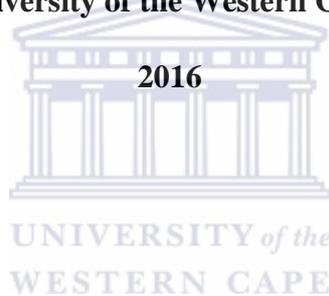


**CHILDREN'S CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'SELF' WITHIN TWO URBAN
IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITIES IN CAPE TOWN**

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Psychology**

University of the Western Cape



Supervisor: DR SHAZLY SAV AHL

**Keywords: 'Self'; self-concept; child well-being; child participation; health
promotion; focus group interviews; community mapping; Photovoice; discourse
analysis; Delphi; South Africa**

ABSTRACT

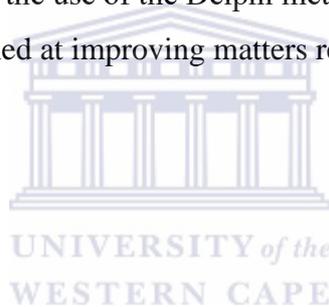
This study aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities in the Western Cape, South Africa. Within this process the study aimed to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments were manifested within children's discourses. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept. The study was conducted through three sequential phases; (1) systematic review, (2) child participation, and (3) intervention programme development.

Phase one: the systematic review, aimed to systematically review academic literature focused on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' An article search and appraisal yielded 38 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Meta-synthesis was used to analyse the findings. Six central thematic categories emerged as the key influences on children's constructions of the self. These include multidimensionality, discursive practices, socio-environmental conditions, oppression & marginalisation, culture, and social support.

Phase two: child participation, consisted of two separate studies. The first study utilized a child participation framework to explore children's discursive constructions of and meanings assigned to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. Eight focus group discussions were conducted amongst fifty-four children between the ages of 9 to 12. Thematic and discourse analysis were used to analyse the findings. The themes of childhood, social connectedness, and children's spaces were identified to have a vital influence on children's self-concept. Four underlying discourses emerged within the themes as central to the participant's self-constructions. These included; (1) '*forfeited childhood*,' (2) '*vulnerability and helplessness*,' (3) '*preserving the integrity of the self*,' and (4) '*opportunities for escape*.' The sequential study aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape in South Africa through the use of visual methods. The data collection methods included Photovoice and community maps with 54 participants between the ages of 9 to 12. Feelings of safety,

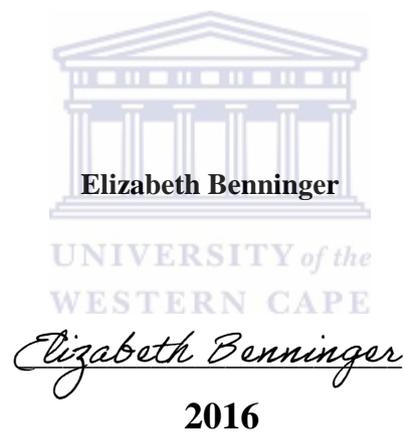
social connectedness, and children's spaces all played a central role in the way in which the participants constructed and assigned meaning to the 'self.'

Phase three: Children's programme implications, consisted of a study which aimed to explore children's perceptions of the nature and content of intervention programmes aimed at improving children's self-concept within two impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The Delphi technique was followed with a group of ten children between the ages of 10 and 12 years who were considered to be the experts on matters affecting their lives. The participants identified the factors which influence children's self-concept to include; *childhood reality, feelings, and relationships*. The participants' suggestions for intervention programmes included a focus on *safety, social support, opportunities for learning and for play, and basic needs*. The study elucidated the value in using participatory methods with children, especially the use of the Delphi method for eliciting children's perspectives for interventions aimed at improving matters related to their well-being.



DECLARATION

I declare that the research *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa* is my own work. It has not been submitted before for any degree, or examination at any other university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.



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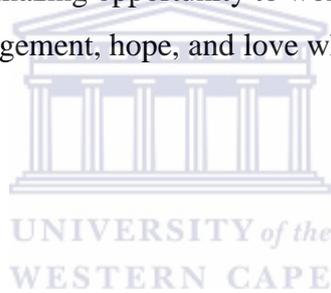
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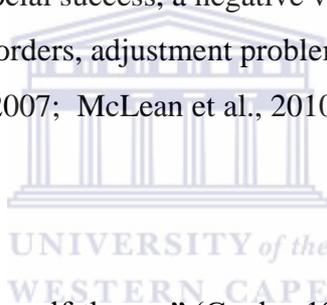


CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Background and Rationale

1.1. Introduction

The ways in which children assign meaning to the ‘self’ could have an impact on their social and emotional well-being, including their coping skills, relationship formation, and behaviour. Furthermore, children’s understanding of the ‘self’ could influence the way in which they make meaning out of their experiences and internalize these experiences as a means of understanding one’s abilities and self-worth. Multiple fields in psychology and sociology recognise the valuable influence of the self in optimal social, psychological, and developmental outcomes. In the field of Social Psychology, the conscious component of the self is commonly referred to as the self-concept. While a positive self-concept has been linked to academic, school, and social success, a negative view of the self has been linked to aggression, depression, eating disorders, adjustment problems, suicide, and shame (Demaray et al., 2009; Margolin & Gordis, 2007; McLean et al., 2010; Neff, 2007; Parkes, 2007; Shaw, 2004).



Social psychology’s “looking glass self-theory,” (Cooley, 1902) postulates self-conceptions to be shaped by the way people are viewed and acted on by the environment in response to their behaviours. The more recent ‘sociocultural self-model’ further supports this theory through a view of the self-concept as constructed through a transactional relationship between individuals and their social, cultural, and structural environment (Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). Individuals and structures influence one another in an on-going cycle through which individuals shape their different selves in response to their social and cultural experiences (Stephens et al., 2012). These theories are supported by recent studies which reveal the impact of an individual’s socio-cultural and historical situation on the self (See De Haan et al., 2010; Lim, 2008; Roth, 2006).

Children who live in conditions of poverty, especially those faced with high levels of community and domestic violence, could be especially limited in their resources available for a healthy self-concept. Research has suggested that high exposure to violence influences

children's self-constructions and perpetuates violence through aggressive cognitions and behaviour (Guerra, 2004; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003). Research further indicates increased risk for internalised psychological symptoms in children who have been victimised or exposed to community violence, such as helplessness, shame, fear, anger, high arousal, anxiety, and depression (see Margarlin & Gordon, 2000; Staub, 2003). These reactions could interfere with a child's social and academic life, and alter a child's developmental trajectory and construction of a healthy self-concept (Margarlin & Gordon, 2000). Violence exposure could additionally become internalised by the child in the form of negative self-perceptions and feelings, such as an unworthiness of being kept safe (Margolin & Gordon, 2000). Socio-economic status could also influence the resources available for the development of a healthy self-concept. For example, impoverished communities with poor infrastructure may have limited spaces for children to safely explore their surroundings and to form supportive relationships with others which could impact their sense of safety and self-worth.

It is however notable how conditions of poverty and violence do not necessarily result in a negative self-concept. Several studies amongst children within impoverished communities revealed many of the participants to construct a healthy sense of self, despite impoverished or oppressive conditions (Benninger & Savahl, 2016). An example is seen in Timberlake (1994), where children who were undergoing homelessness placed significant energy into constructing a conceptual representation of the 'self' as valued and competent in order to buffer against the negative self-messages associated with homelessness. Other studies amongst children have shown similar responses, where the participants showed a tendency to discount the self-domains which they did not excel in while clinging to the more positive domains (Lim, 2008). An individual's sense of hope for the future has been revealed to be a means of nurturing a healthy sense of self in the face of adversity (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2004). Studies on self-compassion have also presented its benefits for mental health specifically related to the self-concept (Barnard & Curry, 2011; Neff, 2007). Neff (2007) defines self-compassion to be an action-oriented coping strategy which promotes positive psychological functioning and increases feelings of safety, security, and positive feelings towards the self.

Although there is a large body of research seeking to understand children's self-concept, the majority of the studies look to the quantitative aspects and self-perceptions through the use of scales such as the Harter's Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982), the Piers-Harris SCS (1969) and the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). According to Blascovitch and Tomaka (1991), there are over 200 measures of self-esteem, although the validity of the scales remains questionable, and the majority of which are developed within a United States context. Additionally, there are limited studies on how messages of oppression, violence, and poverty impact on the subjective understanding of self-concept with children. Although self-concept has been identified to be an important component of children's well-being, self-concept enhancing interventions remain scarce. The understanding of what contributes towards the development of children's self-concept needs to be further researched from the perspectives of the children themselves and must be located within an individual's complex web of history, culture, community, character, and space.

1.2. Aims of the study

Utilising a child participation framework, this study aims to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. Within this process the study aims to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments are manifested within children's discourses. Additionally, the study aims to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept.

1.3. Research context

The history of systematic violence and oppression in South Africa can be traced back to the era of colonisation in the 1600s on the premise of colonial expansion, conquest, and slavery (Stevens et al., 2003). Since this time period, violence in the form of structural racism became increasingly institutionalised to enable 'White' privilege through the social, economic, and psychological exploitation of the 'Black' residents (Stevens et al., 2003). This was made especially explicit during the apartheid era in South Africa (1948-1994), which marked a time of legalised racial segregation based on the values of 'White' superiority and divided South Africans into four racial classifications; Black, Coloured, Asian/Indian, and White with distinct residential areas, resources, and rights. Policies were set in place through

which entire communities were demolished and families separated based on racial classification and forced to live in their racially designated and disadvantaged areas referred to as townships. Within the oppressive environments, violence became expected and normalised. The state-sanctioned violence of apartheid was met with counter violence, becoming an integral part of society (Stevens et al., 2003). This was reflected in the neighbourhoods, schools, and homes, which turned into sites of conflict, rather than nurturing environments (Lockhat & Van Neikerk, 2000). With little opportunities to the essential resources for well-being, poverty and violence flourished, denying the local children a supportive and safe environment to nurture a healthy self- concept.

The oppressive and violent conditions created during Apartheid continue to have an impact upon the well-being of the local children with potentially damaging repercussions on their self-concept. Recent statistics reveals 50% of South African children to remain living in conditions of poverty and violence (UNICEF, 2009; World Bank, 2013) which compromises their opportunities to play safely, sense of self and well-being (Savahl et al., 2015).

1.4. Children's well-being and the self-concept

Current research related to children's meaning assignments and constructions of the self supports the ways in which children construct a self-concept to be strongly tied to the ways in which children make sense of their well-being. The way in which children's well-being is conceptualised varies across societies, cultures, and geographic regions and is closely associated with how the concept of childhood is historically understood, the contextual definitions of children's rights and children's social and legal status (Sandin, 2014). Prior research has identified a number of factors to influence children's well-being, including economic conditions, political rights, opportunities for development (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2007), culture, social relationships, and ability to transcend psychosocial and environmental challenges (September & Savahl, 2009), gender, class, ethnicity, and age definitions, contextual norms and value structures (Sandin, 2014). While a wide range of indicators have been utilised to measure children's well-being, the concept can be more holistically understood through the inclusion of both its objective and subjective components, since each contributes towards a different and deeper understanding of the construct (Axford, Jodrell, & Hobbs, 2014). Objective well-being includes dimensions of health and development and its

contributing factors such as behaviour, emotions, housing and socioeconomic situation, while subjective well-being includes children's assessment and evaluation of their own lives and happiness (Axford, Jodrell, & Hobbs, 2014). Although children's well-being can be understood through both objective and subjective indicators, Axford, Jodrell, & Hobbs (2014) suggest most constructs to sit along a continuum of subjectivity. The word 'subjective' when related to children's well-being includes data collected using subjective measuring techniques and commonly a focus on the *hedonic* tradition in research on well-being, composed of positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Casas, 2016), while the *eudaimonic* tradition emphasizes modes of thought and behaviour which contribute towards engagement and fulfilment (Axford, Jodrell, & Hobbs, 2014).

Recent research has shown the way in which children conceptualise the self to be a predictor of well-being (Moses, 2006; Savahl et al., 2015; Schimmack & Diener, 2002). For example, Schimmack & Diener (2002) compared the predictive validity of explicit and implicit self-esteem measures for informant reports of subjective well-being and found explicit self-esteem to be a predictor of subjective well-being. Based in South Africa, Savahl et al. (2015) have noted children's perceptions that a '*stable self*' is critical to a positive self-identity and their overall well-being. Based within the township of Ocean View, South Africa, Moses (2006) highlighted the complexity of the interaction of neighbourhood features with each other and with the broader physical, economic and socio-political context and its impact on children's well-being in terms of access to resources, hampering integration, and impact on children's self and collective-efficacy. Timberlake (1994) demonstrated how children living in poverty, who are able to make sense of self and social situation of homelessness, have higher levels of subjective well-being.

Although the way children think and feel about themselves has been shown to have an influence on children's well-being, the self-concept remains marginalised on the well-being research agenda. Furthermore, due to the complex and contextual nature of the self, self-concept enhancing interventions remain scarce. The understanding of what contributes towards the development of children's self-concept needs to be further researched from the perspectives of the children themselves and must be contextually understood. This could be achieved through the use of participatory research with children.

1.5. Child participation

The inclusion of children's perspectives on issues related to their well-being is becoming increasingly supported by current child research, where children are now being recognized as key informants and competent informers on issues related to their lives and well-being (Casas, 2016). The growing trend in child participation research is supported by the recent advances in the field of psychology and sociology along with current international and national legislation which supports children's rights. The 'new' sociology of childhood perspective views childhood as socially and culturally constructed, with children often marginalised by social and cultural assumptions of their abilities (Camfield, Streuli, & Woodhead, 2009). Furthermore, children are viewed to be the experts of their lives whose perspectives need to be listened to (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). The perspective additionally views children as active social agents who shape the processes and structures within their surrounding environment (Morrow, 2001). From a children's rights perspective, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child article 12 states that children have the right to freely express their opinion, to be heard, and for their opinions to be taken seriously on all matters which affect them (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Article 13 supports child participation in the form of freedom of expression. This includes the right to seek, receive, or impart information and ideas through the child's preferred form of communication. Within South African legislation, child participation is supported by the Children's Act (2005). Chapter 2, section 10 of the Children's Act (2005) emphasizes the right of every child to participate and to have a voice in matters which concern their care and well-being. While the perspectives of children have been increasingly included in well-being research, those residing within a context of poverty and even more so within developing countries remain marginalised from the research agenda (Camfield, 2010). Furthermore, there remains a gap in the literature which provides children with the opportunity to voice their own perspectives around issues related to the self-concept. This study hopes to fill this gap in international discourse on children's self-concept.

2. Dissertation Structure

The dissertation was completed by published manuscripts and comprises nine chapters conducted through three sequential phases; (1) systematic review, (2) child participation, and (3) intervention programme development. Of these nine chapters, four chapters (chapters four to seven) represent the four journal articles which address the aims of the dissertation. It is

therefore expected that there would be some overlap of the literature in these chapters (see also PhD dissertations by publications conducted by Abebe (2009), Adams (2016) and Kjørholt (2004). **Chapter One**, *Introduction*, provides an overview of the background, rationale, and aims of the study. **Chapter Two**, *Theories of the 'Self'*, presents the theoretical considerations of the construct of the 'self' and the self-concept. **Chapter Three**, *Method*, presents a detailed synopsis of the methodological and ethical considerations of the study. **Chapter Four**, *Article one*, presents the first of the four published manuscripts, in the form of a systematic review which aimed to systematically review academic literature focused on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' **Chapter Five**, *Article two*, utilised a child participation framework to explore children's discursive constructions of and meanings assigned to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. **Chapter Six**, *Article three*, aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' through the use of the visual methods of Photovoice and community mapping. **Chapter Seven**, *Article four*, consists of a study which aimed to explore children's perceptions of the nature and content of intervention programmes aimed at improving children's self-concept through the use of a Children's Delphi. **Chapter Eight**, *Discussion*, provides a synthesis and discussion of the findings of the overall study and its implications for further research and practice related to children's self-concept and well-being. **Chapter Nine**, *Conclusion*, concludes the dissertation through a reflexive account of the research process, including the methodological, theoretical, and ethical challenges which arose within the study, how these were addressed, and the study implications.

3. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an introduction, including the background, rationale, and structure of a dissertation study which aims to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The chapter sets up the study within a South African context, where conditions of poverty and violence could place limitations on children's access to resources necessary for their overall well-being, including the ability to construct a healthy self-concept. The chapter further presents the use of a child participation research framework as a means of achieving the study's aim. Finally, the study concludes with an overview of the dissertation structure which was completed by published manuscripts, and comprises nine chapters conducted through three sequential phases; (1) systematic review, (2) child participation, and (3) intervention programme development.

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CHAPTER TWO: THEORIES OF THE ‘SELF’

1. Introduction

Chapter one introduced the study which aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’. The chapter located the study within the Western Cape of South Africa, where conditions of oppression, poverty, and violence could have an especially detrimental impact on children’s self-concept and overall well-being. The chapter concluded by providing a description of the dissertation structure. The current chapter provides an overview of an array of philosophical, psychological, and social-psychological theories which have contributed significantly towards the understanding of the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self.’ The chapter begins with a summary of the existential and humanistic perspectives of the ‘self’ then moves into the theories of developmental and social psychology and the modern socio-cultural theories of the ‘self’. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the various frameworks and how these contribute towards an integrated understanding of children’s self-constructions and meaning assignments.

2. A Philosophical Understanding of the ‘Self’

2.1. Existentialism and the ‘self’

Existential philosophy provides valuable insight into the psychological dynamics of the human experience as this relates to the self. This philosophy is rooted in the stream of human thought based on existence, with a focus on the living, existing person (Tillich, 1944). This includes an exploration of the mystery of existence and the unique creativity of the self (Tillich, 1944). This philosophy emerged in Europe during the 1840’s in opposition to the ‘rational’ system of thought and life which represented ‘man’ as a calculable and controllable object. According to existential philosophers, reality is based on the immediate personal experience which is unique and irreplaceable, especially prevalent in the personal inner experience (Tillich, 1944). The self is formed through a reflection on these experiences and is in continual transcendence towards self-authenticity. People therefore must move away from the self-prescriptions identified by others towards those self-identified, and break out of the established forms of behaviour which are self-defeating (Thompson, 2008). The experience of being comes with the possibility of *not being*, or nothingness, which is the source of existential despair defined as the will to get rid of oneself (Tillich, 1944). Anxiety on the

other hand arises from our personal need to preserve our being (May & Yalom, 2013). It is through the knowledge of suicide and death that provides us with the realization that we are choosing our own being (May & Yalom, 2013).

