because they will only be seeing that there is respect and that the person is hardworking and you'll find him saying our tribe isn't living right as he will be seeing a different way of respect, which we the Venda people possess - they abuse us because we are too humble sometimes. And our men leave us for those without respect, it is very confusing."

Of particular interest is how the demarcation of house hold roles according to gender is dysfunctional, as women often have to carry the double burden of not only doing their own chores, but to pick up when the men and boys and other women who are favoured do not play their own roles. Secondly, the presence of women in the house seems to automatically free the men from playing their part in keeping the house together. It is evident from the research interviews that the home serves as a space through which a woman is constantly reminded to be silent and not complain no matter how much it pains them. Simply put, Kehler (2001) and Meena (1992) argued that rural black women are burdened with multiple roles related to productive and reproductive responsibilities, resulting in their continuous subjugation and discrimination both within and out of their homes. Like other participants in the study, Phathutshezo (23), Mashudu (23) Tshisikhawe (40), Sarah (55) and Joyce (47) mentioned that it is important for them to know how to do the household chores. However, their

language of expressing the importance of playing their role reflected a male-centred value system and the enforcement of patriarchal division within the home, because their response was rooted in the notion of servitude. However, by being taught how to successfully complete household chores at a young age, these women did express that it benefited them in adulthood and marriage.

Indeed, notions of keeping the marriage together, respecting the husband and the in-laws were the major reasons these women worked without complaining, but, most importantly, they taught their daughters these roles not as a means to develop their independence but in preparation for a heterosexual marriage. Thus, this research - along with the work of many others, such as the study conducted by Sathisparsad et al. (2008), which concluded that unequal gender roles of men and women within the home resulted in subordination of women and the differential treatment of boys and girls - makes it evident that patriarchal ideologies (which are common in African cultures) are the main foundation of women's subordinate identity and subservient gender roles.

However, of greatest interest here is the fact that men were not the enforcers of these ideologies, but the women themselves (including teaching their daughters to conform as well), despite the fact that they understood the implications of such actions. Similar to all of the daughters in the study, Mashudu (23) expressed above that the price to pay for non-conformity to gender roles was corporal punishment, whereas Phathutshedzo (23) mentioned that when one does not do their chores as expected or disobeys the rules, they would not be given food - instead men and children will eat as they are always exempt from such punishment (i.e. by virtue of not being expected to participate in the aforementioned roles). While for the mother, non-conformity was associated with marriage failure as expressed by Tshisikhawe (40), labelled as disobedient (Joyce, 47) and disrespectful (Sarah, 55).

By way of an example: Joyce (44) did mention that she was not happy with doing everything while the boys would come and take her water without her permission and with no plan of replacing it, but she could not express this without the risk of being labelled as a disobedient wife. However, she further mentioned that if the same situation occurred presently (i.e. while she is in her new home with only her children and husband in 2019) she would complain. Joyce's example shows how staying in the same household with in-laws can contribute to women's silence around their own boundaries and basic sense of respect. This is due to the fact that silence in this case is equated to respect. In contrast, since she is now staying in her

own house with her husband and children, she is forging a new tradition in which everyone plays a more equal part. The above is reflective of the fact that time and context also contribute to how one interacts with oppressive norms to forge their identity.

The notions of perseverance and ‘biting one’s tongue’ (not speaking when it hurts) in order to keep the peace, the husband and the household together were recurring themes in the participants’ articulations of how their gender contributes to the roles they play within the home. This constant need to silence the women may contribute to not only emotional but physical abuse as well, and the women swallowing the pain when they should be acknowledging and resolving it. For instance, Tshisikhawe (40) explained: *“they abuse us because we are too humble sometimes. And our men leave us for those without respect, it is very confusing.”* The idea that a respectful and quiet woman can ‘keep’ a man is an entirely socially constructed idea, however these women were raised to believe the notion as a necessary truth/fact and socialised their daughters into thinking the same way. Yet, their daily reality reflected something completely different: most of the women interviewed were single parents as a result of ‘failed’ marriages. Nonetheless, they uphold the paradox of still wishing for their own daughters to remain silent and humble. For an older women like Sarah, the ability to work within the home is viewed as an important aspect for marriageability, but most importantly, that a woman should not talk “too much” - Sarah is keen that her daughters should think in this way as she believes it is what is required from them for a happy and long marriage. Moreover, the emphasis on marriageability reflects the association of femininity/womanhood with heterosexual marriage.

Despite this commitment to silence and obedience, Tshisikhawe expressed her concern that even in performing most of the labour required to keep the shared home afloat, that work would never be enough as the men still leave them for women from other cultures. These grievances are fundamentally based on men’s inability to validate their hard work. The constant need for male validation in relation to ones’ position within the home and society in general results in women staying in oppressive situations, not valuing themselves, nor interrogating the power they possess outside of the confinement of marriage. The irony of patriarchal power was in the fact that women use men as the centre of reference for all actions and efforts and standards, but do not discuss nor require those men to act with any responsibility in that position of power. Ultimately, the above experiences of mothers and daughters living in Venda are living proof of Helman and Ratele’s (2016) fundamental argument about the perpetuation of the patriarchy through private spaces: the family unit (i.e.

the home) serves as the location through which inequality is reproduced through the subordination of women.

Hussein (2005:60) assessed African practices such as rituals, legends, name-giving ceremonies and oral narratives that have been used to mobilise gender ideologies that result in the portrayal of African women “as foolish, weak, jealous, evil, unfaithful, dependent, frivolous and seductive”. In the present study the mobilisation of such ideologies was through word of mouth from older women reflecting on their experiences to prepare their fellow women for the pains of marriage. For example, Joyce reflected on the demonisation of black woman within the home, she described how her aunt told her before marriage that being accused of witchcraft is something she should expect when married but to always bite her tongue and persevere because that is how women are often regarded - particularly if they “*talk too much*” (Joyce, 47). These ideologies are incorporated into ones’ fabric of reality and passed from one generation to the next. For example, Joyce’s daughter grew up in a big family as her mother was married into one, and similar to her mother, she never spoke when she was being maltreated by her aunts. Due to favouritism, she often had to pick up and do more than others. These women valued the security of the family, marriage and community more than their own voices. They use the following reasoning behind not talking or being respectful: “*as long as life is going forward*” (Joyce, 47); “*As long as I have a roof over my head*” (Phathutshedzo, 23); “*As long as there is peace*” (Muriel); “*I don’t like noise*” (Tshimangadzo, 19).

From the data above, it is also prevalent that the process of mothering for black women extends beyond mothering ones’ own children, but into mothering the husbands as well - who are portrayed as children that need to have their water poured for them, not be questioned and respected in order for peace to reign. But chief amongst all, these men have the ability to leave the household for another woman whenever they decide to while the women are confined within the home. However, these women should not be viewed as lacking the agency to re-conceptualise their identity in relation to gender roles, behaviour, gender display and their ability to voice their dissatisfaction within the home, but as active participants in an oppressive system that serves to silence them and their pain; for some, keeping the home intact is their greatest accomplishment and that is their standpoint. However, by freely participating in an oppressive system (i.e. the home), these women cannot be free as they perpetuate their own oppression; they do have agency by virtue of being functioning human beings but, within the margins afforded to them by a male-centered socio-cultural system,

they can rarely express this agency or recognise its existence. In the following section is discussed how Vhavenda' cultural ceremonies (see chapter one) serve as institutions through which femininity is constructed and feminine ideals passed from one generation to the next as well as how the women in this study perceive these practices.

5.1.2 Cultural initiation into femininity

As previously mentioned in the literature section, gender is not a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed, instead "it is an identity tenuously constituted in time through stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988: 519). For black women the stylised acts of gender construction are shaped and influenced by their cultural perception of womanhood (Kiguwa, 2001). For instance, within the Vhavenda culture, femininity construction is a lifelong process through which young girls are sent to initiation schools (socialisation school) where they are taught how to behave as young women, taught about sexuality, morals, respectable behaviour, retaining one's honour, how to be an honourable wife, parenthood and how to respectfully interact with other people in various social settings (Sivhabu, 2017) in order to establish a Muvenda's ideal femininity. The rites of passage are tailor-made in relation to ones' specific age group. Although not all of the daughters in this present study went through the initiation process, some of the daughters and their mothers underwent this process from a young age. For those that participated, there were tensions in relation to the importance of such practices in relation to femininity construction, which will be discussed in this section.

For Sarah (54) and Tshisikhawe (40), participation in the traditional rites of passage was pertinent and central to their conception of womanhood and adequately prepared them to deal with life as full-grown women and mothers. They felt that these practices also made them unique from other cultures as respect is central to their conception of not only femininity, but as Vhavenda women.

Tshisikhawe (40) elaborated:

"what makes us better people as Venda people is that while growing up, a Venda child was sang for, they went to "dombani" and "musevhetho" (which are traditional/cultural initiation or grooming ceremonies), there are lot of things that are done in these ceremonies, which shows you how to live when you have reached a stage of becoming a woman. And how to live a respectable and dignified life".