The writings of the existential philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche form the basis of many social and psychological concepts, including the concept of the 'self.' Reality, according to Nietzsche, is constructed through the power we acquire to shape things and reshape things as we wish (Miller, 1981). The world therefore has no facts, but consists of constructs formed by individuals as a means of making sense of the world. One becomes conscious of his or her experience through the use of language. The language for experience is grouped into schemas, with new material constantly being fit into old schemas. The inner experience, like the outer experience, comes into our consciousness once we have formed a language for it. The inner world is the phenomenological world of thoughts, feelings, and desires. It is also the world of subjectivity, the ego, and the self, and has the same structure and nature as the external world. Concepts are formed as a part of a reflection of events, but are not in themselves reality. The self is not real, but a construct created by the act of interpretation which is constantly being constructed and deconstructed, shaped and reshaped, and created out of the need to understand the aspects of existence which influence and control our interpretations (Miller, 1981).

In addition to Nietzsche, Jean -Paul Sartre is one of the major European twentieth-century existential philosophers who has had a great influence on the understanding of the self (Tillich, 1944). Sartre believed the self to exist only as a part of our reflection on our experiences (Miller, 1986). The self takes the form of the 'I' as the body-subject of the experience reflected upon. The body is a condition for the possibility of consciousness. While we are conscious of the experience in the moment, the 'I' is only formed within the reflection of the experience. The self is therefore only experienced when reflected upon and is constantly undergoing change through reflection (Miller, 1986).

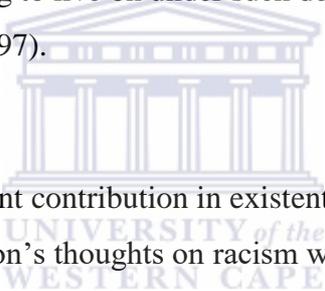
Sartre believed in radical freedom as the foundation of human existence, that is that regardless of our circumstances we can and must choose our actions (Thompson, 2008).

According to Sartre, we have no fixed personality, self, or nature and are therefore ultimately responsible for our self. The self is a process of becoming, a construct to be created, not a fixed state to be found and people actively play a role in determining their life direction and in creating self-authenticity.

Although emphasizing the need for personal responsibility for one's own actions and choices, Sartre's writings also emphasized the need to take into account the wider socio-political factors which alienate people. This was reflected in a significant amount of his work on social and political theory. Self-authenticity cannot be fully understood without understanding the cultural and structural context which may limit choices and values. Attitudes of oppression, for example, are self-defeating. He believed that authenticity not only requires recognizing one's own freedom, but also respecting and recognizing the freedom of others (Heter, 2006). His later work challenges oppression in regard to class and race, recognizing that changes at a broader level cannot occur without the recognition of the significance of human agency (Thompson, 2008). For Sartre, human consciousness was capable of transcending the environment. This ontological freedom is achieved through choosing what mental attitude to adopt (Heter, 2006). Practical freedom, on the other hand, is the ability to obtain human needs. While one always has ontological freedom in relation to the freedom of consciousness, one may remain relatively unfree in a practical sense due to social and structural conditions (Heter, 2006).

Sartre's work was an influential component of black existential philosophy, inspiring the work of philosophers such as Richard Wright and Frantz Fanon, arguably the two most influential revolutionary black existential writers of the 20th century (Gordon, 1997). Black existential philosophers, also known as Africana philosophers, writings raise existential questions on the liberation and identity of being black. More specifically, the philosophy is concerned with the lived experience and the meaning context of African people, raised by the people who live in that situation (Gordon, 1997). Although the ideology of existentialism is fundamentally a European historical phenomenon, the philosophy of existence or existential philosophy consists of philosophical questions around the concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, and liberation (Gordon, 1997). Within every culture exists a wide variety of attitudes and experiences of existence. Gordon (1997) uses the example of a slave, whose

situation can only be understood through the recognition of the fact that a slave experiences it. The philosophy of existence must always be contextually situated, with the self conceptualized through the reflection within a situated life. Black existential philosophy is therefore the situated reality of blackness (Gordon, 1997). This includes an exploration of the lived realities of race and racism. The concept of race has emerged as a fundamental existential question of people who are black, whose racial worth has been historically devalued. Black power challenges the socio-historical situation of blacks as a negated race, by recognising black people as sources of value. Just as existential philosophers focus on the dilemma between existence and the anxiety of non-existence, racism (which questions whether certain groups should have existed) has become a dominant factor in the black struggle against 'non-being'. Existential philosophers theorize that we do not choose to be born into the world, but in choosing to live on, we live a choice, which is our existence (Gordon, 1997). Black existential philosophers recognize that no one chooses to be born under racial designations, but in choosing to live on under such designations, one creates the meaning of existence (Gordon, 1997).



Frantz Fanon has made a significant contribution in existentialism towards our understanding of racism (Thompson, 2008). Fanon's thoughts on racism were built off of Sartre's thoughts on anti-Semitism, challenging the common narratives that are supportive of white supremacist ideas (Thompson, 2008). His book *Black Skin, White Masks* was the first book to investigate the psychology of colonialism, understood not only by the historical events which took place, but the psychological response and the internalized factors of those events (Hook, 2003). According to Fanon, black inferiority continues not only through the external economic exploitation of black people but additionally the internalized meaning of the external experience of being black. Fanon describes this as the impact of systemic vertical violence aimed at reproducing racial domination which produces a collective unconsciousness of racism (Hook, 2003). After a prolonged period of time, the ideology of the dominant group becomes internalised by the dominated group, leading to intense internal distress. In an attempt to defend the self from the psychological distress, oppressed individuals may turn inward as an attack on the self and outwards on the community (Hook, 2003).

3. The 'Self' in Psychology

3.1 Existential-Humanistic psychology and the ‘self’

The previous section discussed the philosophical roots of the ‘self’ from an existential perspective. This section will build off of this philosophical understanding of the self as it is conceptualized in the field of psychology, using existential psychology as a starting point. Existential psychology argues that it is possible to have a science which seeks to study human beings in their subjective reality, with a strong focus on individual meaning-making processes and the dilemma of being versus not being or nothingness. The truth is dependent upon the existing person within a given situation and time (May & Yalom, 2013). The danger in science is making a human being entirely subject or object which loses the existing, living person and the originality of the self (May & Yalom, 2013). There is therefore a need in science to view people in human, rather than in mechanistic or behavioural terms which take the uniqueness away from the self (May & Yalom, 2013).

The self in existential psychology is existing, dynamic, and at every moment becoming (May & Yalom, 2013). Every being is additionally engaged in every moment in transcendence, defined as continual emergence (May & Yalom, 2013). An individual will not be fulfilled within a search for self-satisfaction, rather it is through self-transcendent meaning that he or she will experience happiness (May & Yalom, 2013). The human world is structured around a person’s relation to it and the design and meaning they choose to assign to it. The self in existentialism takes the form of the “I-am” experience of being acting, choosing beings (May & Yalom, 2013). Self-awareness takes place as one participates in the design of the self and the surrounding world (May & Yalom, 2013).

Existential psychology looks to understand the core of our being, including the spiritual components which lie beyond the surface of social and cultural prescribed identities (May & Yalom, 2013). While society and culture may contribute to the meaning surrounding the self, it could also contribute to a loss of being. This occurs as a person becomes his or her prescribed social roles (May & Yalom, 2013). True freedom is found when a person is open to the range of possibilities. Additionally, a person must be willing to take responsibility for their choices and to take action towards the endless possibilities. Change likewise occurs within an individual’s self-concept when people willingly and actively want to change.

In contrast to developmental, behavioural, and cognitive theories, existential psychology views the world to be divided into three forms; *Umwelt* (“world around”), *Mitwelt* (“with world”), and *Eigenwelt* (“own world”) (May & Yalom, 2013). The first form, *Umwelt*, or “world around” describes the world of objects which consists of the biological and physical experience such as nature and instincts. This world is the quantifiable aspect of existence which exists within quantifiable time. The *Mitwelt*, or “with world”, is the social world. This world explains aspects of personal relationships and experiences such as love, in which quantitative time has much less significance. The *Eigenwelt*, or “own world” is the world of the self. This world captures what the world personally means to the individual observer, described to be the “for-me” part of existence (May & Yalom, 2013). This is the world of self-awareness, self-relatedness and insight into the subjective meaning of an experience. It provides a basis for understanding love, which cannot exist without the self (May & Yalom, 2013). Additionally, it exists external to time, rather in a process as the self strives to be integrated for further creativity (May & Yalom, 2013).

Existential psychologist Victor Frankl (1969) theorized man’s search for meaning to be the primary motivation of his life. An unhealthy self-concept occurs as an individual adopts an identity for the sake of others. This results in a loss of meaning and thus takes a toll on his or her mental health. Existentialism to Frankl is defined as existence itself, the meaning of existence, and the striving to find concrete meaning (Frankl, 1969). The self is always in transcendence, with its meaning changing dependent on a given moment in a person’s life. A healthy self is aligned with that one longs for in the depth of his being and discovered as one exists in the world.

Frankl believed that the essence of our existence is being responsible. Mental health takes place when a person is able to take responsibility for himself or herself, and aligns his or her actions according to personal values. While external circumstances may be out of one’s control, the meaning assigned to the situation is up to the individual and the self which he or she chooses to adopt within that moment. Frankl explained “man is not fully conditioned and determined but rather determines himself whether he gives into conditions or stands up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self-determining” (Frankl, 1969, p. 154).” Thus our self can change when we are willing to change and this can occur regardless of our external

circumstances. Frankl called this our 'will' to meaning. This takes the individual outside of being a product or a victim of his condition, to one in control of his existence. A person determines himself when he gives into conditions, while a person achieves self-actualization when he makes decisions and takes responsibility for his existence.

Taking on a similar perspective of the self as Frankl and other existential psychologists, Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) theorized the self to be a fluid process continually changing with potentialities and discovered in one's experiences. The self, like the human experience, is complex and contradictory. Through openness to the infinite potentialities in the world, a person is able to more fully experience the self. A person gains insight into the unknown elements of the self through experiencing a feeling in a given moment. When a person is able to fully experience the range of emotions which he has, he experiences himself, because in that moment the self is the feeling. Through openness to experience, a person can take the new situation for what it is without distorting it based on prior experience in order to fit an already established pattern.

Rogers (1961) conceptualized the process of self-actualization to occur first through the recognition of what the self is not. A person has a tendency to move away from a self that he is not or from an image of what he "ought to be." This movement can also take place away from what the culture expects him to be. Some individuals form a self around pleasing others which gradually moves to autonomy. This is seen when a person begins to make goals for himself which he chooses to move towards. As an individual moves from a self as defined by others, he moves towards being. True freedom is in being able to be oneself. The self does not have an end goal, rather is a continual process of potentialities. It is complex and changing throughout life with a close and open relationship to experience. A self-actualized person is open to both their outer and inner experiences and to the unique experiences of others.

An existential-humanistic-phenomenological view of the self takes into account a person holistically in the context of their history, culture, social interactions, and innate qualities. The past is significant in understanding the person, but is not deterministic because people

possess the capacity for a large amount of self-efficacy (DeRobertis, 2006). Human behaviour is understood through the eyes of the individual and their subjective perception of the world. The child is viewed as an active participant in his or her development, which is a process of creating one's unique self (DeRobertis, 2006).

Charlotte Bühler has contributed towards an existential- humanistic-phenomenological understanding of the self, especially as it relates to children. Bühler (1968) saw humans as “open” organisms in a world of endless possibilities of experiences which contribute towards self-growth. The meanings and values that people attach to the objects, events, and people in their lives are significant in motivating self-beliefs and behavior. In contrast to social behavioral theorists, human beings are actively mediating their own existence in a spontaneous and creative way, rather than being reactive to environmental stimuli (DeRobertis, 2006). In accordance with Roger's person-centered theory (1961), every human being is both a self and a whole being. This being is composed of multiple parts, with the self at the core of the individual and their creativity. It therefore influences the type of goals a person sets for herself or himself in relation to their life circumstances (DeRobertis, 2006). Healthy self-development occurs through a meaningful, creative, and spontaneous existence where decisions are made based on personal values, meaning and purpose (DeRobertis, 2006).

While the self is primarily subconscious in nature, it is greatly influenced by one's socio-cultural context (DeRobertis, 2006). Self-meanings are constructed within a specific socio-cultural environment and worldview which influence goals and behaviors. The environment poses the risk of both nurturing and stifling creative self-development as individuals adapt to their surroundings. Conditions which support a sense of competence, social efficacy, hope, love, curiosity, creativity and meaning, nurture a healthy self-development and thus result in an integrated prosocial self. In contrast, suboptimal conditions can result in a self which is calculative and destructive (DeRobertis, 2006). Self-actualisation occurs with the achievement of a creative and independent identity. Under optimal conditions, a child learns skills which are adaptive to their cultural environment while receiving warmth, love, and affectionate care which nurtures a healthy sense of self (DeRobertis, 2006). Self-limiting adaptation occurs with the need to adjust or fit in to the surroundings for the purpose of

attaining a sense of security and belonging in society. Such adaptation is common in early childhood. As a child transitions from childhood to adolescence, it is common to experience self-limiting adaptation simultaneously with creative expansion defined as a sense of one's abilities to achieve desired goals (DeRobertis, 2006). A child's motivation to achieve goals is dependent on her belief in her ability to succeed and in her sense of self-worth. A child then has a choice to act in a constructive or destructive manner.

3.2. Social Psychology and the 'self'

For many psychologists and social psychologists, existential and humanistic psychology can be problematic in its philosophical nature which makes it challenging to prove 'scientifically' (although Rogers and Frankl both argue for a more human science of the person as essential for developments in the field of psychology). Social psychology has a strong influence on the current knowledge and scientific understanding of the 'self-concept'. Psychologist such as George Mead, Erik Erikson, Sheldon Stryker, and Peter J. Burke have looked towards understanding the components of the 'self' which are more easily accessible in a person's awareness and which can be looked at with both objectivity and subjectivity.

Mead's self-object theory (1934) theorizes the self to be an object to itself. Mead (1934) viewed all social experiences to be identified and integrated with the self. A person experiences herself indirectly based on the standpoints of her direct social group. The attitudes toward herself are thus constructed by the individual in her proximal social context. A person becomes an object to herself just as others are objects to her. People practice self-talk, which includes speaking and replying to oneself as if they were speaking or replying to each other. When this response becomes reflected in behaviour, a person becomes an object to the self. Such conversations with the self can cause a person to change her thoughts and consequently her actions.

According to Mead (1934), the social experiences of the self are the parts of the self which are communicated to others. Through interactions with multiple social contexts, selves are divided into a variety of different selves which are communicated to others or to one's self. These different selves are largely dependent upon the social reaction to the particular aspects

of the self. As an individual exhibits certain behaviours, meaning is developed through the responses of others to those behaviours. At the same time, an individual's behaviour is dependent on the anticipated response of the other. The self- process takes place through the process of language and an internalized conversation of gestures. For children, the self is developed through play, where actions stimulate the response of others and then are responded to in the form of the character being played.

In contrast to the existential and humanistic theories, Mead (1932) theorized a child's self to be in development and not complete or organized. The child has no definite character, personality, or self, rather a self which is made up of a series of responses. Infants, for example, are merely adjusting to the responses of others without experiencing a self. As a person grows older, the self arises through social processes which lead to a more elaborate organization of the self. This process takes place between the "I" and the "me." The "me" component of the self represents the group of attitudes which dominate in the community, while the "I" is the response of the individual to the attitudes of the community. It is the "I" which enables self-expression. Often the "I" develops a sense of superiority to others, formed as a means of preserving the self. Self-consciousness provides the primary structure to the self. To be self-conscious is to take the attitude of the other towards oneself.

According to Mead, the self develops in two stages; in the first stage the individual organizes particular attitudes of others towards himself, and at the second stage the self is further organized by the social attitudes of the social group as a whole to which she belongs. This organized community or social group is called 'the generalized other.' The self-concept is determined by the attitude of the generalized other towards oneself. Individuals are affected by society and are continually affecting society as the attitudes of the group are internalized towards the self and responded to. Depending on the nature of the response, the attitude of the group can be changed. Social attitudes change through the adjustment and readjustment of the self. Society, structures, and social activities, however, are only possible as much as the individuals within them take on the socially congruent attitudes. Through these interactions with others, change can take place in the self-concept. The self can have a voice which is stronger than that of the community by speaking with a voice of reason to herself which integrates the past and the future. This is then spoken to the community to pursue change.

Erikson (1959) discussed the concept of the self to be in continuity throughout various life domains, with healthy development marked by the integration of the self in adulthood. According to Erikson, a healthy self is characterized by cultural relativity. Identities are therefore formed in relationship to one's social and cultural contexts. The basis of a healthy sense of self is rooted in early childhood experiences of trust. Erikson described that "trust forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being "all right," of being oneself, and of becoming what other people trust one will become (p.65)." This is the cornerstone of the first of Erikson's psychosocial stages of personality development, *basic trust versus mistrust*. In this stage, identity takes the form of a sense of "I am what I am given (Erikson, 1959, p.87)." In the second stage *autonomy versus shame and doubt*, healthy development is marked by a child's sense of self-control and self-esteem which results in a sense of autonomy and pride. Erikson explains the self-concept at this stage to be a sense of "I am what I will (p. 87)." Children begin to show self-control, marked by their pleasure and willfulness in coordinating their muscles. A sense of autonomy in a child is greatly influenced by the culture in which the child regularly interacts along with the social organization, and economic and structural conditions. Unhealthy development is marked by shame and self-consciousness as a child doubts their abilities. This is often a result of a child made to feel a strong sense of being small by the adult caregivers (Erikson, 1959).