Similarly, Sarah (55) mentioned:

“The most important things they teach you there is respect, and how to honour the adults in your life. These two are the most important things that you learn. They groom you into dignified young women and that you should stay away from boys, and you should know what it means to be a woman. It was important for us because it prevented a lot of things like, teenage pregnancy and diseases because you did not play with boys, boys had no way of accessing you. By living in this way, you are a ‘proper’ woman.”

The traditional practices not only prepared them for womanhood, but played a significant role in ensuring that initiates do not engage in premarital sex, as virginity testing was part of the process as well and when one loses their virginity their entire family would feel the shame. As mentioned by Magwedzha (2019):

“As one undergoes the Vhusha process, the elders had their ways of checking down there to see if something has been done or if you are still a good girl. The inspection process is called Tshitavha. They will spit on you if you are no longer a virgin, it is embarrassing not only for you as the attendee but for your family as well. We stand in line and go inside the hut one by one. If one is no longer a virgin they would be given red bracelets (Vhukunda) made of beads as a symbol that they are no longer virgin whereas, those who are still virgins are given the white beads to show that they are good girls, untouched by men. One is not to take those beads off as they serve as evidence for your family that you went through the process” (Magwedzha, 2019).

The above participants expressed pride in participating in the initiation processes and wished for their daughters to take part as well but struggled due to the fact that their daughters spend most of their time in school (Sarah, 55). Some felt that the ceremonies were outdated and not useful. For example, Mashudu, the twenty-three-year-old daughter of Sarah mentioned:

“I went to Musevhetho when I was seven years old. My mom encouraged me to go, eis [...] Argh [...] (her voice sounded very low as if it is not something she would have wanted to attend)... Laughs. Hai hai !! (Shaking her head) I did not want to go[...] that time they told us (Ri khouya ula tshivhindi; “we are going to eat liver”) and liver is meat sooo I went but I did not know what was going to happen. When we got there, and they did what they did to us. I was able to see uri haaaaaaaai! [that nooooooo !!] (Shaking her head) here they were playing with us. We just went there to be branded, for what reason I do not understand”

When asked what she learned from the ceremony she expressed:

“mxm [...] argh!!! They did not teach us anything iyah [disappointed sigh] they did not teach us anything. Maybe the nice thing was about dancing and singing traditional songs... do not be deceived weh!! there was nothing. they were playing us really, they played us I think because maybe Vhusha would be something that would be beneficial in relation to life. But with Musevhetho they just hurt our thigh, I can’t even wear a bikini and go to the beach like other girls... [laughs]”.

Furthermore, she mentioned:

“Vhushani [...] I think there they teach you rules and do virginal inspection. I really don't understand why they check one's virginity[...] and then if you are not a virgin you are not pure. I mean it is the same thing, you can be a virgin and get married to someone who has had sex with lot of women or who has children[...] it all goes back to nothing. Who are we being prepared for, who is preparing the guys if Murundu (male initiation process) is not a big thing anymore? They are trying to control girls. The way things are now women should be prioritised to ensure equality, but we have not even scratched the surface on this”

Similar to Mashudu, Joyce, a forty-seven-year-old mother from a royal family, mentioned that:

“I attended Tshikhubana then I went and Burned (ufhisa) because I am royalty I did not go with the rest of the villagers. When I attended Vhusha I did not learn anything important [...] like I did not even see the value of what they were teaching us. I feel like they were just teaching us crazy things [...] like there are things we were taught I did not see how relevant or useful they are. I would not take my daughters there. There are no rules there. Or maybe it's because when I went to u fhisa (burn) it was just the two of us without a lot of people. I just learned traditional songs, beating the drums, they kept telling us to lay facing upward or maybe they were teaching us how to have sexual intercourse with our husbands I don't know [.....] but I really don't see the importance of it all. I would rather sit down with my daughters and teach them real life issues than prepare them for serving men with their bodies [I] think”.

While some participants did not see the importance of taking part in the socialisation processes, some mothers (i.e. Pfuluwani, Caroline, Sarah and Tshisikhawe) felt that the cultural initiation process taught young women to recognise their power as women and to have control over sexual desires, leading to respectful and morally fulfilling lives. In simple terms, Sarah's conception sums up their understanding:

“it is hard, it is still going to be hard to raise good daughters with manner[s] and full control of themselves, it is very hard. Girls these days stay out until late. They have too much freedom and lack commitment to their own goals or responsibilities to their own bodies and futures. Soon you will struggle to control them or teach them the right way of living because you [...] our daughters are not living appropriately. The chief is responsible for making a call for the initiations and we the elderly women would respond and do what tradition demands of us. Impart word of wisdom. But the chiefs are just sitting they don't care. And we cannot move unless they speak. And these processes are important because they reclaim your sense of self from a young age, that you do not just throw yourself to boys. It is sad”

As important as culture is, Phathutshedzo and Tshimangadzo believe that femininity is dependent on ones' personal accountability, their embodied experiences and ability to discern what is important to them as young women. Specifically, they mentioned:

Tshimangadzo (19): “Like I am good person and from [a] young age I told myself that I want to do great thing[s] as a young woman and lead by example and take after my aunts. Going for initiation is not that important, you must have your own goals and your family must inspire and support you, that’s it”.

Similar to Tshimangadzo, Phathutshedzo mentioned:

Phathutshedzo (23): “As a young person, you should learn from other girls’ mistakes and their successes and establish your own goals and dreams and live to be a person the community and your family will be proud of, it is about you”

The cultural initiation into femininity is of utmost significance for the Vhavenda people. The different initiation phases are meant to prepare one for each life developmental stage. In relation to social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1996), identity is constructed within the socio-cultural context and there is an intergenerational succession of femininity conceptualisation as the older women responsible for guiding the young women pass on valuable life lessons in relation to how one is supposed to carry themselves as a woman. Most importantly, these cultural processes empower young women as they are given authority to dictate their own sexual experience through the process of *u kwevha* (see glossary- page ix)- this is meant to increase their own sexual pleasure, if this was an oppressive element it would be to suppress the woman’s sexual pleasure. However, even though they are taught ways to sexually pleasure themselves or dictate their own sexual experience, this does not necessarily mean that these young women are able to express this power when they engage with men. Beside *u kwevha*, the young women are taught about the dangers of unprotected sexual intercourse, and through childbirth and sexual simulation, they are armed with knowledge on how to deal with such life stages when they reach them (Madima, 1996). In theory the above processes seem to arm women with the necessary information needed to understand their own bodies in various situations, however the emphasis on women’s silence result in women not expressing their views and naming their experience. As such, society is left with women who have mastered the art of pretense and are self-sacrificial to maintain the social order which supports patriarchal ideologies.

Although most mothers, including Sarah and Tshisikhawe, noted the importance of such practices in relation to preparing them for motherhood, marriage and most importantly how to maintain their dignity as respectful women in a society, from a feminist standpoint, such practices reiterate oppressive elements that seek to control a woman’s sexuality and how she views and expresses herself, and are structured within narrow male constructed views aimed

at serving male-interests. In addition, as mentioned in the background section (see pages 6-11), ones- virginity is valued and should the elders find out during the inspection that a young woman lost her virginity, they give her red beads to represent impurity, but most importantly so that her family can also know when she gets home that she is not 'pure' (Magwedzha, 2019). Such practices bring shame to the young women's lives and would contribute to the daughters' inability to talk to their mothers about their bodies and discuss their understanding of sexuality as part of their femininity. In addition, it negates a daughters' conceptualisation of sexuality as part of her identity.

Culture is dynamic and always changing, and the women responsible for the initiation processes are not the same, as the practices often occur in different villages, hence the importance of context and time informing ones' experience. For Mashudu (23), the experience was not rewarding as she felt she was taken there under deception. However, she acknowledges that since she only attended Musevhetho, she may not have had the full experience as her mother Sarah (55), who got the full benefit. For Joyce (47), the lack of understanding of the cultural process contributed to her negative conceptualisation of the practices. The lack of transparency made her feel as though it was not important but a mere preparation for sex, marriage and the need to control her sexuality. While it was important for the older participants, Tshimangadzo felt that femininity is an individual conceptualisation and is based on ones' internal understanding of who they want to be as a young woman. However, it should be noted that Tshimangadzo is a nineteen-year-old young woman who was taking a gap year from school - unlike the women in her family and the context of rural Venda, she was already showing signs of being empowered, not following the traditional route girls her age follow (i.e. go to university right after high school; be a teenage mother; participate in the cultural initiation).