The subsequent phase is *the initiative versus guilt* stage of development. During this time, a child's sense of self is conceptualized as "*I am what I can imagine I will be* (Erikson, 1959, p. 87)." At this time a child's consciousness of the self becomes more firmly established. Feelings of inferiority and shame could also be established as a result of overwhelming adult-child power dynamics. In the following *industry versus inferiority* stage, the self is growing into a sense of "I am what I can learn (Erikson, 1959, p87)." Children at this time develop a sense of industry, an ability to do things, to make things, and to do it well. Play is now particularly important for children to master their experience. On the other hand, there is a danger at this time of children developing a sense of inadequacy and inferiority if their individual strengths and attributes are not properly nurtured within their social and cultural environment. Adolescence is marked by the *identity versus identity confusion* stage. During this time, the sense of self is developed around a concern for what he or she appears to be

according to others compared to what he or she feels they are. The self-concept becomes more defined within an individual's understanding of their social environment and amongst existing social identities. If a young person is unable to settle into one of the occupational identities available to them, they will experience identity confusion. Erikson notes that this sense of initiative versus identity confusion is greatly limited by the economic, social, and cultural environment.

After this stage, a person enters into the three stages of adulthood. The first of which is defined to be *intimacy and distantiation versus self-absorption*. Erikson explains that a reasonable sense of identity established in the former stages is a necessity for intimacy development. Distantiation at this stage occurs as a person struggles for identity differentiation. The next stage is the *generativity vs stagnation* stage. Generativity is defined to be the establishment of the next generation, or in other words a desire to bond intimately with another human being in order to create a new life and to contribute towards the next generation. In order to have a sense of generativity, one must have acquired a belief in mankind rooted in childhood experiences. While generative people tend to place the selfhood of their child over themselves, people who lack generativity tend to be overly indulged in themselves. The final stage is defined as *integrity vs. despair and distrust*. Integrity at this stage is defined to be an acceptance that one's life is one's responsibility and by a strong sense of comradeship with man and woman. Conversely, despair occurs in this stage if a person experiences a lack of ego integration.

As children develop through the various life stages, they gradually increase their capacity to meet the opportunities and limitations of their culture. Despite this claim, Erikson's theory of personality development reflects a specific cultural and historical context of the conservative American middle class of his time. This is seen in his references to concepts such as marriage, religion, and heterosexuality, all of which were presumed to be drivers and markers of healthy self-development. Although it may be presumptuous to apply his stages of personality development and manifestations of mental health across cultures, his theory is an example of the social and cultural influences on the self-concept within a specific environment and history. It is additionally important to understand that these stages were also

observed within a specific society and culture which contained certain types of resources which children drew upon to influence their self-development.

Identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000) seeks to describe the reciprocal relationship between self and society. Identity is described to be the “parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.284).” Identity theory is divided into two components; (1) the social structural sources of identity and the relations among identities, and (2) the internal, cognitive identity processes (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The first component stems from the work of Stryker and colleagues’ theory of structural symbolic interactionism and the second from the work of Burke and colleagues and their theory of symbolic interactionism.

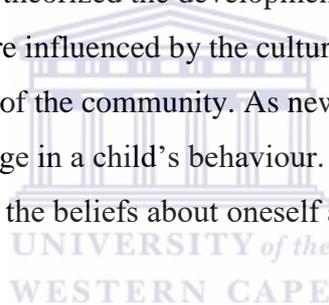
Stryker’s (1980) structural symbolic interactionism theory is based on the understanding of how social structures affect the self and how the self affects social behaviours. The resources within one’s social structure influence the availability of identities. These resources are represented symbolically in the form of status, respect, sense, and esteem which provide the potential for the successful accomplishment of a task which provides one with self-verification. People hold multiple identities within society, closely tied to different social networks and the identities of others within those networks. The connectedness a person has to an identity within a certain social group, the more likely it is for a person to experience the salience of that identity, meaning a greater likelihood the identity will be drawn upon in various situations.

Burke (1991) and his theory of symbolic interactionism focuses on the internal dynamics of self-processes as these influence social behaviour. Symbolic interactionists perceive identities as self-meanings and that self-meanings develop in the context of meanings of roles and counter roles (Burke 1991). According to Burke (1991) identity and behaviour exist in the meanings they share. Behaviour is influenced by a person’s identity standard and organized to change a situation and its self-related meaning in order to bring it into agreement with the standard (Burke, 1991). Emotion occurs as a result of the relationship between perceived self-meanings within a given situation and the self-meanings held in the identity standard.

Both Burke and Stryker's theories conceptualize the self to be partially a structure of multiple identities. Social structures are composed of interconnected social roles linked through activities, resources, and meanings, all of which influence the identity. Identity theory views people to adopt as many selves as there are distinct social groups with which the person interacts, occupies a position, and plays a role (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Through the recognition of the multiple identities, Identity theory accounts for individual variability. Identity consists of internalized meanings associated to the roles which form the external part of the identity linked to social positions within a social structure. Identity salience is defined as the probability that an identity will move across social situations (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

3.3. Culture and the 'self'

For Vygotsky and Luria, culture is central to the development of the child, their self-concept, and their behaviour. Luria (1994) theorized the development of the child to take place in a series of transformations which are influenced by the cultural environment. A child changes to adapt oneself to the conditions of the community. As new cultural artefacts and inventions are formed, this influences a change in a child's behaviour. Likewise, the subject matter of the cultural experience influences the beliefs about oneself and one's abilities.



Vygotsky's theory of learning and identity looks to the specific cultural influences on identity, learning, and behaviour. According to Vygotsky (1933), child development is the process of mastering items of the cultural experience along with cultural behaviours and cultural ways of reasoning. A child constructs an internal process following the mastery of an external method, and these internal schemas are used to influence decision-making. Culture is reflected in both the nervous and psychic processes. People use cultural signs to master themselves internally and externally. Children thus learn, through signs and words, to talk about, compare, classify, and thus manage their own emotions (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Behaviour is influenced, conditioned, and organized by external stimuli and dependent on the way a person responds to the stimuli within a cultural context.

According to Vygotsky, culture influences our daily experience and therefore shapes the selves which make up the culture. In this way culture is viewed to transform who we are.

Meaning is a part of collectively formed social, cultural, and historical systems (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). The ability to organize oneself in the name of an identity develops as one exchanges cultural artefacts with others and then applies the cultural resources to oneself, which influence behaviour (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). This is seen as people attempt to solve their inner problems through the use of exterior objects. A child's inner structure is therefore subject to on-going change dependent on their experiences within a cultural environment.

3.4. The socio-cultural self model

Building off of the theories of Vygotsky and Luria relating to the cultural influences on the self and behaviour, the 'socio-cultural self model' explains the interdependence of individual characteristics, culture, and structural conditions on behaviour outcomes (Stephens et al., 2012). This model takes into consideration the variety of contextual and cognitive variables which influence the development of an individual and collective self. When individuals participate in a certain environment, their self-concept changes accordingly, thus adopting a culturally-congruent self (Adams & Markus, 2004). The culture within an environment brings a history to the present circumstances that affect the individual's cognitive and behavioural patterns (Adams & Markus, 2004). While the self is shaped by cultural experiences, new sub-cultures can simultaneously arise in the form of the interactions of the individual selves within them (Adams & Markus, 2004). In order for an individual to adapt to a more desired behaviour, the current selves must be congruent with the behaviour change. Stephens et al. (2012) refers to this as identity-congruent behaviour. Psychological processes play a central role in identity-congruent behaviour. Individuals' thoughts, motives, and other cognitions unconsciously direct how people interact with, create, sustain, and change the cultures that they comprise through psychological natural forces (Adams & Markus, 2004). As new patterns emerge, cultural norms, meanings, and identities influence and support the new patterns.

People need both the resources and the self-concept to change. Social contexts can limit the access to engage in desired behaviours or to develop skills which foster the desired behaviour (Stephens et al., 2012). Old patterns may lose their adaptive value yet the norms continue to persist because they have become a part of the internalised selves (Adams & Markus, 2004).

This is seen in contexts where there is a history of oppression and violence. Oppression can become internalised in the form of unhealthy beliefs about the self and thus result in negative self-congruent behaviour which perpetuates violence. This internalisation may fade with new experiences, however, behaviour may remain due to social expectations for certain behaviours, cognitive adaption around a behaviour, and a lack of available resources to support change. Interventions will be successful when the current selves support the desired behaviour and social structures are in place to support the selves (Stephens et al, 2012). Through viewing the experience of childhood through a socio-cultural self-lens, we can learn how it is that specific meanings, beliefs, and behaviours become common while others do not.

The 'Possible Selves Theory' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) speculates future-oriented expectations, fears, and strategies to be dependent on the feedback within one's socio-cultural context. Possible selves are cognitive structures of the self which represent what a person would like to become versus who he or she is avoiding becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves take the form of personal representations of self-relevant hopes, expectations, and fears which provide meaning to the self-concept (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In addition to these representations, possible selves include planning and strategy-related cognitions and behaviours (Clinkenbeard & Murray, 2012). Abrams and Aguilar (2010) and Clinkenbeard and Murray (2012) highlighted the importance of the 'possible selves theory,' with adolescents, who were faced with the conflict of their possible future selves versus their feared selves. Those who could produce a clear picture of their future self along with a realistic plan for achieving this self, displayed better outcomes in their psychosocial functioning. These outcomes were closely tied to the availability of social support and other resources within the community.

3.5. Narrative self

Within a specific socio-cultural environment, people draw upon language as a means of communicating with others, taking action, and making meaning out of their lives, experiences, and self. The narrative theory of identity looks to the subjective perspective of events as essential components of the self-concept. Reese and colleagues theorize the understanding of the self to be grounded in narratives (Reese, Yan, Jack, & Hayne, 2010).

Narratives provide us with a way of understanding the self and shaping the self-concept. The way we learn about ourselves is through the stories we tell to others about ourselves and the stories we hear about ourselves from others. Personal narratives begin in early childhood with references to personal past experiences. These experiences gradually become integrated into a life story and reflected in an individual's self-concept.

The life story is defined as “a dynamic collection of self-defining memories that are in narrative form and that can be organized with respect to major lifetime periods” (Reese et al., 2010, p. 23). The life story emerges from the stories that parents and children tell in early childhood and these stories simultaneously shape children's self-concept. Personal narratives are linked to self-understanding throughout development and related to the understanding one has towards an event. The subjective perspective one takes towards an event contributes towards the establishment of the self. Additionally, the way events are organized into a life story shapes who we are.

Reese et al. (2010) hypothesised that adults assist with the self-concept development of their children by providing elaborations of events, especially within the emotional content of these elaborations. Their research has linked discussions of past events to children's self-esteem and well-being. Parent-child discussions of negative events in early life led to a more positive portrayal of life events later on and a more positive self-concept. Their research additionally showed personal narratives and self-concept to be linked in complex ways from early childhood.

McLean and colleagues' Narrative Identity theory recognises the link between narrative processes, identity development, and well-being (McLean, Breen & Fournier, 2010; McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007). It is through constructing narratives that people develop an understanding of the self and the world around them (McLean et al., 2010). The self-concept is viewed to be a process of integrated interpersonal relationships and emotional experiences that are socialized in early childhood and extend into life story themes in adulthood. The process of creating one's experience into a narrative may lead to a greater autonomy and connectedness with others as an individual develops a greater understanding of the world

around them (McLean et al., 2010). Children establish personal meanings of events and greater self-understanding through the assistance of adults to explain and help resolve events.

Situated stories help people to make connections between their experience and the self (McLean et al., 2010). Any narrative account of personal memory is created within a specific situation, by particular individuals, for particular audiences, to fulfil particular goals. The stories one tells about the self are represented directly or indirectly in one's self-concept. Telling stories about the self is additionally a way in which individuals maintain or change their self-concept. One therefore develops and maintains a life story and self-concept through the telling of situated stories.

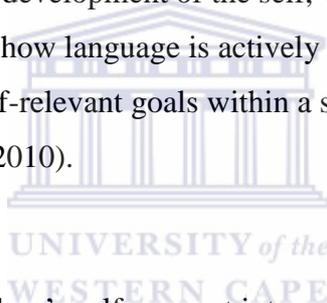
4. Discussion

This chapter provided an overview of multiple theories which contribute towards the understanding of how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' Due to the extensive amount of literature on the 'self' and self-concept, this chapter is not a comprehensive account of all of the existing self-concept theories; rather it highlights an array of philosophical, psychological, and social-psychological frameworks which contribute towards a more holistic understanding of children's self-constructions. The chapter first introduced existentialism and the self in process which strives towards growth and self-transcendent meaning. The humanistic self is similarly viewed as an on-going and dynamic process continually changing with potentialities and discovered in one's experiences. While existential and humanistic psychology looks to the aspects of the self which span beyond the immediate environment and at times one's consciousness, social psychologists are more concerned with the aspects of the self within our awareness and the influence of the social, cultural, and structural environment on the self-concept.

In contrast to the process-oriented self, as defined by Rogers (1961), Frankl (1969) and Bühler (1968), Erikson (1951) and Mead (1934) saw the self as growing within distinct stages of human development. For both Erikson and Mead, the self-concept of the child is not complete until he or she reaches adulthood. The ability to develop a healthy and integrated self in adulthood is greatly dependent upon the resources within one's social

environment in childhood. Stryker and Burke's identity theory (2000) likewise looks to the social environment, especially the social structures, as crucial to influencing the construction of the self. For Burke and Stryker, the self is composed of multiple identities linked to multiple social roles and to behaviours through the meanings prescribed to the specific roles within a social context. People can therefore hold as many selves as their distinct social groups.

While Mead (1934) explained the reciprocal nature of individuals and society, that is while individuals are affected by society they are simultaneously affecting society, Luria (1994), Vygotsky (1933), and Stephens and colleagues (2012) looked specifically at the reciprocal transaction of the self and culture. As culture influences the development of the self-concept, it is likewise composed and changed by the individual selves within it. Mead additionally saw the importance of language in the development of the self, which compliments the Narrative identity theory which emphasises how language is actively drawn upon to construct a self-concept and to fulfil particular self-relevant goals within a specific sociocultural context (see Mclean et al., 2010; Reese et al., 2010).



To box our understanding of children's self-concept into a single theory poses the danger of taking away the uniqueness of the childhood experience and the subjective experience of the self. What the theories have in common is the view of the self to be multidimensional, dynamic, and complex. While one theory may view children as active, meaning-making and participating human beings, others recognize the dependency which the self may have on the available sociocultural resources. However, the environment alone does not determine the self. In existential psychology, all people are in transcendence. All people, even children, are a self in process. People can change when they actively choose to change, regardless of their circumstances. However, it remains unclear how specific sociocultural factors influence this will to change? Can we create meaning beyond what our context tells us? How does the understanding of the 'self' manifest within a context of poverty and one of oppression?

Just as poverty limits the resources which people have for their survival it may also limit the resources available to nurture a healthy self-concept. Fanon (1963) explains conditions of

poverty to be closely tied to oppression, which is violent at its core, challenging the individual's sense of self-worth and manifesting itself through the perpetuation of violent and aggressive behaviour. From a 'socio-cultural self' lens, oppressive conditions not only impact how the individual experiences the self but also limits the opportunities one has for engaging in particular health-seeking behaviours. As destructive and violent behaviours become internalized as a means of understanding the self, the behaviours become challenging to change. If culture influences the development of the self-concept and is likewise composed and changed by the individual selves within it, what happens when individuals rise above the negative messages of an oppressive environment? Applying the 'socio-cultural self model', as the self-concept changes to one of self-nurturance and peace, this would be followed by a more peaceful change in behaviour and an environment which changes accordingly.

Existential and humanistic theories of the 'self' view the self to change with the will to change. People can therefore overcome conditions of oppression and the negative internalizations of the self through having an openness to other possibilities and a willingness to seek such possibilities. Regardless of the external situation, consciousness allows people to exert a great deal of self-efficacy rooted in their ability to choose. Humanistic psychology views people to be naturally inclined to such openness, because all human beings naturally strive towards self-growth. Likewise, existential psychology views humans to be able to thrive even in the most oppressive conditions due to their natural inclination for self-transcendence. According to Frankl (1969), although we cannot always change our situation, we always have the power to choose our response to the situation and to change our self. We could therefore choose to be victims or we could choose to rise above our circumstances. Such ideas are emphasized in the writings of the black existential philosophers such as Fanon (1963, 1967) whose exploration of the lived experience of black people challenged the dominant racist value system rooted in white supremacy, thus spreading a new consciousness which promotes a valued identity of the historically marginalized racial group over one which is self-defeating.

I would argue that one could look at a child through an existential and humanistic lens while incorporating the theories of social psychology which focus heavily on the influences of the social, cultural, and structural conditions on an individual's self-concept. This must

additionally look to the cultural and discursive practices through which aspects of self are expressed to others and internally integrated. While the sociocultural environment provides the external resources which children draw upon to make meaning of the self, there are additional inner resources which may stretch beyond one's immediate cultural environment or social and structural circumstances. The availability of certain resources may heavily impact the self, but the self is not determined by the environment. For a self to be determined by the socio-cultural environment takes away from the 'being' that exists within one's self-concept. The more that the meaning around the self and existence is taken out of the psychological discourse of the self-concept, the more we seem to lose the human being, that is the unique, creative, and willing components of the person. The being who can choose to transcend their socially prescribed identity to a state of self-actualisation.

Is psychology and the self simply the scientific study of treating and understanding the mind as separate from the person, as if we are the mechanics to the machine which controls behaviour, or does that self exist within a human being, who may prove to be more than a product of his circumstances or of his disease? A being who may, despite oppressive or impoverished circumstances, have more capacity for creativity, efficacy, and growth than could possibly be imagined? This leads to a further consideration of taking a multidisciplinary and integrated approach towards understanding and conceptualizing the self. The psychology of the self which uniquely exists within each human being cannot be understood separate to philosophy. Likewise, human behaviour and selfhood cannot be understood external to the personal meanings constructed within the specific social, cultural, and historical environment in which a person exists.

5. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an overview of an array of philosophical, psychological, and social-psychological theories which have contributed significantly toward the understanding of the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self'. The chapter discussed the strengths and short-comings of the theories and the danger in taking a single-faceted or solely objective approach towards the understanding of the self. The chapter highlights the dynamic and complex nature of the self which should be looked at holistically while taking into

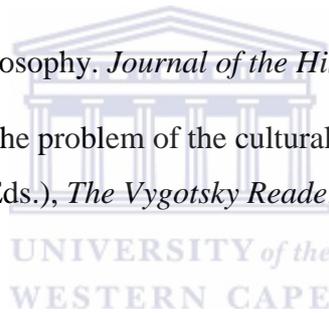
account individual internal capacities and social, cultural, and historical circumstances which may influence a child's unique experience. This further supports the need for further research to utilise a child participation framework in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which children contextually construct and assign meaning to the 'self.'

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CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

1. Introduction

Chapter two provided an overview of the philosophical, psychological, and social-psychological theories which have contributed significantly towards our understanding of the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The chapter concluded by presenting an integrated framework for understanding the child and the 'self.' This included looking at children's subjective experiences which comprise their existence while taking into consideration the socio-cultural resources which children draw upon to construct a 'self.' Although there is a large body of research on children's self-concept, further research is necessary to comprehend children's understandings and meanings assigned to the 'self'. This chapter introduces the methods which were used throughout the study to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The study phases will be discussed below.

2. Research Design

The study was conducted through three sequential phases; (1) systematic review, (2) child participation, and (3) intervention programme development.

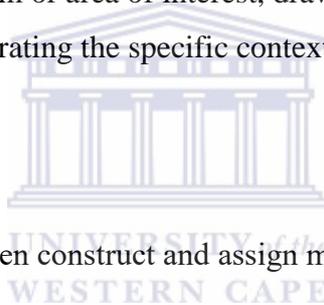
3. Phase One: Systematic Review

3.1 Method

The overarching aim of the first phase of the research project was to provide a systematic review of existing empirical studies focused on understanding the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self'. In the absence of systematic reviews, this study hoped to fill this gap in international discourse on children's self-concept. The systematic review is at the core of evidence-based practice in the medical, health, and social sectors. Its usefulness goes beyond theory to promote the development of practices, interventions, and services based on the best available knowledge, drawing upon the validity and usefulness of existing research findings to assist with the further development of evidence-based practices, interventions, and theories (Long & Godfrey, 2002). Additionally, the systematic review method is an efficient way to become familiar with the best available research evidence for a

focused research question (Garg et al. 2008). The strength of a systematic review is in the transparency of each phase of the synthesis process, which provides a detailed and critical understanding of existing studies (Garg et al. 2008). This process also identifies the applicability and gaps in current research across populations and contexts.

Since the specific research question is concerned with the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes, the review largely, although not exclusively, focused on qualitative research studies, since these are the studies most relevant to the research question under investigation. Pearson (2004) highlights the importance of incorporating qualitative research into the systematic review in order to broaden the view of what constitutes best practice. Incorporating qualitative research takes into consideration different research questions where quantitative studies may be less applicable, providing a different kind of evidence and insight into a problem or area of interest, drawing out subjective perceptions and understandings while incorporating the specific context and culture (Long & Godfrey, 2002).

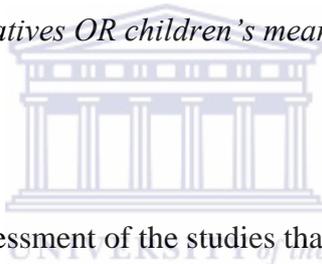


Review Question: How do children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’?

Included databases: EbscoHost, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink are the meta-databases which were searched for the extraction of articles. Databases within EbscoHost included PsychARTICLES, SocINDEX, and Academic Search Complete. Within ScienceDirect and SpringerLink, the search was conducted in the fields of psychology and social sciences. Articles with titles and abstracts which met the inclusion criteria were obtained and reference lists of the identified articles scanned to identify additional relevant articles.

Time period/Inclusion/ exclusion criteria: (1) The time period considered was the last twenty years (1994 – 2014) (2) Participants are children age 18 or under (3) Study seeks to make meaning of how children conceptualise the self (4) Study provides a full report written in English (5) Study is published in an English-language, peer-reviewed journal, book or book chapter. Articles which did not meet criteria were excluded.

Key words: The preliminary keywords used within the search were child, self, self-concept, self-esteem, self-competence, self-efficacy, self-perceptions, child narratives, meaning-making, qualitative analysis, perceptions of the self. The list entailed the terms which have been commonly utilised in studies related to child self-concept. During the initial search, the majority of the studies were related to the objective measures of the self-concept, rather than the meaning-making processes and subjective experiences of children. It was therefore decided not to include the term perception in the search. It was also decided to use the exclusion terms self-evaluation, scale, man, woman and adult within the search. *Self-identity* was a term which was found in many articles interchangeably with self-concept. Additionally, the term *narrative* was included because this term is commonly utilised in studies which seek to understand children's meaning-making processes related to a concept. It was then decided to complete the final search utilising the keywords: child OR *children's constructions* OR *children's narratives* OR *children's meaning* AND OR *self* AND OR *self-concept* AND OR *identity*.



Quality Assessment: Quality assessment of the studies that met the inclusion criteria were rated using the Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT). The purpose of a quality assessment within a systematic review is to determine the quality of the research studies through critical assessment of the research strengths, weaknesses, and benefits. The CCAT has been selected for the purpose of this systematic review due to the tool's depth to fully assess research papers, appropriate scoring system, and validity and reliability (Crowe, 2011). Furthermore, the CCAT can be applied to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research, and can be used to assess, understand and communicate research knowledge (see Donnelly et al., 2015; Mellon et al., 2015). A threshold score of 70% was used as the inclusion criteria.

Data Extraction: The researcher extracted the data which was checked by a second reviewer. The data was extracted following the procedures of meta-synthesis and formatted into a table commonly utilised for data extraction. The table was formatted to extract data specifically relevant to the research question, which included the study authors, aim, sample size, participant characteristics, research design, outcomes, themes, and self-concept domain.

Data Extraction Table Template:

Article No.	Authors	Aim	Sample Size	Participant characteristics	Context	Self-concept domain	Data Collection method/s	Region	Outcome	Themes
1.										
2.										
3.										
4.										

Analysis: The data from the studies were analysed using metasynthesis, which is a form of data analysis commonly utilised within systematic reviews which include both quantitative and qualitative studies (see Bennion, Shaw, & Gibson, 2012; Dolman, Jones & Howard, 2013; Wells et al., 2013). The analysis followed a process of reading, rereading, and taking notes of the key aims, methods, and findings of each article (Bennion et al., 2012). This was followed by data extraction, which is characterised by a recording and the thematic coding of the findings of the articles. Thematic coding commenced through the consideration of the data extraction table along with a review of the notes. The findings were coded into themes and sub-themes, by means of a cyclical process, whereby studies were checked and rechecked for new emerging themes (Bennion et al., 2012). Contradictory and complimentary links between texts were used to bring about new understandings and perspectives (Dixon-Woods, 2005). The findings of the systematic review were accepted for publication in *Child Indicators Research*, DOI: 10.1007/s12187-016-9382-2 and are presented in chapter four.

4. Child Participation

4.1. Child participation framework

After the completion of the systematic review, a child participation framework was used to provide an in depth exploration of the participants meaning assignments and constructions of the 'self.' When conducting research with children related to their meaning constructions and experiences, it is important to take a child-focused perspective in order to create the space for children to have their own ideas and explanations heard and understood (Morrow, 2009). Capturing children's perspectives promotes a holistic view of their experiences of both well-being and adversity that could be used to inform more integrated interventions (Crivello et al.,

2009). Child-focused research positions children at the centre of the research questions, descriptions, interpretations and analyses (Crivello et al., 2009). Furthermore, children's participation needs to be meaningful and responsive to the expectations, needs and wishes of the participants (Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur, 2016). The inclusion of children's perspectives on issues related to their well-being is becoming increasingly supported by current child research, as stated by Casas (2016):

Children are slowly being recognized as key informants and competent informers on their own lives. Consequently, their voices, their evaluations and their points of view are increasingly more accepted as key sources of information in scientific research (p. 9).

Prior child participation research has contributed towards valuable knowledge around issues related to children's attitudes and experiences, such as issues around the environment, labour, schooling, play, gender, sexuality, and spirituality (Mason & Watson, 2014). Mason & Watson (2014) emphasised child participation as critical for the inclusion of children in research, who have been formerly defined by privileged and powerful adults: "children typically have been at the bottom of the hierarchy of formal knowledge production, with their knowledge excluded or marginalized because they are outside the dominant knowledge production forums, including academic institutions" (p. 2757).

The growing trend in child participation research is greatly influenced by constructionism and contemporary Childhood studies (Mason & Watson, 2014). Constructionism challenges the way in which psychology and social sciences has marginalised children through the construction of the child as a 'becoming adult' while excluding their voices from knowledge-producing forums (Mason & Watson, 2014). Through a constructionist lens, childhood became understood to be a socially constructed phenomenon. Contemporary Childhood studies further contributed towards an understanding of children as social actors and knowledgeable subjects whose status and rights must be acknowledged (Mason & Watson, 2014).

Child participation is additionally influenced by current international and national legislation which supports children's rights. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child article 12 states that children have the right to freely express their opinion, to be heard, and for their opinions to be taken seriously on all matters which affect them (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Article 13 supports child participation in the form of freedom of expression. This includes the right to seek, receive, or impart information and ideas through the child's preferred form of communication. Within South African legislation, child participation is supported by Chapter 2, section 10 of the Children's Act (2005) which emphasizes the right of every child to participate and to have a voice in matters which concern their care and well-being.

While children have the right to voice their needs, they also may need the support of adults to take them seriously and to assist them with access to community, organisational, and structural resources. Often in the research process, the researcher's view of the child is based on societal beliefs, rather than the child's beliefs, with children rarely consulted to define their own problems and solutions (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). It is argued that this approach to research disempowers children as adult 'experts' make decisions on their behalf without consulting them or including them in the decision-making process (Crivello et al., 2009, Prilleltensky, 2010). Through child participation research, collaborative methodologies are valued to ensure that children are involved in defining problems and solutions (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). The researcher's role in child participation shifts the adult-centric perspective, working instead as a collaborator in ways which enhance the power children have over their own lives (Langhout & Thomas, 2010).

While using various research methods with children, it is important to note that a method is only participatory depending on the way in which it is used (Crivello et al., 2009). Children are often left out of participation processes in research or may participate to various degrees (Crivello et al., 2009). Moore et al. (2016) stresses the importance of providing children with more power and choice in the research process and in demonstrating, through words and actions, the value of their expertise and viewpoints. For research to be fully participatory, the participants should be engaged in every stage of the research process. Children should take on the role of social actors, collaborators and co-researchers and the adult researchers should

collaborate in ways which enhance the power children have over their own lives (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). This includes allowing the children to define the problem, assess the problem, determine an intervention, implement the intervention, and assess the intervention (Prilleltensky, 2010). Adult researchers seek to build a bridge to children's lived worlds, often using a variety of means of communication such as gestures, tone, and facial expression, and a variety of interactive research tools (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Through adopting methods aligned with the children's forms of communication, adults become partners for change, creating a friendly atmosphere for children which reduces barriers to participation, values experiential knowledge of children, and builds collective ownership (Prilleltensky, 2010).

Child participation research has the potential for a range of benefits for the individual participants, their communities, and the promotion of child well-being. Helping children to articulate their opinions on their environment is crucial for psychosocial problem prevention and the promotion of mental health and well-being (De Winter, 1999). Furthermore, allowing children to have a serious voice and active role in managing their environment is a resource for healthy development (De Winter, 1999). The subjective knowledge identified through child participation can be utilised to gain a deeper understanding of access barriers and to collaborate with children and community members in creating solutions which are culturally and socially relevant for addressing child mental health (Shattell et al., 2008). The environmental experiences and meaning assignments uncovered through the research process could additionally inspire the creation of stimulating and nurturing environments for all children. Through participation, children's self-efficacy can be strengthened along with an increase in self-confidence. This is achieved as the resources of children are developed, while incorporating skill building, social support, and identity development (Langhout & Thomas, 2010).

Furthermore, child participation research promotes social inclusion, which includes promoting a sense of identity, competency, and dignity in children (Prilleltensky, 2010). Learning by participation, rather than exclusion, is an important part of a child's self-concept development. Children can experience the short-term benefits of child participation research, including the enhancement of children's subjective well-being through the act of participation

(Camfield et al., 2009). This enhances the competencies which contribute towards a greater sense of self-efficacy and control over one's life and a greater sense of well-being (Camfield et al., 2009). As a large scale intervention, child participation has the power to mobilise resources, improve service delivery, and influence policy (Prilleltensky, 2010).

The growing interest in child participation research is seen in a number of studies within South Africa and other developing countries. Porter et al. (2008) conducted a three-year study of children's mobility and associated transport issues in three sub-Saharan African countries; Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. The study included a child participation project which complimented the data collected by the adult-led project. The methods utilized by the researchers included one-week activity and travel diaries, photographic journals of children's travel to school and at work, in-depth one-to-one interviews with children and accompanied walks, focus group discussions, ranking exercises, and counting and weighing loads carried by children (Porter et al., 2010). Perceived benefits from the child researchers included that the research project taught them how to talk to people (Porter et al., 2010). Other benefits were seen in the ability of the child researchers to analyze and write up a report with the assistance of the adult researchers and to present their findings at school assemblies, to policy makers and school practitioners (Porter et al., 2010).

Cluver & Gardner (2007) described the risk and protective factors in relation to the psychological well-being of children orphaned by AIDS in Cape Town using semi-structured interviews which allowed children to respond verbally or in the form of writing or drawing. The findings showed children who were orphaned by AIDS to be especially vulnerable to emotional and behavioural problems and for interventions to take into account their psychological well-being. The ethnographic study by Moses (2006) utilised one-to-one interviews, informal conversations, drawings, photographs, and writing to show how social and economic capital is not equally accessible to all people and how this influences the self-concept of a sample of 63 children, ages 6-18, living in a Western Cape community faced with high levels of poverty and violence. September & Savahl (2009) explored children's understandings of child well-being through the use of focus groups with 200 children between the ages of 9 and 16 years. The findings supported well-being to be viewed as an integrated whole, greatly influenced by factors including safety, basic needs, community

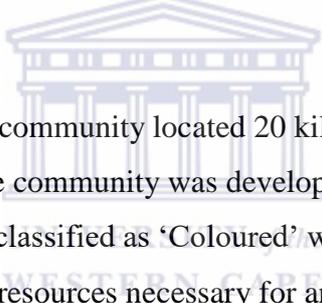
resources, and psychosocial issues. Theron & Malindi (2010) explored the experiences of South African street youth and the assets which contributed to their resilience using focus groups and individual interviews with 20 adolescents. The findings showed youth resilience to be rooted in sociocultural and intrapersonal assets, which were classified into the categories of sociocultural resources and personal strengths. The results additionally encourage interventions to respect the coping abilities of youth who are living on the street and to build on their assets.

Based in Kampala, Uganda, the study by Young & Barrett (2001) aimed to develop an understanding of Kampala street children's socio-spatial geographies in relation to their street environments and survival mechanisms using visual action methods such as mapping, thematic drawings, daily timelines, and photo diaries. The use of such methods resulted in high levels of participation amongst the children who were working and living on the streets. Their participation additionally led to a wealth of detail regarding the lives of more difficult to reach children and their daily environments. Also amongst street children, Ataov & Haider (2006) utilized mapping, Photovoice, peer interviews, drama of interactions with others, in-depth discussions, life story and drawings to explore the experiences and value of the street for children who live and work on the street. The findings show how the condition of street children in Turkish cities could provide insights into the inclusion of children in the planning and managing of the public space and how activities viewed to be regular for children, such as play and social interaction, may be visibly different from their peers.

Various participatory methods were used to ground the research process in the values and principles of child participation. This included the development of a child reference group of community participants who served as co-researchers and consultants. This increased the participation of the children through involving them as collaborative research partners throughout the research process. Additionally, multiple groups of children from each community had the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions on issues affecting their self-concept and were provided with various avenues for communication which included the use of Photovoice, focus group discussions, drawings, writing, and community mapping.

4.2. Research context

The research project took place within two low-income communities in the Cape Flats region of South Africa. The communities of Lavender Hill and Khayelitsha were selected in order to capture the diversity of the childhood experience within the Cape Flats. Both communities were formed as a result of Apartheid's system of institutionalised racism, with Lavender Hill developed as a township for residents classified as 'Coloured' and Khayelitsha for residents classified as 'Black.' The children in the communities are heavily impacted by conditions of poverty and chronic exposure to community violence. This is severely influenced by the strong gang presence in the region, where there are estimated to be around 150 gangs and an estimated 100,000 members (Fihlani, 2011). Although faced with similar challenges of violence and poverty, the communities are diverse in their spatial, cultural, and historical make-up, all of which may contribute to the local children's experience of their social environment and its influence on the way in which they conceptualisation of the 'self'.



Lavender Hill. Lavender Hill is a community located 20 kilometres from the Cape Town CBD in the Cape Flats region. The community was developed after the passing of the 1950's Group Areas Act, when residents classified as 'Coloured' were restricted to live in the area and denied their basic right to the resources necessary for an adequate quality of life. According to the 2011 City of Cape Town census, 32,598 people reside in the community, 29.1 % of the residents are children under the age of 14 (9,503) (City of Cape Town, 2011). The demographic profile of the community is predominantly Coloured (95%), 3.7 % Black African, .7% Asian, .1% White, and .6% other (City of Cape Town, 2011). Due to the high rates of poverty within the community, it is faced with a number of challenges which compromise the mental health and well-being of the residents. Fifty-nine percent of households have a monthly income of R3,200 (approximately 200 USD) or less, only 18.2% of those aged 20 years and older have completed grade 12 and less than 1% have completed a higher education (City of Cape Town, 2011). This lack of financial and educational capital contributes towards a variety of other prevalent social issues, including high crime rates, gang activity, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and substandard mental health.

The daily exposure to crime and violence could have a detrimental impact on the psychological well-being and self-concept of the children within the community, who live within an environment of perpetual danger and threat. According to the 2012-2013 Steenberg Police Department crime statistics, there were reported to be 23 murders, 82 sexual crimes, 476 attempted murders, 241 robberies, 1,352 drug related crimes, and 39 illegal possessions of fire arms, with victims often being children (Crime stats SA, 2013). Children in the community are especially at-risk to both forced involvements in gang activity and gang-related victimisation. Knoetze (2013) reported seven children to be killed and six injured in the crossfire of gang warfare in Lavender Hill between February and June 2012 (Knoetze, 2013).