The differences in understanding of the cultural initiation processes into femininity reflect the standpoint theory (Collins, 2000) through which everyone's truth is privileged. Moreover, their individual embodied experience informs their interaction with the cultural processes. For most of these women, patriarchy is a colonial concept, hence they conform to the traditional hierarchical social order without questioning its oppressive elements. Through the initiation processes women have power to shape other women's conceptualisations of femininity. One of the major concerns that Mashudu (23) expressed is that the cultural practices do not speak to the current contextual challenges, which reflects the need for culture

to evolve in order to empower young women to deal with the current socio-cultural and socio-economics factors that contribute to their fabric of reality.

Moreover, the practices reflect a hetero-normative order of society. As Sarah (55) mentioned, the Chief (Musanda) is responsible for ensuring that such practices stay alive, as women cannot participate without the call from the royal family. Therefore, it can be argued that women have the power to determine the construction of culturally subservient femininity or an empowered femininity, however the fact that the call comes from the male chief reflects that this power is limited. In addition, Sarah mentioned that female elders in a society cannot move on with the initiation process unless the chief makes the call, which leads the researcher to ponder if this is constructed to ensure a long supply of women who are sexually immoral to serve the sexual pleasures of men, as culturally empowered women do not give themselves away easily (Magwedzha, 2019). Though some villages still practice the coming of age process, less and less women are encouraging their daughters to participate (Sivhabu, 2017). Some of the reasons expressed by the women in this study were that “there is nothing to learn” (Joyce, 47; Pfuluwani, 36; Matodzi, 35; Thifhelimbilu, 47), while in a study by Sivhabu (2017), older women responsible for the initiation process were accused of witchcraft. Madima (1996) noted that modernity contributes to the dissolution of such practices as well.

While most women in the present study conformed to the traditional conception and performance of femininity, for some, the need for an empowered sense of femininity through education and financial independence was more pertinent to their identity. Therefore, in the following section the tension between Normative and counter-normative constructions of femininity is discussed.

5.1.3 Normative vs counter-normative constructions of femininity

From the discussion above, it is evident that for black women in South Africa, their femininity is a complex matrix of their blackness and cultural practices that inform their existence. As such, there was a lot of tension with regards to normative femininity conceptions informed by family structures; culture and gender ideologies, and counter-narratives of femininity stemming from changes in the social structures of gender and the realisation that women have of the struggles (via gender roles, ideals, displays and identity)

that perpetuate a subjugated sense of self. However, it should be noted that women creating counter-narratives of femininity are not necessarily claiming to be against patriarchy or an identity informed by the resistance of cultural normative constructions of femininity, but are forging feminine identities that are integrative of themselves: reflective of their social position, hopes, fears and individual goals in comparison to other women. This section serves to show the tension between normative and counter-normative constructions of femininity through Thilivhali's (An employed, forty-four-year-old married mother of one) conception of femininity and how other women interact with these norms to construct their integrative sense of self.

5.1.3.1 Tensions between Normative and counter-normative femininity

Thilivhali, a forty-four-year-old employed married woman with one daughter, is a perfect example of the tensions one experiences when trying to break away from traditional moulds of femininity:

Thilivhai (44): “well I am proud of the fact that although I had a child when I was young, I did not give up on school. I had my child and was taken to my matrimonial home and then they told me a wife does not go to school, so I stayed at home for an entire year having dropped out of school. So lets say I stayed the year that I was pregnant because back then when you fall pregnant they never allowed you in school. So I stayed at home the entire year of 1993. And the next year of 1994. They kept saying they will not help care for my child [...] 95 I fought hard to go back at school because even my mother did not want to care for my child, but she eventually agreed and I went back to school. Then I passed [...] it was very hard because after my matric my father said he does not take a woman to school. It was very hard I had to stay at home and work with my mother in-law.... We sold things at the markets on days when people were receiving their social grants as this was done in various shops [...] so we would move with the social grants cars and erect our markets and sell things [.....] my mother in-law was happy about this. she never wanted to care for my child yet she enjoyed and took me around when she had to sell things. So, I sold things even then I was not happy like I would ask myself , am I now an old woman that sells things (mundendeni)... I was even ashamed of this type of work until one day my brother who was a soldier came to me and said he did not like what I was doing, he said to me I will bring money for you month end so that you can go to X university and register. I told him I did not know the place, he said you will know it I said I have never been there, he said you will go there and register for a course I really don't like the work you do, you are too young. Indeed, he brought the money-that is how I started to take my studies further. I used to tell myself that I want to see myself working in better conditions because I could see that this life if you are not independent, it becomes hard. It needs a woman who wakes up and works harder, a self-reliant woman. Then I registered via Z university then I wrote the NPD and I

worked hard and finished in 2 years and a half then 2016 I got a job as a high school teacher. I was 40 about to turn 41.”³

Her entire family and support systems were doing everything possible to mould her into a traditional woman confined within the home. Even though at times it meant that she had no one to look after her daughter, Thilivhali did not stop pushing harder and harder until her own mother had no choice but to look after her child. Moreover, her brother served as her greatest champion by encouraging and providing her with funding to further her studies. Unlike her father, who mentioned that he does not take grown women to school, her brother took a stand for his sister.

When asked why she was persistent about going back to school, Thilivhali answered:

“it’s because I could see that my peers were working... so I was like how I define this notion of dependence because if you want to remain behind everyone else you rely on them for everything. So I pulled my socks up and fought [.....] this made me stand up and be independent”

In relation to why her parents and mother in-law never wanted to help her, Thilivhali reflected on the societal expectation in relation to womanhood and how they serve to keep a woman in a domestic setting under surveillance:

“they expect you to have kids, cook, work... when you are married, they see you as a maid [...] they want you to do everything for them. When there are visitors, they want you to do everything for them like you are a maid. they are scared that if you start working it means that you will not do all those things for you and if you don’t work, they can monitor your movements, you become a maid”

After having followed all the societal norms of identity (i.e. Marriage, childbirth, obedience, good manners and respect not only for husband, but for her in-laws), Pfuluwani’s (thirty-six-year-old mother of two) marriage came crumbling down. She suffered from abuse at the hands of her husband. Although Sarah, a fifty-five-year-old married mother, mentioned that in “humility, respect and good manners one would be able to have a peaceful home”, when Pfuluwani’s horror occurred all of these traits could not protect her. She detailed her experience and how that affected her conceptualisation of her feminine identity and what she teaches her daughters today after having rebuilt herself.

“people expect that a woman must give birth to babies when she is married, I’m not sure if it’s the Venda tradition/culture or every tribe because it seems like people find joy in having kids. I don’t see it as important to have children, it’s just that people have had a change of mind... well, people are just meant to live together and love

³ X, Y, Z represent the names of institutions which were rendered anonymous for ethical purposes.

each other, a child is a gift from God if a child is not there it's not there!.. it shouldn't be said that because someone doesn't have a child then that person is not a woman. having children to me is not important, even children are better, having a man is what is not important to me at all, that is the lowest thing in life, in fact it must be the lowest thing to a woman, you must learn to be independent before a man and children. having a man is like living with a snake and unaware that it's there in the house, because for that person to change it doesn't even take three minutes, and you find that you no longer recognise/know the person. That is what happened to me, I couldn't recognise that, that was my husband anymore. where I was I found myself no longer knowing whom I had went to see or who I was there for, I found myself with no one in my corner/no relative. My relative[s] were my children and at that time the other one was five years old and the other one was one year old and couldn't talk to them. He beat me up so bad I had no choice but to run away in the middle of the night with my children. I never returned to that house. I wanted my children to have a good example, I am now happy in my own house. But you see once you come back from your matrimonial home, they call you Mbuyavhuhadzi (the one who returned from her matrimonial home). That affects your identity as a woman. No matter how hard you work they always define you in that way. If you quarrel with someone they bring it up all the time to remind you of your failures. But I see myself as a winner you see. My children are safe"

Her identity as a woman was predominantly based on her accomplishments as a married woman, a mother and a humble loving partner, but when that all fell apart she had to start from scratch - re-defining herself even though she is constantly reminded of her failed marriage.

Phathutshedzo, a twenty-three-year-old, described various feminine expectations society has for a woman and how these expectations affect identity construction and expression.

Phathutshedzo (23): "Expectations that people and family members have for a female child are self-love, a girl who dresses herself well, a girl who respects herself and has manner. They don't want to see a girl who constantly walks about the streets behaving loosely. When it comes to marriage, every parent or every woman becomes happy or as they grow up, they tell themselves that one day they would love for their child to be happy and be married like they were but elsewhere it is not so, it is difficult to find a partner to marry. Expectations can be frustrating and angering because at times people want you to live according to what they want and not according to your will"

Phathutshedzo's understanding of society's expectations show how societal norms can be problematic as they contribute to a distorted sense of identity which is not a true expression of ones' being. As important as normative constructions of femininity are to ones' identity, Musiwa (thirty-nine-year-old mother of three) mentioned that due to the changes in the family structure in relation to marriage and gender structure changes, a woman's identity rests solely on her ability to independently be responsible for her children:

Musiwa (39): “what they expect is that a person be able to support her children. Since marriage is no longer like that of then/old (we go and come back), to support your children, getting a job and working for your children are the most important. A person/woman must take care of her family”

Using the above as a backdrop, it is evident that identity construction cannot be solely understood as an isolated one-dimensional phenomenon rooted within the mother-daughter relationship. Rather, it is a complex phenomenon mostly influenced by ideological factors such as socio-cultural expectations stemming from ‘feminine ideals’ and ‘mothering ideals’; socio-economic factors such as class and educational level of both members of the dyad and their articulation of human agency in constructing their femininity. Thus, femininity construction cannot be understood without taking the above issues into consideration. In the following section, the role that one’s class contributes to their femininity construction will be discussed.

5.2 Class

Class plays a significant role in how the mother and daughter interact and construct their femininity. As previously mentioned, one of the descriptors for mother’s self-perception is their ability to provide monetarily and emotionally for their children. These types of provision contributed to their description as ‘responsible women’. For the purpose of this research, class is defined in relation to level of education attained and participation in formal employment. The mothers in this study were predominantly unemployed and dependent upon seasonal farm work, domestic work, social grants, feeding schemes and selling various products door-to-door. Some were unemployed, while only Thilivhali (44) was a qualified teacher and the only mother that had been to university. Through the discussion of the sub-themes “one child per maize meal” and “Pizza”, it is discussed how class intersects with women’s conceptualisation of femininity/womanhood as “responsible women”. Furthermore, Thilivhali (44) and her daughter Mutshidzi (25) are used as examples to show how a mothers’ ability to provide monetary and emotional support to her daughter may result in denial of the daughter’s independence.

5.2.1 “One child per maize meal”

For the following mother and daughter dyad, Musiwa (39) and Tshanduko, having more children was a way to make a living for their children through the child grant and other means of making money. For example, Tshanduko mentioned:

Tshanduko (23): “I am a person who fell pregnant and did not live or end up with the father of first my child, and it was just this thing of kids playing around. And my mother accepted me with my child and house help would stay with my child while I go to school. And then she said “now that you have a child how do we do this/how do we go on from here? Because I am buying nappies and I am buying milk”. I was receiving a child grant, and she said she would take the money and buy food and stay with the child while I go to school and we agreed on that. From there she explained to me that when a person is now a parent, she must live with one person/partner, because I will suffer and make my children suffer forever. And I understood her and did as thus. then I met the father of my second born child and lived with him until today.”

Tshanduko further explained that one of the main similarities between her and her mother was based on the fact that they both grew up suffering and this commonality contributes to their closeness.

“what is similar between me and my mother is that my mother grew up suffering as she explained to me, and I also grew up suffering to a point where when we are seated we tell each other of the way we suffered while growing up, and tell each other that we must treat each other well, so that we may not be shamed in the community”

While provision for ones’ children is of utmost significance, for Musiwa it contributed to her life choices in relation to dating and how she interacts with her daughter. For example, she mentioned:

Musiwa (39): “yes right now if I sit down with my child and say my child do you see this person, he is the one buying a bag of maize meal, she says “my mother this better be your last”, it’s not wrong for her to tell, I will also respect her if she advises me with respect. Men always have their own thoughts. And the way they think mislead kids, it makes the kids you bore suffer and as a woman when I give birth to a child, as you can see, I’m working to get money for food, I find money for meat, and I find another man who will say that I should give him a child so that when he buys food, he buys food feeling free, with his surname in this house. Do you understand what this is, as a woman I do not have a “limit” that [is] why you see us living in homes with bastard kids. If the other child is born, since I’ll be having one and the man says he cannot fend for only one child so I’m asking for a surname here in this house, so it’s better you make me children. Most girls are coming across this. And she gives birth there after they dump her, until she gets a second child and get married, if it gets hard or painful she better leave and part from it. And work for her children, don’t let the second child suffer, the first one rather suffers”

What was striking for the researcher was how a mother would go out her way to ensure that her children are fed. However, in doing so she increases her burden by adding more children in a bid to ensure that all of her children are fed. This mother and daughter stay together in a two-roomed house with Tshanduko's two children and her two siblings. Tshanduko is not questioning her positionality nor the dynamics between the two as she is using the same approach she has seen her mother employ through her life, during this interview she was pregnant with another child and left school in grade 10 - this already limits her career options as a young woman. While their life choices positively affected their self-perception as mothers and responsible women, these choices also pushed them deeper and deeper into the periphery of society, making their voices weaker in relation to expressing their agency. In addition, Musiwa (39) expressed that as a "woman I do not have [a] limit, that is why you see us living with 'bastard' children"- this statement shows that Musiwa feels as though as a woman she has no power or voice to dictate or decide when she is done giving birth, hence the continuous burden of fatherless children, all this in order to ensure that all of her children are fed.

While challenges with food provision was one of the main reasons some mothers kept having more children, for some of the participants this did not contribute to them having more children, but instead strengthened the relational dynamics between family members in a community as they share to sustain their livelihood. For example, Ndangulo (21) (Caroline's daughter) explained :

Ndangulo (21): "I was by raised my mother, and she raised us even though she didn't work. She was merely volunteering at the clinic. When she was raising us [...] The money with which she used to buy us food was our grant money [...] but she ended up going to the social workers where they made some arrangements so that my mother can get paid something where she was working at the clinic [...] so it happened after every quarter and she is still getting paid every quarter. One of the people who used to help was my mother's cousin (female) she used to help us if we were running short of maize meal, and my step father who is my little brother's father, when there was nothing at home I'd go to him and explain and he would help me, anything that I wanted at home he used to help me with."

Ndangulo (21) and Caroline's (54) experiences reflect the fact that the mothering process as defined through a process provision by both daughters and mothers is not only limited to women or biological mothers, instead it extends to other family members. In this case it was the stepfather and Caroline's cousins who helped. While for Pfuluwani (36) and Khano (18), when they needed financial and emotional help, Pfuluwani's "sister stepped in and her uncle to support" them. These support the idea of a black family network, through which relations

extend beyond the nuclear family system to include the community. Thus, it can be argued that linked with the self-perception section, for women in this study, ones' identity is defined in relation to other individuals in a society due to the fact that each individual is a part of the other in one way or another. Moreover, the black family unity regards identity as a collective thing rather than individualistic.

5.2.3 "Pizza"

While it is important to provide monetarily, the inability of mothers to do so resulted in them coming up with creative ways to ensure that their children are protected emotionally from bullying should they not have as much as other children. Here femininity is associated with the ability to nurture and protect. For Tshisikhawe, a mother of five daughters, when she did not have money for meat, she fed her children maize meal and sugar but told them that it was "Pizza" so that they did not have to answer many questions or be bullied by other children. She explained:

Tshisikhawe(40):"I've taught my children that even if we don't have any delicacies, we eat pizza. Most people out there will even laugh at the fact that we eat pizza, pizza can be served with pap, when I say pizza, I mean sugar and water. You'll even hear my daughter, the one who is in grade R saying we ate pizza. (I do this to protect them from being laughed at by other kids out there) and I just say its pizza and that's it. Even when I was still in my marriage you did see that I used to make a living by collecting firewood, having peace jobs, and making bricks and even when they were building at schools I used to go. I have been to the farms, my children learnt to cook when they were still very young, the oldest at that time was seven years and the other one was four, I'd find them waiting for me and having prepared a pot waiting for me to come back home, using the 7pm bus. but it was difficult. Their grandmother and my sister in-law didn't help, but I found that I've taught my children life, while they were still young, even when I was going back to the city they used to stay behind. I taught them well, that when their elder sister has cooked you must give her respect, you don't only eat vegetables with meat only, so even sugar is at is, the one we call pizza here at home, is savory and can be served with pap, even tomatoes can be served, and they must respect each other. You do not eat food from other homes, don't trust friends."

What was different from Tshisikhawe's (40) experience in relation to familial support was that, unlike the previously mentioned mothers and daughters, she did not receive any support from her mother and sister in-law. Instead she had to come up with various ways expressed above to ensure that while her children are fed, they are also protected from any bullying. In order to empower her children, Tshisikhawe encouraged her daughters to take ownership of

their lives and strive for education. For all of the women in this study, education was the key factor for them to escape out of poverty. However, for Mutshidzi, having an education did not liberate her (i.e. give her independence to forge her own identity) as her mother kept her confined within the home. She explained:

Mutshidzi (25): “I need her support. I really need her support. Because when I try to be independent, she does not allow me to. she asks me Are you dying of hunger. [silence] are you dying of hunger... heeee?(laughs) are you dying of hunger? if I say I am going to look for a job or say I found a job right now, as soon as I tell her that tomorrow I am going to work, she ask are you really dying of hunger (imitating her mom’s voice), should I stop working, who will look after your children, are you dying of hunger? On what day will I start working, what about my children, who will work for them huh? My children will be supported by other people until when? until which day yes until when? The issue even if I tell her that I want something... she does not do for my whatever I want yet she does not want me to go look for a job. When I ask for things, she tell me I have nothing I don’t have anything... but when I tell her I [want] to go work says no.”