Despite the high rates of underemployment and crime, the community possesses a variety of local assets. A significant amount of community members are taking action towards improving the well-being of the local children. There are over twenty child and youth community organisations, NPOs, and NGOs operating within the community. Organisations such as Brightly Beams, the Village Care Centre, and Mother's Unite provide after-school programmes and feeding schemes for the children. Youth development organisations include the New World Foundation and the Mamelani Project. Organisations such as Philisa Abafazi Bethu, RAPCAN, and Women Hope for the Nation work to promote children's and women's rights. Primary and secondary schools are also working towards providing a safe and nurturing environment for its learners and work to collaborate with local organizations, law enforcement, and service providers on matters affecting the community's children.

Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is a community located on the periphery of the city of Cape Town (30 km from Cape Town CBD) in the Cape Flats region. The community was established in 1983 as a township for 'Black' residents as a result of apartheid's system of racial segregation. Khayelitsha, meaning "new home" in isiXhosa, was originally developed to accommodate an overflow of informal settlement dwellers on the Cape Flats with an initial plan from the government to create four towns, each with 30,000 residents in brick houses, and to move all people classified as 'illegal' to the Transkei. (SA History Online, 2014). This plan was violently resisted by the local residents, causing more people to relocate to the

community. The area continued to grow rapidly with migrants from the Eastern Cape arriving in search of work (SA History Online, 2014).

The township is currently the second biggest township in South Africa after Soweto in Johannesburg, and remains faced with a complexity of economic and social challenges which limit the availability of resources for the optimal health and well-being of the local children. This is reflected in the low levels of economic and educational opportunities. The population of Khayelitsha is estimated to have 391, 749 residents, with 28.1% (110,330) children under the age of 14 (City of Cape Town, 2011). According to the 2011 City of Cape Town census, only 36% of those aged 20 years and older have completed Grade 12 or higher. Thirty-eight percent of the labour force (aged 15 to 64) is unemployed and 74% of households have a monthly income of R3 200 (approximately 200 USD) or less. The structural living conditions have an additional negative impact on the well-being of the residents. Only 45% of households live in formal dwellings, with the majority of the residents living in shacks in informal settlements. Those within the informal settlements face the constant risk of eviction. The majority of the homes lack access to basic indemnities; 38% of the households do not have access to piped water in their dwelling or inside their yard, 28% of households do not have access to a flush toilet connected to the public sewer system, and 19 % of households do not have electricity for lighting in their dwelling (City of Cape Town, 2011).

Children in the community are faced with the ongoing struggle of community violence. A complex mixture of factors such as a lack of social cohesion, unemployment, poverty, substandard housing, overcrowding, and lack of recreational facilities and activities all influence the high crime rate (De Kock, 2012). The community additionally occupies a first position regarding the national murder, attempted murder and aggravated robbery figures (De Kock, 2012). The escalation in gang activity over the past two years has had profound impact on the psychological well-being of the local children, who live in constant threat of violence. Along with increases in the prison gangs recent school children gangs have formed, with regular fights, stabbings, and killings taking place outside of the school grounds. Thirteen schools were reported to be directly affected by the violence (Cronje, 2014). In the 2013 SAPS crime stats, there were reported to be 168 murders, 1,481 assaults, and 246 sexual crimes (Crime Stats SA, 2013). Local police have expressed that the only way to address the

situation of violence within the community is through a collaborative government and community response (De Kock, 2012). Such a response entails the collaboration of the local community organisations, NGO's, law enforcement, and government to work towards a more peaceful community for children. There are additionally a number of residents, community-based organisations, and schools taking action towards the improvement of child-well-being in the community, including programmes which target building healthy and safe neighbourhoods. An example is seen with the organisation Waves for Change, known by the community as Isiqalo, which works closely with law enforcement to provide surfing and mentoring to youth in the local gangs and juvenile justice systems. The local schools are also active in supporting the psychosocial needs of the community's children. The *Ubuntu* culture within the community, which promotes human connectedness and kindness, additionally provides a strong support network for many of the children.

4.3. Participants and sampling

4.3.1. Participants

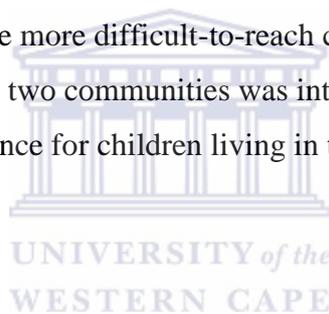
The study included 54 participants from the greater Lavender Hill and Khayelitsha communities who were between the ages of 9 to 12 (26 girls and 28 boys). This age group was selected for a variety of reasons. The first being the limited research available on the 'self' and meaning amongst middle childhood children. Additionally, middle childhood marks a time in child development where they are experiencing rapid increases in cognitive and psychosocial abilities which provide them with the capacity to engage in the study in a meaningful way. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952) emphasises how children during this age period become capable of logical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving with the major psychological achievement in the realm of intellectual accomplishments. According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1953), this age group is at stage four of their development, with the main developmental task being industry versus inferiority. During this stage, children enjoy experimenting with new ideas, curiosities, and developing new synthesis. Children are also developing a growing awareness of the self as both a private and social concept, laying the groundwork for stage 5, where the focus is on developing an identity versus identity confusion.

Middle childhood is also an important period of life for the prevention of psychosocial challenges and for the promotion of mental health. Children's experiences with family, peers, social structures, and neighbourhoods could promote or inhibit their healthy social and cognitive development (Coll & Szalcha, 2004). According to Aber, Brown, & Jones (2003), middle childhood consists of vital developmental aspects that mediate the influence of early risk on future behavioural and emotional challenges. As children experience an increase in exposure to adults and peers outside of the home they begin to integrate prosocial or antisocial behaviour based on the quality of such relationships (Aber, Brown & Jones, 2003). Children additionally begin to develop a sense of competency, including ideas about their own abilities and values (Coll & Szalcha, 2004). Middle childhood therefore marks an influential period for health promoting interventions. Such interventions include those which promote a healthy self-concept as children begin to navigate their way through societal structures and form their ideas about the self and their self-aspirations (Coll & Szalcha, 2004).

4.3.2. Sampling

Purposive sampling was utilised to select four groups of participants from the local primary schools and community organisations (two groups from Khayelitsha and two groups from Lavender Hill). Purposive sampling “involves selecting participants who share particular characteristics and have the potential to provide rich, relevant and diverse data pertinent to the research question (Tong et al., 2007, p. 352).” The criteria for participation included; (1) participants were between the ages of 9 to 12, (2) participants resided in one of the participating communities, (3) participants had a willingness and time to participate. The researcher partnered with two local NGOs, Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu, to assist with this process. Young & Barrett (2001) and Ennew (2009) stress the importance of building a trusting relationship with the children prior to entering the research process. The researcher strived to build a trusting relationship with the local children through her regular engagement in the community for six years in one community and one year in the second community prior to the start of the research project. This engagement included participation in community forums, facilitating weekly psycho-education sessions at the schools, trainings for local youth care workers, and coordinating a daily after-school programme. The researcher additionally incorporated fun games, activities, and ice-breakers into the data collection process in order to create a trusting atmosphere and to minimize the adult-child power dynamics.

The researcher accessed the participants through the local primary schools and community-based organisations in the two communities where she formally worked. The particular primary schools and community organisations had a relevant sample of children who came from a diversity of backgrounds and neighbourhoods within the communities. The children were first approached through the schools and the community-based organisations, where the researcher visited the children, explained the research study, and asked the children to sign up with the teacher or organisation site manager if they were interested in participating. The organisations included Waves for in Khayelitsha and Philisa Abafazi Bethu in Lavender Hill. Both organisations had a strong presence in the community for their promotion of child well-being and had supportive relationships with the local primary schools. The use of multiple child environments (schools and community organisations) was chosen in order to capture the important perspectives from children within various community environments and also allowed the researcher to reach the more difficult-to-reach children within the community. Additionally, the sample from the two communities was intended to better capture the diversity of the childhood experience for children living in the Cape Flats region of Cape Town. The groups included;



Group one: A Primary School in Lavender Hill. The group consisted of 6 boys and 7 girls between the ages of 10-13 with the mean age of 11.33. Although the study targeted the ages 9-12, the researcher selected the participants from the grade 5 and grade 6 learners, which included children up to the age of thirteen. All of the children were 10-12 years old with the exception of one thirteen-year-old boy.

Group two: Philisa Abafazi Bethu, Lavender Hill. The group consisted of 3 boys and 10 girls between the ages of 9-12 with the mean age of 10.53. Since the main initiative of the organisation is to provide support for local women and girls, there were more girls than boys who signed up for participation from this particular organisation.

Group three: A Primary School in Khayelitsha. This group consisted of 9 boys and 5 girls between the ages of 9-12, with the mean age of 10.78. There were initially an equal amount of boys and girls who signed up to participate in the research project, however due to challenges around safety and household obligations, several of the girls dropped out of the project after the initial session.

Group four: Waves for Change, Khayelitsha. This group consisted of 10 boys and 4 girls between the ages of 9-12, with the mean age 11.14. There was a disproportionate amount of boys who participated because the organisation attracted more boy participants than girls. This was reported to be for three reasons; safety walking to the beach where the programme took place, household obligations of females and the sport of surfing being more attractive to boys within the area.

4.3.3. Child reference group

Two child reference groups were formed, one in Khayelitsha (3 boys, 2 girls) and one in Lavender Hill (3 girls, 2 boys) between the ages of nine to twelve years with the role of co-researchers and community consultants throughout the entire child participation research process, including the focus group discussions, Photovoice and community mapping. Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur (2016) noted the importance of using children's reference groups as a strategy for participation and for co-reflexivity. They specifically point to the usefulness of child reference groups in facilitating the exploration of deeper levels of meaning and interpretation. It was therefore important to ensure the study was as inclusive as possible regarding the participation of the children and that their ideas and opinions were meaningfully incorporated throughout the research process. The child reference group participants were trained in qualitative research methodology and co-conducted the research amongst an additional 58 children within their respective communities. The children were selected from two community-based organizations where the researcher was involved based on the credentials of being the appropriate age, being available for the weekly research sessions, and having an eagerness to participate. The child reference group participants assisted with every stage of the child participation research process.

Following the initial sessions, the child reference group co-facilitated the focus group discussions, community maps, and the Photovoice project with the adult researcher. Each child reference group participant was provided with a research journal and instructed to record observations, thoughts, and research activities throughout the research process. Several of the participants used their research journals to interview other children at their school and in their community. The child reference group was continuously consulted on the outcomes of the sessions and the planning of the future sessions. Discussions were then held with the child reference group to explore the research data collected and its implications for how the child participants construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within their communities. A total of 18 child reference group meetings were held with the child reference group participants over the time period of four months (February-June 2015). Below is an outline of the Child Reference Group Sessions:

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Qualitative research training
 - a. Research and ethics
 - b. Qualitative methods; Focus group discussion and Photovoice training
- 3) Accompanied community child initiation session
- 4) Accompanied child participant focus group discussion part 1
- 5) Accompanied child participant focus group discussion part 2
- 6) Accompanied child participant Photovoice briefing
- 7) Accompanied Photovoice session
- 8) Accompanied child participant Photovoice discussion session
- 9) Accompanied child participant community mapping session part 1
- 10) Accompanied child participant community mapping session part 2
- 11) Accompanied child participant termination session and closing party
- 12) Data analysis session
- 13) Accompanied child participant sharing of findings and dissemination session

- 14) Children's Delphi part 1
- 15) Children's Delphi part 2
- 16) Action plan for the dissemination of findings
- 17) Termination
- 18) Closing party with families

4.4. Data collection: child mosaic method

The child participation research drew upon multiple methods in the form of the Child Mosaic method (Clark & Moss, 2001) in order to provide a more holistic understanding of the particular phenomenon under study. The Child Mosaic method is a participatory method for children which focuses on the meaning-making process as seen as an ongoing, dynamic relationship between the children and space (Clark, 2010). The data from the various methods was used to create a holistic picture or "mosaic" of the research phenomenon. Morrow (2009) explained how using a range of research methods with children can help to triangulate the data and to build a clearer picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Task-based methods can additionally be useful for establishing good rapport with the children and for providing complementary data and interesting points of comparison from individual interviews or focus groups (Tekola et al., 2009). For example, Young & Barret (2000) used multiple methods such as photos, drawings, mapping, and focus group discussion to capture the socio-spatial environment of street children in Kampala, Uganda. Another example is seen in the study by Clark and Moss (2005) who used photography, interviewing, observations and drawings amongst early childhood participants as a means of involving children in the redevelopment of a preschool.

Multiple methods are beneficial for participatory research with children because they build upon various forms of communication and provide the opportunity for children to choose what they want to contribute and express within the study (Darbyshire et al., 2009). A range of methods is additionally important for research with children because it takes into account their developmental stages (Ennew, 2009) and various levels of literacy (Crivello et al., 2009). This study incorporated a broad range of children's capacities for expressing

themselves. Within the mosaic method, this study utilised the data collection components of focus group discussions, community mapping, and Photovoice. The focus group discussions, community mapping and Photovoice activities took place at two community centres and one primary school; Philisa Abafazi Bethu in Lavender Hill and Waves for Change and the participating Primary school in Khayelitsha over the period of two months. Two local youth and childcare workers were presented during all of the sessions to assist with the facilitation and translation of the content into the participants' first language when necessary. The community youth care workers included Bongwiwe Poswayo (contact number +27 71.150.6793) and She-earl Petersen (contact number +27 71.701.4717). They are contactable to confirm the integrity of the data collection protocol. The sessions took place weekly from March-May 2016. The sessions went as followed:

- 1) Research initiation session
- 2) Focus group discussion part 1
- 3) Focus group discussion part 2
- 4) Photovoice session
- 5) Photovoice discussion session
- 6) Community mapping session part 1
- 7) Community mapping session part 2
- 8) Termination session and closing party
- 9) Sharing of analysed data and plan for dissemination session
- 10) Closing party with families



4.4.1. Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion is one of the data collection techniques which was implemented with the participants. Focus groups are a valuable method for eliciting children's responses regarding their views and experiences and for complementing other research techniques (Morgan et al., 2002). This is particularly useful with children due to the emphasis on

creating an environment in which children feel comfortable to engage with the material and opens up the opportunity to generate interactive conversations among children that can assist with the clarification and conceptualisation of the topic (Darbyshire et al., 2009).

Focus groups are commonly utilised in qualitative research with children. For example, Darbyshire et al. (2009) used focused groups in coordination with photos and drawings to provide children between the ages of 4 to 12 years with a means of sharing their perspectives on barriers and enablers related to physical activity and relevant spaces in their environment. September & Savahl (2009) utilized focus group discussions to explore children's own understanding of their well-being amongst 200 children between the ages of 10 and 12. Morgan et al. (2002) found focus groups to be useful for examining the experiences of children aged 7 to 11 who were living with asthma.

A semi-structured interview schedule was followed in this study, with four core questions which focused on various factors which influence the 'self.' These questions were proposed by the child reference group and stimulated substantial discussion. The questions included; *How do you describe yourself? How do children think and feel about themselves in our community? What makes them think or feel that way? How do different places within the community and outside of the community make you feel?*

4.4.2. Community mapping

The community mapping activity was used within the mosaic method in order to gain a deeper understanding of the regular environmental influences which could have an impact upon the self-concept of the local children. Mapping exercises are valuable for capturing children's perceptions on their environment while encouraging free responses and individual interpretations (Darbyshire et al., 2009). Maps can also enable children to construct a representation of their social world (Aber, Brown, & Jones, 2003). The community mapping activity entailed children drawing a map of their community which included the places and spaces which influenced the way children thought and felt about themselves.

Mapping exercises have been utilized in a variety of research projects with children. Clacherty (2005) utilised a mapping exercise with children in a refugee camp to represent their life in the camp and as a means of generating discussion around gender-based violence (Clacherty, 2005). Clark (2010) utilised map drawings with preschool children as an avenue for discussion about which objects, places, and people were most important for the nursery school. This contributed valuable information to the study regarding children's understanding of the space and its importance in their daily lives. The mapping exercise by Darbyshire et al. (2009) was valuable for capturing children's perceptions in their environment and the barriers and enablers related to physical activity. Young & Barrett (2001) utilised maps with children who were living on the street to elicit information about their daily lives, including the details of each place and its importance. Morrow (2001) found community mapping in conjunction with photos and focus group discussions to be useful in painting a fuller picture of the subjective experiences of children's neighbourhoods and their social networks.

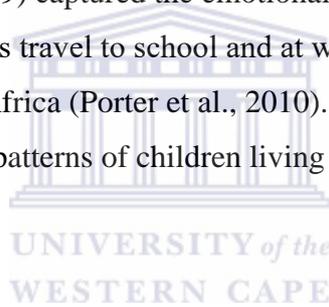
During the community mapping session, the participants were divided into groups of three or four and asked to draw a map of their community, specifically focusing on the places where they regularly engaged and the spaces which influenced how children thought and felt about themselves. According to Ennew (2009) when using drawings in research, children must be given the opportunity to explain their drawing. The children in this study had the opportunity to explain the drawings which provided a rich description of the spatial and environmental influences on their self-concept. The maps were additionally used to stimulate further discussion around what changes needed to be made to the community in order for it to be an environment which promoted a healthy self-concept. The community map exercise was useful for creating an alternative avenue for children to express themselves, especially those who did not feel comfortable speaking up during the focus group sessions. The community map exercise was additionally a useful means of triangulating research data from the focus group discussions and the Photovoice sessions.

4.4.3. Photovoice

Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology where participants take photographs which address a community concern, in this specific study the way in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' Photovoice is relevant with child participation research because

it provides the opportunity for the participants to gain power through incorporating their personal voice, experience, and language, to express their lived experience and priorities, and to identify community and personal priorities through selecting the content of the photos (Hergenrather et al, 2009). Photovoice additionally generates complimentary visual information for the focus group discussions and drawing exercises (Derbyshire et al., 2009).

Photovoice has been utilized in prior research as a useful means of data collection with children. Gabhainn & Sixsmith (2006) utilised Photovoice with children between the ages of 8 to 12 in order to provide visual and discursive data regarding their well-being. Clark (2003) found Photovoice to be a useful complimentary tool for understanding the environmental experiences of young children at a nursery school and for designing a playground based on their ideas and experiences. The photos taken by children between the ages of 4 to 12 in the research by Derbyshire et al. (2009) captured the emotional aspects of play. Photographic journals were created of children's travel to school and at work as a means of identifying barriers to mobility in Southern Africa (Porter et al., 2010). Photos were additionally used to recreate the daily life and spatial patterns of children living and working on the street in Uganda (Young & Barrett, 2000).



The children in this study were asked to take photos based off of the following questions; *What in your life influences how you think and feel about yourself? What influences how children in the community think and feel about themselves?* The children were placed in pairs and instructed to share a disposable camera with 27 photos. The children were instructed on how to use the cameras, ethics around Photovoice, and to take the disposable camera home for the week to capture any relevant components of their lives. This also allowed the children to capture life situations, which the presence of the researcher as an outsider may have otherwise changed.

The photos were used to generate discussions within the mosaic project and in the final data analysis. During the Photovoice debrief session, all of the photos were placed on the wall for the group to see. The group was then asked to comment on the photos and how they related to their self-concept. Questions to stimulate discussions around the photos included; *What do*

you see here? What is happening in this photo? How does this relate to how you or other children in your community think and feel about themselves? What can we do about it? The children then had the opportunity to present their photos or to select their favourite photos and to explain why they chose the photo and how they relate to the photo. This technique was useful because it allowed for the children who did not have photos (because their cameras were lost or stolen) to be included in the conversation. Even the children who did not have their own photos were excited to discuss the photos of their peers. Some of the children who felt less comfortable speaking decided to write out the descriptions of their favourite photos.

4.5. Data analysis

4.5.1. Focus group discussion: Thematic and discourse analysis

The analysis of the focus group discussions proceeded by means of a thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The key motivation for using the thematic analysis was to facilitate a thematic grounding wherein the discourses could be interpreted. Thereafter, discourse analysis was used to draw out the participants' emerging meanings of the self as expressed within their language use. Discourse analysis has been chosen due to its strength in the in-depth exploration of individual subjectivity and its application to the study aim. There are two common approaches to discourse analysis with distinct objectives; one which is concerned with the discourse practices, including the performative qualities of discourse, and the other which seeks to explore the role of discourse in subjectivity, self-hood, and power relations (Willig, 2000). This study utilized the approach of discourse analysis by Potter & Wetherall (1987), which in a combination of techniques within the two approaches. This approach views discourse to go beyond its function to *describe* things, to also *do* things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis is based on the premises that discourse is an action in itself (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Through a focus on the language-in-use, discourse analysts explore how meaning is negotiated and constructed (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

In research, discursive accounts or observations should not be taken at face value or looked at as straightforwardly as true or false. This is because discursive practices are dependent on certain conditions which must also be taken into consideration in order to capture the meaning behind what is being communicated. The researcher must understand what the

words are doing and achieving (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Attention must be paid to the organization of different versions of accounts and the way they are contextually constructed. Reality is constructed through discursive accounts as a person attempts to make sense of a situation or phenomenon.

An important aspect of discourse analysis is variation. While some forms of qualitative research use tools such as triangulation in order to eliminate variation, discourse analysis looks at variation to be a way into the analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Talk in itself is a variable because it serves various functions and is constructed to have various consequences, such as to construct different versions of the social world, to do things, or to make sense of something (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The researcher must look to what it is the discourse is trying to achieve within the varying accounts and the constructive and flexible way in which talk is used (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Variation in language across persons and settings uncovers how language is used for positioning the self and accomplishing interpersonal objectives (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Discourse analysis views language as a medium for self-construction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discursive meaning overtime can create a sense of self, which is in the fluid process of being continuously constructed and reconstructed, with its meaning negotiated through social interactions (Willig, 2000). The self-concept is dependent on the discourse which is used as a means of making sense of a person's own actions and the actions of others (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). There are a multitude of selves found in different kinds of discursive practices. Verbal accounts in this sense are viewed to both reflect and construct the social world of the participants (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Researchers should therefore focus on the multiplicity of self-constructions and their functions within a specific social environment.

The specific focus of the analysis in this study was on illuminating the discourses which children used to conceptualize the 'self.' The emerging discourses were then used to illuminate the meanings which emerged around the participant's self-concept. Through the use of language, the participants' experiences could be bridged to the research question being explored (Willig, 2000). The analyst was explicit about her individual perspective, position,

and use of own language so that the reader could weigh the evidence with the analyst's perspective in mind (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). This was applied through the use of the analysts' personal narrative provided at the end of the research process. The findings from the focus group sessions are presented in Chapter Five and published in *Child Indicators Research*, 2016, DOI: 10.1007/s12187-016-9389-8.

4.5.2. Community mapping and Photovoice

The data collected during the community mapping and Photovoice sessions was synthesised using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing patterns and themes within the research data which emerged as being important to the phenomenon under investigation (Fereday, 2006; Braun, 2006). The analysis followed the steps as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which included six phases: (1) familiarising yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. During the first phase, the primary author transcribed the data, read and reread the data, and noted down initial ideas. Initial codes were systematically created from the interesting features of the data. Colour coding the codes within the text and creating a visual map of the codes assisted with this process. The codes and data relevant to the codes were then collated into potential themes utilising a table format. The next phase included re-reading through the entire data set to ensure the themes accurately represented the data and to add additional data within the existing themes which may have been overlooked. After the themes were defined and further refined, a detailed analysis was written for each individual theme and included within the final report. The child reference group was consulted in order to check for the accuracy of the themes and the final analysis was verified by both the child reference group and the research participants in the form of a child-friendly report in order to ensure that their voices were accurately represented. The findings from the community mapping and Photovoice sessions are presented in chapter six and published in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 2016, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v11.31251>

5. Phase Three: Intervention Programme Development

The next phase of the study aimed to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept. This phase further grounded the study within the child participation framework. While research using participatory methodologies with children has grown in recent years, Moore (2016) makes the essential point that "there has been little discussion within the research field as to how children and young people may meaningfully and actively participate in co-reflective activities such as reference groups (p. 2)." In this study it was proposed to use the Delphi technique as a means for meaningfully engaging the participants on the premise that they are the experts of their lives and experiences.

The Delphi is a technique which captures the collective opinions of experts who have a consultative role on a particular topic (De Villiers, De Villiers, & Kent, 2002) and takes the form of an exploratory exercise conducted with the expert panel related to the phenomenon under exploration (Kennedy, 2002). The technique includes a series of forums or questionnaires which take place until a consensus is reached about a particular topic or problem. Open-ended questions are used for eliciting opinions related to the topic, with additional questions formed based off of the feedback from the previous rounds (De Villiers et al., 2002). The traditional Delphi is characterised by the five features of anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, statistical group response and stability in responses (Hanafin & Brookes, 2005).

Epistemologically the Delphi technique has its roots in both positivist and interpretivist epistemologies (Hanafin & Brooks, 2005). Those working from a positivist stand-point argue that the Delphi technique is grounded in the ontological position of a single reality, while those from an interpretivists/ social constructionist position argue for multiple realities. The key argument of the interpretivist/social constructionist is that the group consensus is achieved through an inter-subjective iterative process. In the current study the latter epistemological position is adopted and works from the assumption that children as knowledgeable experts are creating consensus through a continuous process of interaction and feedback.

5.1. Delphi process

The data collection proceeded through the following steps associated with the Delphi. The first step included the selection of the appropriate participants for the Delphi. According to Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna (2000), the participants should be selected purposively to form a panel of informed experts who have knowledge of the subject or problem under investigation. Hasson et al. (2000) explained the importance of the Delphi in identifying areas that one group of experts considers important as providing a significant contribution towards solving a particular problem. While the Delphi panel traditionally consists of adult experts who are perceived to be the experts in their professional field related to the Delphi aim, current research supports the importance of children as key informants and competent informers around issues related to their lives (Casas, 2016).

In this study the experts were chosen in accordance with a child participation framework, where children were viewed to be the most professionally suited for the Delphi panel. Firstly, they were viewed to be the experts of their own lives, with valuable knowledge and a deep insight, understanding, and experiences of being a young person within their communities. According to Casas (2016) “the majority of children sometimes do not perceive, think or have opinions or evaluations on their life and on their world that adults believe they have” (p.9). Secondly, the child reference group participated in all stages of the larger child participation research project, which provided them with substantial in-depth knowledge around the subjective experiences of other children within their respective communities. Thirdly, the Delphi required participants who were committed to the process. The participants of the child reference group had shown a strong commitment to the research project for four months prior to the start of the Delphi panel.

The Delphi participants were selected from the two participating communities of Khayelitsha (3 boys, 2 girls) and Lavender Hill (3 girls, 2 boys); they were between the ages of ten to twelve years, and were also members of the child reference group for the larger research project. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from two community-based organizations where the researchers were involved based on the criteria of being the appropriate age, being available for the weekly research sessions, and having an eagerness to participate. The child reference group functioned as co-researchers and community

consultants throughout the entire research process, including the focus group discussions, Photovoice, community mapping, and Delphi. Two of the participants from the Lavender Hill child reference group decided to terminate their participation prior to the start of the Delphi because of a conflict with soccer practice. These participants were replaced by two others who were actively engaged throughout the prior phases of the research process. Although in the ideal situation the same participants would be available for all stages of the research process, Moore and colleagues (2016) found that approximately one-quarter of reference group membership changes over the life of the project.

The next step identified by Hasson et al. (2000) is to identify the resources and skills of the participants and the appropriate means of communication to use throughout the process. Given that the participants were children residing within communities with an under-resourced education system, the literacy of the participants varied, it was therefore decided to provide the participants with various means of communicating their ideas through the use of writing, drawing, and verbal response.

Three sessions were held with each child reference group. While the content of the sessions followed a structured format, an informal atmosphere of engagement was encouraged with food and refreshments provided during each session. The first session began with a series of open-ended questions related to the themes which emerged throughout the larger study. The discussions specifically explored how the perspectives of children in their communities could contribute towards the design of interventions aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept. The questions included; *How do children think about themselves in your community? What barriers did our research discover which prevented children from viewing themselves in a positive way? What is needed for children to develop a healthy self-concept in your community? What would a programme aimed at improving child self-concept look like?* In addition to the discussion, the participants were provided with the opportunity to create drawings of their ideas for an intervention programme, which was then shared with the group and included in the final analysis.

After the completion of the first round, round two included a review of the items discussed in the prior session and provided the opportunity for amendments and changes. The researcher drew three separate sections on a large whiteboard labelled Photovoice and community maps, focus group discussions and intervention programme. All of the themes identified by the participants in the prior session were listed in the applicable category on the white board. The participants then had the opportunity to add items by verbally explaining or writing their responses in the appropriate category. This process continued until consensus was reached amongst all of the participants.

The third stage of the Delphi included the data analysis procedure. Once consensus was reached by all of the panellists, the data from the Delphi was compiled into a report using content analysis and distributed to the panellists during the third round for their review. Themes were identified and summarized under thematic headings, which clarified the children's perceptions of what should be included in programme interventions aimed at the promotion of a healthy child self-concept. The items were related back to the original data, using the wording of the participants. Once the participants approved the report, a final draft was written up and distributed to each member for final approval.

The data from the Children's Delphi is presented in chapter seven and is presently being given full consideration for publication in *Child & Family Social Work, 2016*.

6. Ethics Statement

The research was approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee. The research was additionally supervised by a faculty member at the University of the Western Cape who had research expertise in the field of psychology and child well-being. Once approval was received, the researcher approached the primary school principals and community organisation directors for approval of the study and to arrange a time and space where the groups could meet weekly. The school principals and organization directors were fully informed about the research, including any potential risks, and signed a research memorandum of understanding, which provided approval for the research to take place amongst the organization and school participants.

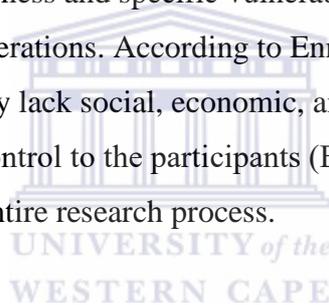
6.1. Child participation ethics

Child participation research has a number of ethical issues which must be carefully considered within a research project. Child participants must be fully informed about the research, including any possible risks and realistic expectations for participation (Bell, 2000, Ennew, 2009). Additional ethics include protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and avoiding any potential for harm (Bell, 2000). An initial session was held with the participants, introducing the research project, its purpose and aim, expectations of participation, ethics and principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, in both English and the first language of the participants (Afrikaans or isiXhosa) to ensure they fully understood the research expectations and risks. The participants were informed about any potential risks and were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point without consequences. The participants were also informed about the academic use of the data, which was included in a doctoral thesis publically available as well as for peer-reviewed publications and relevant presentations. The participants were provided with an information sheet which included the details of the study as well as a signed consent form for both the guardian of the child and the child. Children provided both verbal and written consent. Permission was additionally sought from the participants to audio record the sessions. The children spent the first session playing with the Dictaphone so that they could fully understand how the recording worked and so they could feel comfortable with its presence during the sessions. The electronic files were securely stored in an encrypted format which only the primary researcher and the supervisor had access.

The following guidelines were enforced during the Photovoice sessions for the protection of the participants' best interests and for the privacy and safety of the participants and the community members. Two written consent forms were administered to the participants. The first followed the university institutional review boards' ethics protocols adopted to Photovoice, which provided a detailed explanation of the participant's voluntary involvement in the Photovoice process. The second consent form was used for the approval of the publication of photographs or for the utilization of photographs in the final report and for the dissemination of research findings to relevant stakeholders. The participants participated in a

Photovoice training session where they were instructed to follow the ethical guidelines for Photovoice, which included; a discussion of the participants' responsibilities when they carry a camera to respect the privacy and rights of others, a critical dialogue that yielded specific suggestions and ways to respect others' privacy and rights, and an emphasis that no picture is worth taking if it begets the photographer harm or ill will (Wang & Powers, 2000, p. 87).

Other ethical considerations involved the consideration of children's rights. Child participation research should support the children's right to express themselves, to be heard, informed and to have their opinions respected (Ennew, 2009). In child participation research, all children participating in and affected by research must be recognized as rights bearing citizens, including the right to participate and to be protected from harm (Bell, 2000). While respecting the rights of children as equal to adults in research, it may also be necessary to take into consideration the uniqueness and specific vulnerabilities of the child participants which may require special considerations. According to Ennew (2009), children are especially vulnerable because they lack social, economic, and political power. Rights based research hands over power and control to the participants (Ennew, 2009). Children's rights were adhered to throughout the entire research process.



Remuneration is an additional ethical challenge identified in research projects with children. Examples of remuneration chosen in prior research included providing children with food, monetary compensation, skills development, research tools, and certificates (Porter et al., 2010). The children in the study were provided with food and refreshments during the sessions, received age-appropriate skills training as a part of the research programme, printed copies of their photos taken during photovoice, and a closing party with games and treats. During the closing session, the participants commented on how grateful they were to participate in the project. One child mentioned that he often does not have lunch at school, so he was very happy that the researcher provided food for him. Other children commented on learning a lot from the project about their community and about how to stay safe.

Porter et al. (2010) described the key ethical challenges of a child participation study to be power differentials with age, class, gender, social or economic status, unrealistic expectations

of children, danger in overburdening children, and obligation to ensure research collected by children is utilized to its fullest (Porter et al., 2010). Collaboration with the local NGO's Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu was an effective means of ensuring that the ethical standards regarding child participation research were adhered to. The partnership provided the researcher with necessary resources for the protection of the participants, including access to a social worker, a referral service for children in need of additional support, and a means of ensuring that the findings were distributed within the community. Children who showed any psychological distress received additional counselling support and were additionally referred into the Waves for Change or Philisa Abafazi Bethu afterschool programmes. The organisations additionally provided a youth and childcare worker to attend all focus group sessions and to assist with translation.

Maglajilic (2010) described the most important ethical issue in participatory research with children to be “what will happen with the children’s efforts once adults gain relevant research knowledge? How will they be supported to continue their work (p. 213).” This particular research study in itself was limited in its ability to achieve the ideal outcomes of improving children’s self-concept and well-being, however, it did emphasise a social process which facilitated learning and enhanced the commitment of the children, the community, and relevant stakeholders to take action towards improving child well-being. In addition to the collaboration with Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu, the researcher was actively engaged with other local community organisations and schools, attended regular community forums, provided life skills and mental health education, resource development, and facilitated after school-programmes within the first community for four years, and the second community for one year prior to the start of the research project. This allowed the researcher to provide timely feedback of the results to a variety of community stakeholders so that the findings could be utilised by the larger community to contribute towards improvements in local child well-being.

6.2. Validity

Validity is an important component of qualitative studies for demonstrating the credibility of the research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Validity seeks to determine if the research really measures what it intends to measure (Golafshani, 2002). While validity in quantitative

research seeks to ensure the replicability or repeatability of the results, the validity in qualitative research is often measured in terms of quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2002). The concept of validity within qualitative studies is contingent to the particular research question and methodology (Golafshani, 2002). This method could be looked at through three lenses which include that of the researcher, the participants, and an external source (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The following strategies were applied to ensure validity of the study: *collaboration, member checking, triangulation of data collection methods, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, audit trails, and researcher reflexivity and memos.*

Member checking. Member checking is a validity procedure which entails taking the data and researcher's interpretations back to the study participants for their confirmation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking was employed through confirming data and interpretations with the study participants and the child reference group. Summary findings, interpretations and theories generated were clearly presented and approved through the use of a child friendly report provided for the children.

Collaboration. Another form of validity which assisted with the credibility of the research was through the close collaboration with the research participants and the community throughout the entire research process. Through the collaboration of the child reference group, the research data and analysis was reviewed by the children for clarification and accuracy. The researcher maintained close collaboration with the research participants throughout the entire research process through the use of the child participation methods. Collaboration with local community organisations, including having a local youth care worker present at all session, allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics and to build trust within the community.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple research methods to provide complimentary or contradictory data which informs a fuller picture of the research phenomenon (Morrow, 2001). Creswell and Miller (2000) define triangulation to be “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different

sources of information in order to form themes or categories in a study (p.126).”