Mutshidzi sounded frustrated throughout the interview process, she constantly expressed how much she wanted to be independent, especially for the sake of her children. What struck the researcher about this dyad, Mutshidzi and Thilivhali, is that Thilivhali was previously denied the ability to go finish school after giving birth to Mutshidzi, as mentioned in the Counter-narrative section (see pages 94-98), yet she is doing the same thing to her daughter. This denial of agency and independence seems to be based on the need for the mother to have control over her daughter or to prove her capability to provide for her child. Specifically, Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983), cited in Boyd (1989), argued that the mothers’ identification with her daughter may result in the mother unconsciously behaving towards her daughter in a way she internally acts towards the daughter part of herself - in this way, she is living out her childhood as a young woman who encountered challenges when trying to establish her independence. Thus, she sees her ability to support her daughter as a process that should not end merely because her daughter is now a mother, unlike how she was raised. It is evident that there are deep tensions between the perception of the separate ‘I’ (mother or daughter) and collective ‘we’ (mother and daughter) (Lerner, cited in Boyd, 1989). In the following section it is discussed how the geographical location of these women affects their conceptualisation and expression of femininity.

5.3 Location

As previously mentioned in the problems statement section of the introduction chapter, the rural woman is confronted by multiple challenges which include typical developmental tasks such as educational progress, reproductive tasks (childbearing and rearing), caring for the sick, food processing, dealing with a patriarchal culture that undervalues women and unequal access to resources and opportunities compared to men and women in urban areas of South Africa (Kehler, 2001; Meena, 1992). In this section, it will be discussed how location intersects with the process of femininity construction for both mothers and their daughters. Of utmost significance is to note that location is defined in relation to whether one stays in rural or urban areas. The location is not fixed as some daughters stay in urban areas as a result of their studies while some mothers reflected on their experiences while working in urban settings. The intersection of femininity construction with location is discussed through two sub-sets (i.e. positives and negatives) of staying in rural areas.

5.3.1 Positives

Mothers expressed that staying in rural areas positively affected their identities as “responsible women” because it is cheap and enables them to provide monetarily for their children, increasing their financial independence in the process, but also enables them to physically raise their children and guide them through life.

For example, Sarah (55), a traditional healer, explained:

“For me it is great because I work with people, I work with nature, which means that I need the rural environment to be able to source the medicinal plants and roots for my clients, since I was unable to become a medical nurse after being pulled out of school, the environment here allows me to do my job properly and fulfil my calling”.

Similar to Sarah, Tshisikhawe (40), a mother of five, expressed,

“Oh! I cut wood, to use here at home and I also cut and collect firewood to sell. People can come to me so that I cut firewood for them, this is the work that God has given me. If I don’t go out to fetch firewood, I feel like there is something which is missing. I really like firewood because even when I am seated, they give me money. I’m not the kind of person who can really say today I don’t have money to buy bread because seated as I am I can just hear someone who want[s] firewood, then I pack them for him and he gives me money then I buy bread for my children to be like other kids”

While Tshisikhawe and Sarah are able to make money, which allows them to provide for their children from nature, for Musiwa, a mother of three and grandmother of two, staying in

the rural areas means that she can provide emotionally and nurture her children appropriately as she will be able to monitor them and understand better. She explained:

Musiwa (39): “I feel good about it because I can be able to see where my kids lack, better than living for the cities and leave my children behind and when I’m there I’ll just hear people saying my child has done this and that, and when I’m there I can’t be able to see which child is more responsible/sensible [...] eh you see but if I’m here I can be able to see that this one is doing wrong or making a mistake and that one is not playing, when I send this one he/she refuses... that way I’m able to reprimand them in the right way. You see! Then I’ll lay down the rules to say do this.”

Besides the ability to provide for their children and reduce the financial challenges, the mothers also expressed that it would be difficult for them to imagine themselves in another location besides where they are due to the comfort that comes with a sense of community within the rural areas. As Musiwa (30) explained:

“The thing is, we are used to this place, so I don’t think there is anything I can say oppresses me [...] living in the city will be difficult for me”.

While Musiwa has never been presented with an opportunity to go live in a city or urban area, Caroline (54) did have the opportunity during the apartheid era, when her then boss asked if she could move with them to Pretoria from Louis Trichardt (a town in Limpopo) where she was working. She denied the opportunity for the following reasons:

Caroline (54): “the thing is, I was born right here at home and had not been to the city before, I felt like I was going to be lost [...] you know that we Venda kids get cold feet, thinking that if you go there you’ll just be lost forever and never return. But also I was not comfortable because my blackness will make me stick out”.

For Caroline, her identity as a black woman meant that she would stand out as she would be living in a predominantly white area, which scared her. Furthermore, she expressed that Venda people get cold feet, although her conceptualisation cannot be generalised to the entire rural Venda context it is important to note that her conception is rooted in her own lived experience. Moreover, the idea that she cannot view herself separate from this context reflects a limited cage she has locked herself and others in. However, the contextual difference should be taken into consideration as she is reflecting on her experience as a young woman in a historically exclusive South Africa.

5.3.2 Negatives

While mothers loved the rural areas due to the low cost and the opportunity to make money due to interacting with nature, as well as to be able to mother their children in close proximity, the daughters felt that the lack of resources prohibited themselves from fully expressing themselves to construct their identity as independent beings due to a lack of exposure.

For example Phathutshedzo, a twenty-three-year-old student who previously stayed in the rural area of Ha-Mudimeli, studied in urban areas and was in the process of moving to Louis Trichardt, made a distinction between the two areas and how they affected her construction of femininity:

Phathutshedzo (23): “In all the years that I lived in Ha-Mudimeli, I felt like living there was good but ever since I started living in Makhado, I can see that it is better because there are a lot of opportunities and when I hear that there are jobs, one quickly applies but when at Ha-Mudimeli, one must first look for transportation and by the time you reach your destination, you find that a lot of people have been accepted and hired. When at Ha-Mudimeli, you cannot explore/see how the world is or the types of challenges that other youths are facing or what changes other youths are making in their lives, you only see things from Ha-Mudimeli and I can’t necessarily say there is good motivation in terms of lifestyle. In town, there are educated people, girls who live in beautiful houses and are driving nice cars which helps a girl to define her own goals in relation to seeing how others are living their lives. which you will not witness when in Ha-Mudimeli.”

Similar to Phathutshedzo, Mutshidzi (25) expressed the following:

“Well I studied in Pretoria and honestly I feel like staying here is very limiting, when I want to go to shops, I cannot freely go to shops, I have to wait for hours for transport whereas when I was there [...] it was easy. and there you are exposed, you see how some girls are working hard and it encourages you to work harder. When I am here I am mostly in the yard with my children so there is not challenge. There is no life here [...] no life at all.”

Beside the limitations in relation to a lack of inspiration, all of the participants expressed that the lack of resources such as water and transportation was the major downside of living in a rural area. Lack of water meant that women like Joyce (47) had to spend hours collecting water, hours they could be using to advance themselves through studying or engaging in another activity that positively contributes to their femininity construction. Besides that, Khano, an eighteen-year-old high school student, said:

Khano (18): “The schools in which we attend are in shambles [...] it could that while we are just sitting in there, the walls just fall on us, truthfully this is not good/not fair at all no! no! [...] [laughs] maybe that why we are not passing even the books are torn [laughs] not the kind of schools worth setting foot.”

To emphasise her dissatisfaction with the schooling system she repeated her statement:

Khano (18): “the schools are not good at all [...]the schools in which we go to, are in bad conditions and since we are villagers there really is no one who cares for us, that we are not schooling in nice schools and even the education they receive is not good/up to standard [...] even the classes are overpacked with a lot of people, listening is not easy, because they are not patient with us, just because they don’t take care of us here in the villages. If we look at the surrounding/neighboring areas, we can be able to see that the kids there are going to good schools, whereas we are attending in tatters, that’s what hurts me the most, it’s just tatters!”

Khano’s statement reflects the socio-economic and socio-political factors that shape the fabric of reality of rural dwellers as previously mentioned in the problem statement. In this case her location is negatively affecting her learning experience and ability to excel as a student. Therefore, it can be argued that her poor learning conditions may negatively affect her life chances compared to other young women in urban areas or in well-kept schools. Furthermore, this may have significant impact on her ability to conceptualise an empowered sense of self since everything about her social location contributes to marginalisation.

In the following section, through a comparison of mothers and daughters views, it will be discussed how the pre-discussed nodes of social factors intersect within the mother-daughter relationship and mothers’ and daughters’ similarities and differences in relation to how the above social factors affect their identity construction and expression.