Triangulation can also be a means of gathering a more valid, reliable and diverse construction of the multiple realities which may exist in relation to a research phenomenon (Golafshani, 2002). Triangulation was employed through the three levels of data collection; focus groups, community mapping, and Photovoice.

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement is another validity procedure which entails the researcher to stay within the research space for a prolonged period of time (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Prolonged engagement in this study allowed for the researcher to build trust within the community, to have a gateway to information which was not easily accessible, and to improve the perspective and understandings of the participants’ views and contexts (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Banyard & Miller (1998) emphasized the importance of considering the relationship of the researcher to the participants and how variables such as cultural background and race may influence the dynamics (Banyard & Miller, 1998). The researcher’s prolonged engagement allowed her to build trust within the community, to have a gateway to information which was not easily accessible, and to improve the perspectives and understandings of the participants’ views and contexts (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher was actively engaged within the communities, including the local CBOs and primary schools, for five years in Lavender Hill and one year in Khayelitsha prior to the research data collection and analysis procedure.

Thick, rich description. Another validity procedure involves the researcher to provide a thick, rich description of the entire research process, including the setting, participants, and themes. This was described with rigorous detail throughout the data collection process and through the use of a research memos, and discourse and thematic analysis. A detailed explanation of any contradictions and differences in the data were included. The COREQ checklist (Tong et al., 2007) was utilised to promote comprehensive and explicit reporting of data, including aspects of the research team, study methods, context of the study, findings, analysis and interpretations.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is a validity procedure which includes the debriefing of data by someone who is familiar with the research topic under investigation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This person serves to provide support and to challenge the researchers' assumptions and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The research was supervised by a UWC faculty member with research expertise in the field of psychology, child participation and child well-being. The researcher attended weekly meetings with the supervisor throughout the research process. In addition to debriefing with the supervisor, the researcher also attended counselling sessions in order to debrief around the emotional nature of the study.

Researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity was utilized in order for the researcher to disclose assumptions, beliefs, and biases which may influence the study. Reflexivity is especially important in qualitative research to prevent research bias and ensure accuracy and validity. Reflexivity was used by both the adult and child researchers. The researcher was rigorously honest, detailed, and critically reflective at all stages of the research. All researchers (including the child reference group) kept a research journal to utilise for critical self-reflection throughout the research process. The adult researcher conducted an analysis of personal narrative at the end of the data analysis process in order to ensure an honest analysis of the research data.

Audit trail. An audit trail is a validity procedure which turns to individuals external to the research project to examine the research credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The research process and procedure was examined from an auditor external to the study. This included the researcher's use of a memos, activity log, research journal, and clear and rigorous reporting of all stages of data collection and analysis. The final report included a detailed description of each research tool and any challenges with the data collection process that may have influenced the results.

7. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter provides detail for the methodological approach to the research study, which included a description of the three research phases; (1) Systematic Review, (2) Child Participation, (3) Intervention Programme Development. Central to the chapter is the

grounding of the study within a child participation framework. The child participation framework is especially important for capturing the subjective perspectives and experiences of children on issues related to their self-concept, well-being, and adversity which could be used to inform more holistic intervention programmes for children. The following chapter presents the first phase of the research, a systematic review of children's constructions of the self.

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CHAPTER FOUR: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

1. Introduction

Chapter three presented a detailed description of the methods applied throughout the study which aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The study was broken down into three sequential phases; (1) systematic review, (2) child participation research, and (3) intervention programme development. This chapter presents the first phase, a systematic review which aimed to systematically review academic literature focused on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The journal review process for this article is presented below; subsequent to which the article is presented.

2. Journal Review Process

Article 1 (Chapter Four) was originally submitted to the *Journal of Happiness Studies* on 03 March 2015. The *Journal of Happiness Studies* is an international peer-reviewed journal devoted to scientific understanding of subjective well-being with a 2014 impact factor of 1.683. Feedback was received from the journal on 03 November 2015, after 9 months of waiting. The article was rejected for publication with substantial comments provided by the two reviewers which were thoroughly attended to before re-submitting the article.

Due to the initial 9 month waiting period, it was not feasible to re-submit the article to the *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Several other relevant peer-reviewed journals were considered, however since systematic reviews are typically longer than other scientific research papers, it was challenging to find a journal which allowed over a 7,000-word count. It was then decided to re-submit the article to *Child Indicators Research* on the 06 November 2015. *Child Indicators Research* is an international peer-reviewed journal which presents measurements and indicators of children's well-being and their usage within multiple domains and in diverse cultures. The journal explores how child indicators can be used to improve the development and well-being of children (see <http://link.springer.com/journal/12187>), with a 2014 (2015) 5-year Impact Factor of 1.513. Although article 2 of the dissertation was already prepared to

submit to this journal, the choice to additionally submit the systematic review was that the Journal's aim closely lined up with the focus and content of the study. Additionally, the journal allowed for a 10,000-word count. Feedback from the journal in terms of the manuscript was received on 22 January 2016. The manuscript went through one round of revisions, and received contrasting overall appraisals from the two reviewers. The executive editor, reviewer comments, and authors' rebuttals are presented below. The authors' reflections on the review process is presented. Finally, the article is presented, which was accepted for publication on 25 February 2016.

2.1. Revisions

This article went through one round of revisions and the editors' and reviewers' comments (consulting editors) are presented below, as well as the corresponding rebuttal to these comments:

2.1.1. Editors comments

Dear Ms. Benninger,

Reviewers have now commented on your paper. As you can see, we have very different evaluations on your paper; one very negative and the other one very positive. I decided to put more weight on the second reviewer's point. However, I would like to ask you to consider the first reviewer's criticism when you revise your paper. I would like to accept your paper with minor revisions. I hope you are willing to undertake the work required, and revise your paper accordingly. For your guidance, reviewers' comments are appended below. Your revision is due by 03/07/2016. If you need more time please contact the journal office. Please submit a list of changes or a rebuttal against each point which is being raised when you submit the revised manuscript. To submit a revision, go to <http://isci.edmgr.com/> and log in as an Author. You will see a menu item call Submission Needing Revision. You will find your submission record there. Please make sure to submit your editable source files (i. e. Word, TeX)

Thank you for considering CIR for publishing your work!

Bong Joo Lee

Editor-in-Chief

Child Indicators Research

2.1.2. Reviewers' comments

Reviewer 1

This is a literature review that is presented as a systematic review and the methodology and interpretations are suspect. As a reader who is not familiar with the idea of self-concept and what does it mean 'healthy self-concept' I found the introduction confusing as the authors showed how 'healthy' self-concept or a unhealthy self-concept impacts the child life. It would be very helpful to start with the basic definition and explanation of what is a self-concept. I admit I found it difficult to understand,' the environment is likewise shaped by the individual selves within it (Stephens et al. 2012).' In general, in the introduction I saw many sources of influences on the child's self construction and it will be helpful to start with explaining what do we mean by self construction and what are its components. Furthermore, the relationship between the need to conduct more research on how children construct their self-concept and systematic review is not clear. I do not know of any topic that does not need more research, what is the specific contribution of this review? In the method, the authors say - 'The motivation behind the systematic review is to ascertain the strength of evidence supporting further research, theory, and interventions focused on child self-concept.' - How the 'strength of evidence' can support further research? If there is little evidence (it is not clear for what), should we see it as a basis for more or for less research? The authors say that systematic review is at the core of evidence based practice. I agree. I believe, however, that the introduction should lead us to understand how this review is associated with practice and what kind of evidence are we looking for? Interventions that impact self-concept? Not clear.

Only later the authors indicate that they will review qualitative studies. This changes the whole perspective of the reader that expects the traditional systematic review with different kinds of questions and methodologies. Starting with this point may have helped the reader a very different approach. At the same time, if the authors are presenting their review of qualitative studies as 'systematic' it is important that they address the special (an often

contested) nature of qualitative reviews and the criteria of quality that they need to follow. For instance, no grey literature is mentioned and no hand searching of relevant journals are included. It is also not clear what is the criterion - Articles which do not provide sufficient data to be abstracted were excluded.

The key words seem quite arbitrary, especially as the authors did not provide the reader with the basic understanding of the concepts involved (why children narratives are included? Did the authors review all qualitative studies in the last 20 years that included the word identity? I suggest that the authors provide several examples of the use of CCAT for qualitative studies. The references they provide to support their meta-syntheses procedures are dated and unrelated to systematic reviews. What do the authors mean when they say that some of their studies are correlational? This is very confusing.

I am afraid I cannot judge the trustworthiness of the analyses of the themes as there is very little information on the process (and no information on the team members' qualifications). When I read a Campbell systematic review I know it followed the appropriate procedures; I have no assurances in this case. In the discussion, I see many instances of integration of themes that I am not sure what was the basis for this interpretation as I did not see in the procedure a way of examining connections between themes. Similarly, it is not clear whether the interpretation is based on what was seen in each of the studies or reviewing them in their totality. For instance, 'the notion of self-concept was identified to be a fluid, situational and multi-dimensional phenomenon' - in every study or when we see the wide range of studies, each focusing on one aspect? Similarly, I failed to see the connection between some of the implications as seen by the authors and the findings they presented. For instance, do we know anything from the review on the impact of 'health promoting activities', even 'crucial' impact, when no outcome data are provided?

Reviewer 2

I very much welcome this review which gives a comprehensive insight into the concept of self among children. The paper is very well written and provides a very good account of the area. The systematic nature of the review is to be welcomed and the wide range of studies included gives breadth as well as depth. A small number of comments for consideration:

1) I think it would be useful to include a table setting out the facet analysis (to include the search terms/ truncations etc)

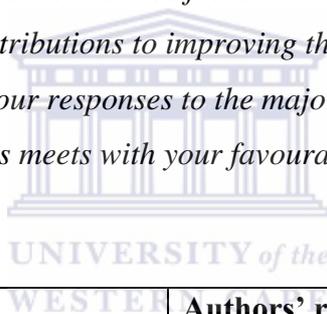
2) The reference to overlapping domains under the multidimensionality theme highlights some well discussed areas such as academic, racial, gender etc, Others, are less well articulated such as "athletic" and "global" - some exposition of these areas might be helpful

3. Throughout the paper the examples provided are very useful. Some consideration of limitations could add to the integrity of the review.

2.1.3. Authors comments

Dear Editor in Chief and anonymous reviewers,

We would like to thank the editor and reviewers for the extremely helpful comments which we believe have made significant contributions to improving the overall quality of the paper. In the table below we have outlined our responses to the major and minor comments identified by the reviewers. We trust that this meets with your favourable feedback.



Reviewer's comment	Authors' response
Reviewer 1	
As a reader who is not familiar with the idea of self-concept and what does it mean 'healthy self concept' I found the introduction confusing as the authors showed how 'healthy' self concept or a unhealthy self concept impacts the child life. It would be very helpful to start with the basic definition and explanation of what is a self concept. I admit I found it difficult to understand - , ' the environment is likewise shaped by the individual selves within it (Stephens et al. 2012).'	Agreed. The authors have clarified the definitions of the self, self-concept, and the sociocultural self model (p1, p2)

<p>in the introduction I saw many sources of influences on the child's self construction and it will be helpful to start with explaining what do we mean by self construction and what are its components.</p>	<p>This has been more clearly attended to.</p>
<p>Furthermore, the relationship between the need to conduct more research on how children construct their self concept and systematic review is not clear. I do not know of any topic that does not need more research, what is the specific contribution of this review? In the method, the authors say - 'The motivation behind the systematic review is to ascertain the strength of evidence supporting further research, theory, and interventions focused on child self-concept.' - How the 'strength of evidence' can support further research? If there is little evidence (it is not clear for what), should we see it as a basis for more or for less research</p>	<p>Strongly agree. We have now more clearly articulated the rationale behind conducting the systematic review.</p>
<p>The authors say that systematic review is at the core of evidence based practice. I agree. I believe, however, that the introduction should lead us to understand how this review is associated with practice and what kind of evidence are we looking for? Interventions that impact self-concept? Not clear.</p>	<p>There is an absence of systematic reviews around children's subjective experiences of the self. The self-concept has been included in many current intervention programmes related to child well-being and wellness, however, there is a gap in the literature which seeks to understand how children construct and assigns meaning to the self. Having a deeper understanding of this will contribute towards the understanding of the</p>

	<p>role that the self-concept plays in children's well-being and overall development.</p>
<p>Only later the authors indicate that they will review qualitative studies. This changes the whole perspective of the reader that expects the traditional systematic review with different kinds of questions and methodologies. Starting with this point may have helped the reader a very different approach.</p> <p>At the same time, if the authors are presenting their review of qualitative studies as 'systematic' it is important that they address the special (an often contested) nature of qualitative reviews and the criteria of quality that they need to follow. For instance, no grey literature is mentioned and no hand searching of relevant journals are included. It is also not clear what is the criterion - Articles which do not provide sufficient data to be abstracted were excluded.</p>	<p>Although many systematic reviews focus on quantitative research, qualitative studies were more relevant (although not exclusively) to the current research topic, since its aim was focused on 'meaning'.</p> <p>The current systematic review included both quantitative and qualitative research, using the CCAT (Crowe, 2011) appraisal tool, which is specifically designed for systematic reviews which include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies.</p> <p>The criteria for inclusion/exclusion is listed on page 5</p>
<p>The key words seem quite arbitrary, especially as the authors did not provide the reader with the basic understanding of the concepts involved (why children narratives are included? Did the authors review all qualitative studies in the last 20 years that included the word identity?</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment through providing a further description of the concepts and the article search procedure (pages 5, 6)</p>

<p>I suggest that the authors provide several examples of the use of CCAT for qualitative studies.</p>	<p>We have included references with regard to the use of the CCAT in systematic reviews which include qualitative research (page 6)</p>
<p>The references they provide to support their meta-syntheses procedures are dated and unrelated to systematic reviews.</p>	<p>This comment has been attended to. Recent articles which have utilised meta-synthesis within a systematic review have been included (page 6).</p>
<p>What do the authors mean when they say that some of their studies are correlational? This is very confusing.</p>	<p>Correlational studies are commonly used in social psychology research. These suggest a relationship exists between two variables, however cannot prove that one variable causes the change in the other due to a lack of a control group or other variables within the environment which may play a role in the change which cannot be controlled for. This research design is often used to gather preliminary information on a topic. This term was utilised in the current study because it is one of the research designs listed in the CCAT, which was utilised to appraise all of the articles.</p>
<p>I am afraid I cannot judge the trustworthiness of the analyses of the themes as there is very little information on the process (and no information on the team members' qualifications).</p>	<p>This has been included in the methods section of the review.</p>
<p>In the discussion, I see many instances of integration of themes that I am not sure what was the basis for this interpretation as I did not see in the procedure a way of examining connections between themes. Similarly, it is not clear whether the interpretation is based on what was seen in</p>	<p>The authors have attended to the comment and have specified when the interpretation was based on several or all of the findings. The procedure for data analysis has been further elaborated</p>

<p>each of the studies or reviewing them in their totality. For instance, 'the notion of self-concept was identified to be a fluid, situational and multi-dimensional phenomenon' - in every study or when we see the wide range of studies, each focusing on one aspect?</p>	
<p>Similarly, I failed to see the connection between some of the implications as seen by the authors and the findings they presented. For instance, do we know anything from the review on the impact of 'health promoting activities', even 'crucial' impact, when no outcome data are provided?</p>	<p>Agreed. We may have overstated based on the limited data and we have attended to this in the text.</p>
<p>Reviewer 2</p>	
<p>1) I think it would be useful to include a table setting out the facet analysis (to include the search terms/ truncations etc)</p>	<p>Agreed. This table has been included (see page 7, table 2)</p>
<p>2) The reference to overlapping domains under the multidimensionality theme highlights some well discussed areas such as academic, racial, gender etc, Others, are less well articulated such as "athletic" and "global" - some exposition of these areas might be helpful</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment (pages 10,11)</p>
<p>3. Throughout the paper the examples provided are very useful. Some consideration of limitations could add to the integrity of the review</p>	<p>Agreed. We have in fact overlooked this. While we have attended to the overall limitations of the studies within the discussion, the reviewer makes a cogent point about further considerations of</p>

	limitations of the studies. This comment has been attended to. (pages 10-21)
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2.2. Reflections on the review process

The review process for the systematic review was both challenging and rewarding. The main challenge was in the discrepancies between the two reviewers. While the first reviewer provided a harsh criticism of the review and its validity, the second reviewer was very positive regarding the article's contribution to the field of psychology. The first reviewer was unfamiliar with the research topic of the self-concept and the use and value of qualitative methods within a systematic review. Although this provided a certain level of frustration, the comments helped to strengthen the systematic review, especially regarding the way in which the topic was presented so that those who are not familiar with the 'self-concept' could still be able to comprehend the article and its value. Both of the reviewers provided several additional suggestions which helped to strengthen the article, such as including the reviewed studies' limitations and in more clearly articulating the data collection and analysis procedures.



3. Article

This part of the thesis is presented in an article published in *Child Indicators Research*, 2016, DOI: 10.1007/s12187-016-9382-2. The article in its original format is presented below:

A Systematic Review of Children's Construction of the Self: Implications for Children's Subjective Well-being

Abstract

This research aimed to systematically review academic literature focused on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' An article search and appraisal yielded 38 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Within these articles, six central thematic categories emerged as the key influences on children's constructions of the self. These include multidimensionality, discursive practices, socio-environmental conditions, oppression & marginalisation, culture, and social support. The study highlights the multidimensional and fluid nature of the self and emphasises the self-concept to be mutually influenced and supported by an individual's immediate social networks, socio-environmental resources, and internal processes. A child's ability to meaningfully construct a sense of self was associated with higher levels of coping and resilience and improved well-being. The review provides considerations for increased interventions aimed at improving child well-being which must take into account the unique ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the self. Such interventions should be inclusive of the individual and contextual issues influencing a child's self-constructions, including coping skills, structural challenges and proximal economic and social resources.