5.4 Conclusion

Being human alone is a challenging process, but being woman is a complex matrix of existence through which women must find their way and voice in a masculine world. These women must contend with multiple social factors that intersect to oppress, silence, exclude and marginalise them as they forge their own identities. In this chapter, the aim was to show how gender, culture, class and location intersect during the process of femininity construction. In support of Kehler’s (2001) argument that rural black women are burdened with multiple roles concerning productive and reproductive responsibilities, the mothers and daughters in the study expressed that keeping the house together by taking on domestic roles was their mandatory responsibility. The mothers, except Joyce (47), expressed that staying in the rural area was not a disadvantage for them, especially due to the fact that it positively

affected their identities as “responsible mothers” as they are able to meet the livelihood demands due to the low cost and drawing various resources, such as wood, from nature in order to make money. Besides the financial implications of staying in rural areas, the safety of a community (expressed through sharing and support) meant that when one is struggling to make ends meet, other members would help them, especially in regards to food security, as expressed by Ndangulo (21) in the class section. While mothers were able to explain the advantages of their location, daughters felt as though staying within the rural areas hindered their abilities to imagine a life beyond the confinement of their social location; the lack of service delivery meant that the standard of education they received negatively affected their learning process. As Khano (18) mentioned, the schools were in bad condition and they did not have all of the books they needed, which could be a reason that they do not perform well academically. This limits their chances of having greater socio-economic mobility in the society.

The cultural constructions of femininity as facilitated through various initiation processes was regarded as beneficial, as it resulted in girls delayed sexual debut, lower numbers of teenage pregnancies and armed women with cultural knowledge of existence. However, for some of the daughters and mothers, the processes were of no use as they “did not learn anything” that they deemed practical to current society. The usage of deception to recruit participants, as expressed by Mashudu (23), shows that there is lack of transparency as to what one is going to experience once they get there; the mark they make on ones’ thigh also negatively affected her body image as she feels that she cannot wear swimwear like other girls. In addition, Joyce (47) expressed that she did not understand some of the activities she had to do during the ceremony, thus she rendered the participation as non-beneficial and would rather sit down and talk to her daughters about life challenges and how to deal with them. Nonetheless the researcher is of the opinion that since culture is not fixed, through various stakeholders of society standing together and ensuring that various elements of existence that are crucial to the present society are incorporated in these cultural schools, many people will be encouraged to go as they will learn various tools they can use to construct empowered feminine identities.

Sometimes the message that women cannot or should not be independent beings with a voice is very open, it takes the form of advice from the older women who had supposedly walked the same life journey. For example, the mothers in the studies expressed that a good woman was one who does not “talk too much”; “do not be loose”; and “be respectful”. These socio-cultural messages can obliterate even the concrete evidence of female voices and agency by

blocking them through patriarchal ideologies. The most lethal form of discouragement in the present study was the usage of marriage as the center of womanhood. For Thilivhali, being a teenage mother meant that she was automatically deemed a grown woman who no longer deserved any support from her parents and she was sent to her boyfriend's home to be his wife. As she expressed, she was not allowed to go back to school and was expected to serve as "a maid". While she was able to break away from the social confinement through education and become a financially independent mother and wife, the injunction to not be more than a wife and mother was always echoed through various feminine ideals and societal expectations as mentioned above. Similar to Weems' conceptualisation of Africana womanism (cited in Davis, 2017:15) that define a woman as a "self-namer, self-definer, family-centered, in concert with males in struggle, flexible roles, genuine sisterhood, strength, male compatible, respected, recognised, whole, authentic, spirituality, respectful of elders, adaptable ambitious, mothering and nurturing", Tshimangadzo (nineteen-year-old), expressed that a woman is whatever she defines herself to be - a mother, a wife, a professional woman or even an advocate for the traditional conception of womanhood. What was striking about the women in this study was that they are not afraid to call attention to the social factors that intersect in their process of identity construction. Although they have previously suffered in their marriages due to being self-sacrificial through silence as they were taught that this was their mode of being, they firmly encourage their daughters to forge new means of existence.

Chapter 6: Summary, conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

For the purpose of this research, the mother-daughter relationship was conceptualised as a critical site for femininity construction, specifically because the mother serves as the primary caregiver and key socialiser (Chodorow, 1989). As a result, the mother serves as a frame of reference through which the daughter can construct her own conceptualisation of femininity or womanhood. Through a discussion of the results, it becomes evident that unlike the majority of studies rooted in psychoanalytic perspectives (see pages 17-19), the daughter is not a passive recipient of the mothers' conception of how femininity should be defined or enacted, instead mothers and daughters are connected in a dialectical relationship through which both parties can actively engage in the process of femininity construction. As Nash (2018) argues, this relationship is characterised by crisis, loss and redemption, all of these are mediated by the various social factors both women interact with as they make sense of their lived realities. Drawing from Nash's argument, in this chapter an integrated discussion of this study's main findings will be provided. To achieve this, firstly summary of the main findings and how they relate to the literature review will be provided. Secondly, the present study's limitations will be discussed before giving recommendations for practice and future research. Lastly, an overall conclusion of the entire study will be presented.

6.2 Summary of key findings

The lived experiences of black women in rural South Africa have remained a relatively unexplored area of formal research (Williams, 2001). As previously mentioned in the problem statement (see page 3), most of the literature on black femininities and mother-daughter relationships to date have been produced from an African-American women's and psycho-analytic perspective. Thus, due to wide contextual differences, the South African women's lived experiences (especially in rural Venda) need more attention. In addition, research written in the South African context about the mother-daughter relationship is often rooted in the daughters' point of view. To address the gap in conceptual and theoretical understanding of this process, the main aim of this study was to examine how black women construct their feminine identities within the context of the mother-daughter relationship and

how their constructions were affected by the various social factors the women interact with to inform their complex identities. The results were split between two chapters titled the mother-daughter relationship: complexities and intersectional nodes of femininity. In the section below the findings are integrated.

From the research findings it was evident that for women who have children, motherhood was central to their conception of femininity. In particular, the ability for these women to provide monetary and emotional support to their children accorded them respect by other women and their own children. Besides the ability to provide, the mothers defined selflessness as a central aspect of femininity construction. While it is important for mothers to provide for their children, for Thilivhali, an employed teacher, her ability to provide contributed to her denying her daughter independence, reflecting the tensions between the sense of independent 'I' and collective 'we' (Lerner, cited in Boyd, 1989). Specifically, she struggled to let her daughter become her own independent person. Consistent with other studies on mother-daughter relationships, this study concludes that mothers shape their daughters' development of the self and identification through their own experiences, expectations, desires, principles, beliefs and perceptions, as well as through their socio-economic position, cultural level, occupation, education, lifestyle values and standards (Ashcarft & Belgrave, 2005; Stogiannidou, Sakka & Deligianni-kouimtzi, 2007; Theodosious-Tryfodiou, 2016).

Blackness was not central to women's conception of femininity. This could be based on the fact that their social location involved other pressing social factors which negatively or positively influenced their conception of femininity. For example, the most prominent social factors raised by the women in this study were social location, marital status, class and gender. In relation to social location, most mothers expressed their satisfaction with being located in rural areas as it enabled them to sustain their livelihood in interactions with nature and the community in general. For example, Tshisikhawe, a mother of five daughters, expressed that she sustains her livelihood by selling wood which she gets from the 'rich forest', Whereas Sarah, a mother of five daughters who is a traditional healer, expressed that staying in rural areas enabled her to get medication for her different clients. For other mothers, the low cost of staying in rural areas was a bonus as they were employed on farms or relied on child grants, while other mothers were appreciative of the safety net that comes from being connected to other individuals who step up to assist when these mothers struggle to feed their children. The individuals that made up the safety net were inclusive of extended

family members and neighbours. Although most women from the mother group were satisfied with their location, in contrast the daughters expressed that the lack of service delivery and poor schooling conditions negatively affected their social, academic and financial mobility. In addition, these daughters expressed that the rural areas are so isolated from various institutions of power and role models that it is often challenging to envision a different sense of femininity located in a different context, for the rural areas are all they know.

In relation to how the mother-daughter relationship influenced femininity construction, both mothers and daughters engaged in a self-comparison process with their respective mothers. What emanated from this process of comparison was that both parties often resorted to silence to avoid expressing their dissatisfaction with the relationship and society as a whole. In fact, silence was central to these women's conceptualisation of femininity in such a way that mothers themselves were actively encouraging their children to not speak up, as a woman who 'talks too much' is not respected. Central to this association of silence with womanhood was the notion of respectability. Specifically, enacting hegemonic femininity was associated with silence, dress code, respectful interactions with others in a society, being responsible to their children and husbands (for those who are married) and respect for their own bodies by not being sexually promiscuous, resulting in a hierarchy of 'good' and 'bad' women. In trying to conform to dominant conceptions of femininity, these women often perpetuated their own oppression and exclusion from decision-making processes.

While members of a marginalised group (i.e. women) promote the notion of respectability in order to portray their personal social values as continuous and compatible with dominant values (Higginbotham, 1993), from a black feminist standpoint, it can be argued that these women feel empowered when respected, hence the need to assimilate to dominant discourses by enacting the stereotypes associated with their existence. While it is important to honour their standpoint, it is also pertinent to note that after conforming to standards of femininity and doing everything possible to ensure marriageability, the women in this study like Tshisikhawe, Pfuluwani and Musiwa felt victimised as the attributes such as silence and nurturing gave them a false sense of security. These women felt victimised after their marriages failed, irrespective of them having ideal feminine attributes instilled in them by their own mothers.

Society expects a woman to behave in a particular way in order to be deemed acceptable. While some women freely internalised and performed the feminine norms and standards prescribed by society and culture, for some these expectations were deemed as oppressive as they silenced women and prohibited them from expressing their lived experience and the domestic challenges they experienced. These were reinforced through strict gender roles which had women assuming all of the household chores (except herding livestock) and childcare without any assistance from their male counterparts. Nonetheless, these women should not be viewed as passive partakers of the oppressive constructions of femininity. For example, Thilivhali was taken out of school after childbirth as her father expressed that he does not take 'musadzi' to school. Although her dreams and goals were delayed, through education she was able to construct a counter-normative conception of womanhood based on independence. Like Thilivhali, most daughters expressed that education is the main tool to achieve independence.

For some of the Vhavenda women in this study, participation in cultural initiation schools aimed at moulding a culturally acceptable femininity was important, especially because this prepared them for different life stages a woman would go through such as childbirth, marriage and sexual morality, hence yielding protection from sexually transmitted diseases and early teenage pregnancy. While these practices are significant for passing on cultural knowledge from one generation to the next, these would be deemed as oppressive because they prepared women for a position of servitude in society. By being told to take as little space as possible and be quiet, these women automatically assumed a marginalised sense of existence and expressed that they would conform for the sake of peace, as expressed in the intersectional node of femininity: gender (see page 81). Unlike Sarah and Tshisikhawe, the mothers who were keen on having their daughters participate in the initiation processes, one daughter who went through Musevhetho and some mothers explained that the incompatibility of this traditional framework of femininity construction with the present challenges women are faced with on a daily basis are the reasons they would not encourage others to participate.

The tension between mothers and their daughters emanated from both parties feeling unseen and unheard. This contributed to both mothers and daughters longing for better relationships. In addition, as both parties go through periods of transition within their relationship and independently, this filter into how they conceptualise their mother-daughter relationship. For example, Mutshidzi explained that when she gave birth to her son, her mothers' affection towards her was reduced and after the birth of her second child this completely dissipated.

Whereas, for Ndangulo and Tshanduko, their childbirth contributed to stronger bonds with their mothers. In addition, when mothers were going through challenging times with their husbands (i.e. infidelity and domestic violence), daughters automatically assumed the position of being the protector.

Overall, women's construction of femininity reflected the traditional conception womanhood rooted in Africana womanism, which defines black womanhood through the following characteristics:

“1.) self-namer, 2.) self-definer, 3.) family-centered, 4.) in concert with males in struggle, 5.) flexible roles, 6.) genuine sisterhood, 7.) strength, 8.) male compatible, 9.) respected, 10.) recognised, 11.) whole, 12.) authentic, 13.) spirituality, 14.) respectful of elders, 15.) adaptable, 16.) ambitious, 17.) mothering and 18.) nurturing.” (ibid., 2017:15-16).

These forms of femininity conceptualisation were enforced within the family system, with women playing an active role to ensure that their own and their daughters' conceptualisation were rooted in the above feminine ideals. From the above, it is evident that the multiple and varied ways in which identity is constructed is a complex relational process mediated by various social factors.

6.3. Study limitation

Working with small samples is important in qualitative research as it enables the collection of rich and detailed data (Durrheim, 2006). However, the usage of a small sample does not allow for the results to be generalised to wider contexts. Nonetheless, this is not the main purpose of the current study. This study is woman-centered and the women's experiences are unique to each woman interviewed. Therefore, these experiences should not be assumed to represent the lived realities of all Vhavenda women in Vhembe district.

Individual interviews were conducted with mothers and daughters, the main reason for this being to ensure that both parties felt comfortable to express their experiences without fear of hurting the other party. Each individual brings different attributes and perspectives to the research process; hence the use of different wording when probing may have negatively affected the uniformity of the findings or research experience across the interviews. Additionally, having the interviews at different times may have resulted in participants speaking to other participants in between interviews, resulting in them altering their

perceptions to please the researcher. By conducting some interviews in Tshivenda, it is possible that some of the critical meanings of experiences were lost during translation. However, to account for this limitation, Tshivenda interviews were transcribed in Tshivenda and a private translator translated them to English. They were then translated back to Tshivenda by the researcher to ensure validity.

6.4. Recommendation

During the research process it became clear that culture was central to women's perceptions of femininity construction. Therefore, although cultural practices may have some oppressive elements, I think it is important for these cultural practices to be revived and restructured to account for the daily challenges women are faced with. Specifically, programmes rooted in women empowerment should be linked to the cultural initiation processes, this way young women are prepared to face the various challenges rooted in societal institutions. Moreover, it was evident that women played an active role in reinforcing patriarchal ideologies that serve to silence and marginalise them within the home and society as a whole. Thus, it is recommended that women, in interactions with each other, use their lived experience to empower each other.

While collecting data, some participants expressed that they would like to do further interviews in relation to the relationship between mother-in-laws and their daughter-in-laws, specifically based on the notion that this is a relationship fraught with conflicts and ambivalence as the two parties compete for the men's attention. This is a potentially rich site for future research. In addition, it is recommended that a study of this type be duplicated using a mixed method research design, as this will allow broader application of the research findings and contribute to the pool of black femininity knowledge.

6.5 Overall conclusion

This research expresses a more feminine way of femininity construction through the voices of women themselves. Here, emotions and tensions are expressed as fully embodied in the lives and the relationships between mothers and daughters and their immediate surroundings. Multiple and complex voices were expressed, some voices expressed discomfort,

representing a sense of self that is caught at the crossroads of intersecting social factors informing ones' fabric of reality. Specifically, the female body is rooted within a masculine community and struggling to break free.

Although some women expressed pride in their culture, femininity and motherhood, patriarchy has wounded their hearts, denying them their right to both feel and expresses their emotions openly. In fear of being branded as disobedient, these women continue to reinforce patriarchal ideologies of femininity in the lives of their children. However, socio-cultural and socio-economic frameworks aimed at unpacking and reconstructing femininity may serve as opportunities for women to recover their own voices. In addition, it is evident that it is the mothers and daughters of this world, in their day-to-day interactions, who seem to be capable of affecting others, thus setting off a chain of action that can deeply change society.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: English consent letter

Consent letter

Dear participant

My name is Pfarelo Matsila (student number: 18279865), I am a Masters candidate at the University of Pretoria's Sociology department conducting a study titled "Intergenerational constructions of black feminine identity: Mother-daughter narratives.", for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements for my Masters of Social science degree.

Aim: This Masters study seeks to explore how black women construct their feminine identities within the context of mother- daughter relationships.

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that you can withdraw your participation at any point in the process- should you agree to participate. There are no consequences associated with withdrawing from the process; if anything, your decision will be respected; however, your engagement would be highly appreciated.

The study entails a 90-120 minutes discussion centered on the topic of black femininity in the context of mother-daughter relationships. This discussion will be conducted through individual semi-structured mother- daughter interviews which, with your consent, would be recorded for the purposes of transcription for the write-up of my mini-dissertation.

I will treat our discussion confidentially; as such, you have the choice of not having your name but a pseudonym used in the mini-dissertation. In order to minimize the risk of your daughter/ mother being able to recognize what you said, whatever we discuss will not be disclosed to them and the use of pseudonyms will ensure that your information is not recognizable in the final report. However, given the nature of the research, there is a risk that members of mother-daughter dyads will be able to recognize and identify information shared by the other member of the dyad (i.e. in publications or the thesis). As a result, your attention is drawn to the fact that confidentiality is limited in this respect and internal confidentiality

(within the dyad) is not guaranteed in the study. If you agree to participate and sign this letter you are signalling that you agree with the limits on confidentiality contained within a dyadic study of this nature.

However, it is reiterated that external confidentiality is guaranteed and that only I, the researcher, as well as my supervisor, Dr Rachelle Chadwick, will have access to the recordings, field notes and other information shared between us during the process of my study. For the purposes of confidentiality, these transcriptions will be saved separately from the consent form which will confirm your participation in the study.

This study is approved by the University of Pretoria faculty of Humanities research ethics committee; as such, the department of Sociology is required by University regulation to store these transcripts for 15 years.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor should you wish to inquire about any parts of this process at absolutely any point or to ask questions, access data and enquire about the dissemination of results. Should you experience any distress arise as a results of the interview process, please feel free to use the free 24 hours Life line service (011 422 4242/0861 322 322) for counselling services and further emotional and mental support.

Pfarelo Matsila: matsilapfarelo@gmail.com

Cell phone number: 0817387084

Dr Rachelle Chadwick: Rachelle.chadwick@up.ac.za

Thank you,

Pfarelo Matsila

Appendix B: Tshivenda consent letter

Aa!

Ndi a livhuwa u sumbedzwa u takalela havho kha idzi ̄hōdiso dza “Nganea dza mme na nwana wa musidzana malugana na kutalukanyeke kwa vhufumakadzi na vhurema ” (Intergenerational construction of black feminine identity: mother –daughter narratives)

Ngudo idzi dzo di sendeka kha u todisisa ndila ine vho-mme na vhana vhavho vha vhasidzana vha talukanya ngayo vhuvha havho sa vhafumakadzi vha vharema na ndila ine vhushaka ha mme na nwana ha kwana ngayo kupfesesele uko.

Phindulo dzavho dza uvhu vhudavhidzani dzi ̄ō vha tshiphirini. Mūōdisisi u ̄ō lingedza u sa vhakwamanya na dzi phindulo dzavho kana u bvisela khagala dzina ̄avho sa mudzheneleli wa idzi ̄hōdiso. Ngauralo, zwine ra amba ngazwo a zwi nga do divhadzwa nwana wavho kana mme avho. Na hone, madzina a khole khole a do shumiswa u dzumbetshedza vhuvha havho. Fhedzi, vha na pfanelo ya u shumisa madzina avho a vhukuma.

Vha divhadzwa uri huna khonadzeo dzauri nwana wavho kana mme avho vhakone u talusa manwe maambiwa. Ngauralo, arali vha tenda u di dzhenisa, vha vha vhatshi khou tenda uri naho mugudiswa a tshido lingedza nga ndila dzothe u dzumbetshedza vhuvha havho, huna khonadzeo ya uri nwana wavho kana mubebi anga talusa maambiwa avho kha ripoto.

Vha ̄ivhadzwa u ri u dzhenelela havho kha idzi ̄hōdiso ndi u vōunthia, ngauralo, vha na thendelo ya u litsha tshifhinga tshīwe na tshīwe. Vha kho u fhindula dzi mbudziso hedzi nga u fhulufhedzea, u dzhenelela havho kha idzi ̄hōdiso, ndi zwa ndeme kana vhūhogwa nga māda. Ndi livhuwa tshifhinga tshavho na tshumisano ya vho.

Vha humbelwa tshinga tsha mithethe ya 90-120, ine radovha ri tshi kho u saukana thoho ya ngudo idzi. Nga thendelo yavho, vhudavhidzani u vhu vhu do rikhodiwa, hu u itela uri mutshudeni a kone unwala ma wanwa a ngudo idzi.

Ngudo idzi dzo tendelwa nga University of Pretoria Faculty of Humanities research ethics committee, ngauralo, department ya sociology i na thendelo ya u vhulunga nyambedzano idzzi lwa minwaha ya 15.

A rali vhana mbudziso malugana na thodisiso idzi, kana vha tshitama u vhalala report kana u pfesesa ku shumisele kwa ngudo idzi, vhangana kwamana na Pfarelo Matsila kana Mugudisi wawe kha zwidodombedzwa zwitevhelaho:

Arali Vhangana khakhisea muyani nga murahu ha u dzhenelela kha ngudo idzi, vhatutuwedzwa u shumisa nomboro idzi dza mahala dza Life Line (011 422 4242/ 0861 322 322), u wana thikhedzo kana counselling.

Wavho

.....

Mutshudeni wa Masitasi

Pfarelo Matsila: matsilapfarelo@gmail.com

Nomboro ya thingo thendeleki: 0817387084

Mugudisi

Dr Rachele Chadwick: Rachele.chadwick@up.ac.za

Appendix C: formal acknowledgement of consent – Tshivenda version

Fomo ya thendelo

Nhe _____ ndi a tenda u dzhenelela kha idzi
thodisiso dza masitasi, dza “Nganea dza mme na nwana wa musidzana malugana na
kotalukanyele kwa vhufumakadzi na vhurema ” (Intergenerational construction of black
feminine identity: mother –daughter narratives)

Ndo talushedzwa nga vhudalo nga ha mushumo kana ndivho ya idzi thodisiso. Ndi a pfesesa
u ri ndi nga litsha u dzhenela kha idzi thodisiso tshifhinga tshinwe na tshinwe arali ndi sa tsha
zwi takalela na uri tsheo eyo i nga si ntsie ndi na masiandoitwa a si avhudi.

Ndi a pfesesa uri mushumo wa idzi thodisiso a si u thusa nhe, na u ri dzina langa na
mafhungo e nda amba zwi nga si bviselwe khagala.

Ndi kho u nea Pfarelo thendelo ya u shumisa madzina anga a vhukuma kha thodisiso idzi

A thi kho u nea Pfarelo thendelo ya u shumisa madzina anga a vhukuma kha thodisiso idzi

Tsaino : _____ Duvha : _____

Appendix D: Interview schedule

A: Mother's interviews

Please tell me about yourself, (names, age, occupation, and the number of live daughters you have).

Growing up

Can you please tell me more about your own childhood? What can you remember? What did other people tell you about your childhood?

- Who raised you when you were little?
- What was it like for you?
- What can you remember about that time? Role played by own grandmothers/ aunts/ other family members.
 - ❖ Do you play the same roles to your daughter?
- What sorts of activities were encouraged in your family? (By who)
- What would you change/keep the same about your childhood?

Questions about femininity

- What does it mean to be a woman?
- How do you define yourself as woman?
- What is most important to your identity as a Muvenda woman?
- What roles are expected from a Muvenda Woman?
 - ❖ How do you feel about those expectations?
- What are the positive and negative experiences of being a woman?
- What are the differences and similarities between you and your mother?
- Who or what would you say has had the biggest influence on your ideas of what it means to be a woman?

Mother-daughter relationship

- Tell me about your relationship with your daughter from when she was born until now.
- Current relationship with your daughter.
 - ❖ How is your relationship different/similar to the one you had with your mother?
- How has your relationship with your daughter affected the person that you are?
- What has your experience of being a mother and watching your daughter become a woman been like
- Compared to your mother and grandmother have you noted any difference in how you understand womanhood
 - ❖ Why do you think this so?
- What do you expect from your daughter
- What are the differences and similarities between you and your mother/ daughter?
- Can you think of any stories that show how you and your daughter spoke about femininity?

Blackness and location

- Do you stay in the same house with your daughter 365 days a year?
 - ❖ If not where is she located?

How has this affected your relationship with her? Or how you understand womanhood

What does being a black woman to you?

Is your being a black woman important to whom you are as a person?

How does being black/ being a woman contribute to the person that you are?

- How does staying in rural areas affect this (if at all)?

Would you view your being a black Muvenda woman differently if you stayed in urban areas?

Conclusion

Any additional thoughts/questions?

Reflect on experience of being interviewed

Thank participant for willingness to be interviewed.

B: Daughter's interview

Please tell me about yourself, (names, age, occupation)

Growing up

Can you please tell me more about your own childhood? What can you remember? What did other people tell you about your childhood?

- What can you remember about that time? Role played by own grandmothers/aunts/other family members.
- What was it like growing up in your house hold?
- What would you change/keep the same about your childhood?
- What sort of activities were encouraged in your family? (by who)

Questions about femininity

- What does it mean to be a woman?
 - ❖ How do you define yourself as woman / young woman?
- What is most important to your identity as a Muvenda woman?
- What roles are expected from a Muvenda Woman?
- How do you feel about those expectations?
- What are the positive and negative experiences of being a woman?
- Who or what would you say has had the biggest influence on your ideas of what it means to be a woman?

Mother-daughter relationship

Tell me about your relationship with your mother from when you were born until now.

Relationship with mother as a baby, toddler, child, teenager, currently

- How is your relationship with your mother / daughter?

- What has your experience of being a daughter and watching your mother grow been like?
- What do you expect from your mother? And what do you think she expects from you as a young woman?
- What are the differences and similarities between you and your mother?
- Can you think of any stories that show how you and your mother spoke of femininity?

Blackness and location

- Do you stay in the same house with your mother 365 days a year?
 - ❖ If not where are you located
- How has this affected your relationship with her? Or how you understand womanhood.
- What does being a black woman mean to you?
- Is your being a black woman important to whom you are as a person? /How does being black/ being a woman contribute to the person that you are?
- How does staying in rural areas affect this (if at all)?

Conclusion

Any additional thoughts/questions?

Reflect on experience of being interviewed

Thank participant for willingness to be interviewed.