Keywords: children, self, self-concept, meaning, child well-being, systematic review

Introduction

The way in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' plays a crucial role in a child's healthy development, behaviour, as well as their overall well-being. Furthermore, a child's understanding of the 'self' could influence the way in which they make meaning out of their experiences and internalize these experiences as a means of understanding one's abilities and self-worth. In Social Psychology the conscious component of the 'self' is commonly referred to as the self-concept or self-identity. The self-concept is defined to be a construct created as a reflection of a child's interaction with their social environment and the way children think about themselves in relation to their abilities and attributes (Kenny & McEachern., 2009). While a positive self-concept has been linked to academic, school, and positive psychosocial development, a negative view of the self has been linked to aggression, depression, eating disorders, adjustment problems, suicide, and shame (Demaray, Malecki, Rueger, & Summers, 2009; Margolin, & Gordis, 2000; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010; Neff, 2007). Furthermore, research has shown a stable self to be a key component of children's subjective well-being (Savahl et al., 2015). Multiple fields in psychology and sociology recognise the valuable influence of self-concept in optimal social, psychological, and developmental outcomes. Humanistic psychology, for example, makes reference to the crucial development of a healthy self-concept as positive self-regard and unconditional self-acceptance. The behavioural-based model of the self-concept theorises an individual's self-concept to be reflected in their unique patterns of behaviour. People experience a healthy self-concept through the development of successes in the various life domains accompanied by positive feedback from the environment (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003). According to Mead (1934):

“The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (p. 135).”

Social psychology's "looking glass self-theory," (Cooley, 1902) postulates self-conceptions to be shaped by the way people are viewed and acted on by the environment in response to their behaviours. The 'sociocultural self-model' builds on this theory to describe the transactional

relationship between individuals and their environment. Individuals and structures influence one another in an on-going cycle whereby individuals shape their different selves in response to their social and cultural experience (Stevens et al., 2012). While the self is shaped by cultural experiences, new sub-cultures can simultaneously arise in the form of the interactions of the individual selves within them (Adams & Markus, 2004). As new patterns emerge, cultural norms, meanings, and identities influence and support the new patterns.

The conditions within an individual's environment influence the experiences which they draw upon to construct the self. For example, violence exposure within a child's environment could be internalised by a child in the form of negative self-perceptions and feelings, such as an unworthiness of being kept safe (Margolin & Gordon, 2000). Research has suggested that high exposure to violence influences children's self- constructions and perpetuates violence through aggressive cognitions and behaviour (Guerra, 2004; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003). Research further indicates increased risk for internalised psychological symptoms in children who have been victimised or exposed to community violence, such as helplessness, shame, fear, anger, high arousal, anxiety, and depression (see Margarlin & Gordon, 2000, Staub, 2003). These reactions could interfere with a child's social and academic life, and alter a child's developmental trajectory and construction of a healthy self-concept (Margarlin & Gordon, 2000). Socio-economic status could also influence the resources available for a child's self-construction. For example, impoverished communities with poor infrastructure may have limited spaces for children to safely explore their surroundings and to form supportive relationships with others, all of which could influence the self-concept.

In order to see large-scale changes in child well-being, communities need to be exposed to promotional activities focused on improving overall quality of life. Research has identified the key factors of social support, coping skills, and self-concept as having a strong influence on child well-being (see Cluver & Gardner, 2007, Fattore, 2007, September & Savahl, 2009). Due to the complex and contextual nature of the 'self', self-concept enhancing interventions remain scarce. The concept of the 'self' cannot be easily defined and must be located within an individual's complex web of history, culture, community, character, and space. Although there is a large body of research measuring self-concept, the majority of these studies look to the quantitative aspects and self-perceptions through the use of scales such as the Harter's

Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982), the Piers-Harris SCS (Piers, 1969) and the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). According to Blascovitch and Tomaka (1991), there are over 200 measures of self-esteem, although the validity of the scales remains questionable. Furthermore, the majority of these scales have been developed within a United States context. Additionally, there are limited studies on how messages of oppression, violence, and poverty impact on the subjective understanding of self-concept with children. Further research is therefore required to provide deeper insight into children's understanding and meaning assignment of the 'self,' across child populations and contexts. The overarching aim of this article is to provide a systematic review of existing empirical studies focused on understanding the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self. In the absence of systematic reviews, this study hopes to fill this gap in international discourse on children's self-concept.

Method

The review was conducted by the primary author, trained in clinical and research psychology, as a part of a PhD dissertation. The second reviewer and co-author is a research psychologist who specialises in child and youth research. The systematic review is at the core of evidence-based practice in the medical, health, and social sectors. Its usefulness goes beyond theory to promote the development of practices, interventions, and services based on the best available knowledge. A systematic review draws upon the validity and usefulness of existing research findings to assist with the further development of evidence-based practices, interventions, and theories (Long & Godfrey, 2004). Additionally, the systematic review method is an efficient way to become familiar with the best available research evidence for a focused research question (Garg et al. 2008). The strength of a systematic review is in the transparency of each phase of the synthesis process, which provides a detailed and critical understanding of existing studies (Garg et al. 2008). This process also identifies the applicability and gaps in current research across populations and contexts.

Since the specific research question is concerned with the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes, the review largely, although not exclusively, focuses on qualitative research studies, since these are the studies most relevant to the research question under investigation. Pearson (2004) highlights the importance of incorporating qualitative

research into the systematic review in order to broaden the view of what constitutes best practice. Incorporating qualitative research takes into consideration different research questions where quantitative studies may be less applicable, providing a different kind of evidence and insight into a problem or area of interest, drawing out subjective perceptions and understandings while incorporating the specific context and culture (Long & Godfrey, 2004).

Review Question: How do children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’?

Included databases: EbscoHost, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink are the meta-databases which were searched for the extraction of articles. Databases within EbscoHost included PsychARTICLES, SocINDEX, and Academic Search Complete. Within ScienceDirect and SpringerLink, the search was conducted in the fields of psychology and social sciences. Articles with titles and abstracts which met the inclusion criteria were obtained and reference lists of the identified articles scanned to identify additional relevant articles. Personal contact was also made with experts in the field on the topic of self-concept who may be able to direct the researcher to relevant studies.

Time period/Inclusion/ exclusion criteria: (1) The time period considered is the last twenty years (1994 – 2014). (2) Participants are children age 18 or under (3) Study seeks to make meaning of how children conceptualise the self (4) Study provides a full report written in English. (5) Study is published in an English-language, peer-reviewed journal, book or book chapter. Articles which did not meet criteria were excluded.

Key words: The preliminary keywords used within the search were child, self, self-concept, self-esteem, self-competence, self-efficacy, self-perceptions, child narratives, meaning-making, qualitative analysis, perceptions of the self. The list entailed the terms which have been commonly utilised in studies related to child self-concept. During the initial search, the majority of the studies were related to the objective measures of the self-concept, rather than the meaning-making processes and subjective experiences of children. It was therefore

decided not to include the term perception in the search. It was also decided to use the exclusion terms self-evaluation, scale, man, woman and adult within the search. *Self-identity* was a term which was found in many articles interchangeably with self-concept. Additionally, the term *narrative* was included because this term is commonly utilised in studies which seek to understand children's meaning-making processes related to a concept. It was then decided to complete the final search utilising the keywords: child OR *children's constructions* OR *children's narratives* OR *children's meaning* AND OR *self* AND OR *self-concept* AND OR *identity*.

Quality Assessment: Quality assessment of the studies that met the inclusion criteria were rated using the Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT). The purpose of a quality assessment within a systematic review is to determine the quality of the research studies through critical assessment of the research strengths, weaknesses, and benefits. The CCAT has been selected for the purpose of this systematic review due to the tool's depth to fully assess research papers, appropriate scoring system, and validity and reliability (Crowe, 2011). Furthermore, the CCAT can be applied to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research, and can be used to assess, understand and communicate research knowledge (see Donnelly et al., 2015, Mellon et al., 2015). A threshold score of 70% was used as the inclusion criteria.

Data Extraction: The researcher extracted the data which was checked by a second reviewer. The data was extracted following the procedures of meta-synthesis and formatted into a table commonly utilised for data extraction. The table was formatted to extract data specifically relevant to the research question, which included the study authors, aim, sample size, participant characteristics, research design, outcomes, themes, and self-concept domain.

Analysis: The data from the studies were analysed using metasynthesis, which is a form of data analysis commonly utilised within systematic reviews that include both quantitative and qualitative studies (see Bennion, Shaw, & Gibson, 2012, Dolman, Jones & Howard, 2013, Wells et al., 2013). The analysis followed a process of reading, rereading, and taking notes of the key aims, methods, and findings of each article (Bennion et al., 2012). This was followed by data extraction, which is characterised by a recording and the thematic coding of the

findings of the articles. Thematic coding commenced through the consideration of the data extraction table along with a review of the notes. The findings were coded into themes and sub-themes, by means of a cyclical process, whereby studies were checked and rechecked for new emerging themes (Bennion et al., 2012). Contradictory and complimentary links between texts were used to bring about new understandings and perspectives (Dixon-Woods, 2005). The final themes and key findings are presented in the results section.

Results

Article search procedure: The articles were initially obtained through a search procedure of the selected databases. The key words *children's constructions* or *children's narratives* or *children's meaning* and or *self* and or *self-concept* and or *identity* were searched within the selected databases and yielded a total of 1,762 hits. A title search followed by an abstract search narrowed down the studies to 314 which met the criteria. The articles were then reviewed and appraised through the use of the CCAT. A total of 20 articles met the criteria. The references of the articles which met the criteria were then search for further relevant articles. An additional 18 articles which met the criteria were found through the reference mining. (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Article search procedure

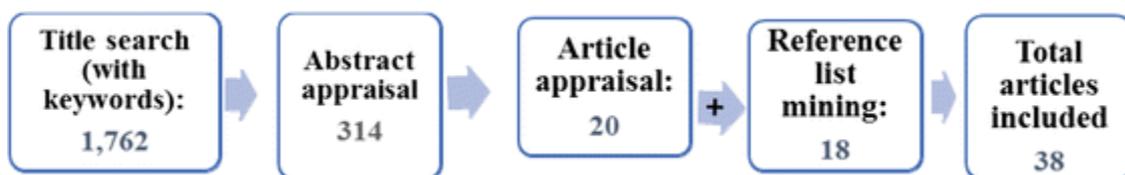


Table 2: Article Search Procedure

Metadatabases searched	Keys words/Phrases	Hits	Meets criteria	Reference mining	Total meets criteria
Ebscohost	Child OR <i>children's constructions</i> OR <i>children's narratives</i> OR <i>children's meaning</i> AND OR <i>self</i> AND OR <i>self-concept</i> AND OR <i>identity</i> .	813	10	12	22

Table 2: Article Search Procedure

Metadatabases searched	Keys words/Phrases	Hits	Meets criteria	Reference mining	Total meets criteria
Springerlink		703	9 (6 new)	6	12
Sciencedirect		153	4	0	4
				Total	38

Design of reviewed studies

The design of the reviewed studies can be categorised as qualitative, descriptive/observational/ exploratory, and mixed methods. Within these categories there were eight subcategories which included; narrative, ethnography, grounded theory, concurrent mixed methods, correlational, longitudinal, prospective, and case-control. The categories were line up with those described in the CCAT, which was utilised to assess the quality of the studies. Narrative and ethnographic studies were the most common design utilised, with a total of 13 studies. Ten of the studies utilised a grounded theory design, four mixed methods, three correlational, one longitudinal, one prospective, and one case-control study. Seventeen utilised more than one research design.

The data collection tools within the studies included in-depth, informal, and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, field notes, self-report questionnaires, and creative arts such as drawings, photos, and puppet shows. Data analysis procedures included thematic content analysis, narrative analysis, correlational analysis, statistical analysis, descriptive analysis, inductive analysis, narrative case study, grounded theory comparative analysis, discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, qualitative comparative analysis, phenomenological analysis, and constant comparative analysis (See Table 3).

Table 3: Study design

Study design	Number	Author (s) *Multiple methods
Qualitative: Narrative	13	Ahn and Filipenko (2007), Mclean et al.(2010), Wang (2004), Bohanek et al. (2006), *McLean and Breen (2009), *Welch-Ross et al. (1999), Cockle (1994), Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006), Graham and Anderson (2008), *Hung et al. (2011), McLean and Jennings (2012), *Roth (2004), *McMurray et al. (2011)
Qualitative: Ethnography	13	Hammack (2010), Isom (2011), Kickett-Tucker (2009), *Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler (1994), Moses (2006), *Timberlake (1994), *De Haan et al. (2010), *Hung et al. (2011), Lim (2008), Gernhardt et al. (2014), Valentine (2000), *Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Abrams and Aguilar (2005)
Qualitative: Grounded Theory	10	Rogers et al. (2012), Noble-Carr et al. (2013), McMurray et al. (2011), *Campos Monteiro and Dollinger(1998), Moss (2009), *Timberlake (1994), Johnson (2014), Purdie et al.(2000), *Roth (2006), *McMurray et al. (2011)
Mixed methods (concurrent)	4	Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler (1994), *De Haan et al. (2010), McLean and Jennings (2012), *Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Bohanek et al. (2008)
Descriptive/ observational/ exploratory: Correlational	3	Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Egan and Perry (1998), *McLean and Breen (2009)
Descriptive/ observational/ exploratory: Longitudinal	1	Whitesell et al. (2006)
Descriptive/ observational/ exploratory: Prospective	1	*Welch-Ross et al. (1999)
Descriptive/ observational/ exploratory: Case– control	1	Macfie and Swan (2009)

Self-Concept Domain

Fourteen thematic domains of the self were included within the studies. These domains included the global, narrative, situational, collective, cultural and ethnic, racial, gender, athletic and academic selves, self-identity, self-efficacy, self-worth, self-regard, and self-esteem (See Table 4).

Table 4

Self-concept domain

Self-concept domain	Number	Author (s)
Cultural/ ethnic self	8	Wang (2004), Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Whitesell et al. (2006), Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006), Graham and Anderson (2008), De Haan et al. (2010), Gernhardt et al. (2014), Roth (2006)
Self esteem	7	Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Moss (2009), Bohanek et al. (2008), McLean et al. (2010), Reese et al. (2007), Purdie et al. (2000), Valentine (2000)
Self-identity	5	Whitesell et al. (2006), Rogers et al. (2012), Noble-Carr et al. (2013), Hammack (2010), McMurray et al. (2011)
Self-efficacy	5	Egan and Perry (1998), Bohanek et al. (2006), Moses (2006), Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), Abrams and Aguilar (2005)
Global Self	4	McLean et al. (2010), Cockle (1994)
Self-Worth	4	Reese et al. (2010), Timberlake (1994), Macfie and Swan (2009), Reese et al. (2007)
Self-regard	1	Egan and Perry (1998)
Collective self	4	Whitesell et al. (2006), Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Fernández-Kelly and Schauflier (1994), Valentine (2000)
Racial self	3	Isom (2007), Kickett-Tucker (2009), Johnson (2014)
Academic Self	3	Graham and Anderson (2008), Lim (2008), Roth (2006)
Narrative self	4	Ahn and Filipenko (2007), McLean and Breen (2009), Reese et al. (2010), Welch-Ross et al. (1999)
Gender self	2	Isom (2007), Johnson (2014)
Situational self	2	McMurray et al. (2011), Timberlake (1994)
Athletic self	1	Hung et al. (2011)

Demographics

The participants of the studies were identified to be from 19 different racial or ethnic categories. These included European American, African American, Asian American, Native American, Dominican American, Russian American, British (Caucasian), Dutch, Palestinian, Singaporean, Greek, Brazilian, Caucasian Australian, Indigenous Australian, German, Turkish, South African (mixed race) and New Zealander. Twenty-one of the studies were conducted amongst Americans, with the majority of the studies amongst dominantly European American participants (n = 9) (see Table 5).

Table 5
Demographics

Race	Number	Author * Multiple racial/ethnic groups
European American	9	Ahn and Filipenko (2007), Bohanek et al. (2006), Bohanek et al. (2008), Egan and Perry (1998), Mcleen et al. (2011), McLean and Jennings (2012), McLean and Breen (2009), Valentine (2000), Welch-Ross et al. (1999)
USA multiple ethnicities (i.e. Dominican, Chinese, Russian, African, European, Hmong)	8	Abrams and Aguilar (2005), Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), Fernández-Kelly and Schauflier (1994), Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Lim (2008), Rogers et al. (2012), Timberlake (1994), Wang (2004)
Australian (white and indigenous)	4	Kickett-Tucker (2009), Moss (2009), Noble-Carr et al. (2013), Purdie et al. (2000),
African American	3	Graham and Anderson (2008), Isom (2007), Roth (2006)
New Zealander	2	Reese et al. (2007), 2010
British (White)	1	McMurray et al. (2011)
Asian American	1	Cockle (1994)
Dutch (multiple ethnicities)	1	De Haan et al. (2010)
Palestinian	1	Hammack (2010)
Singaporean	1	Hung et al. (2011)
Greek (Minority)	1	Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006)
Brazilian	1	Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998)
Native American	1	Whitesell et al. (2006)
German	1	*Gernhardt et al. (2014)
Turkish	1	*Gernhardt et al. (2014)

Table 5
Demographics

Race	Number	Author * Multiple racial/ethnic groups
South African (mixed race)	1	Moses (2006)
Unspecified	1	Macfie and Swan (2009)

Age: The largest proportion of the studies were amongst adolescent participants (n=22), followed by middle childhood participants (n=17), with the least amount amongst participants in early childhood (n=7) (See table 6).

Table 6
Age

AGE	Number	Author (s) * Multiple age groups
Adolescence (12–18)	22	Abrams and Aguilar (2005), Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006), *Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler (1994), Graham and Anderson (2008), Hammack (2010), Johnson (2014), *Kickett-Tucker (2009), Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Lim (2008), *Moses (2006), *McMurray et al. (2011)* Mcleen et al. (2011), McLean and Jennings (2012), McLean and Breen (2009), *Noble-Carr et al. (2013), Purdie et al. (2000), Reese et al. (2010), Roth (2006), *Valentine (2000), Whitesell et al. (2006),
Middle childhood (5–12)	17	Bohanek et al. (2006), Bohanek et al. (2008),Cockle (1994), *Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), De Haan et al. (2010), Egan and Perry (1998), Hung et al. (2011), Isom (2007), *Kickett-Tucker (2009), * Macfie and Swan (2009), *Moses (2006), *Purdie et al. (2000), Rogers et al. (2012), Reese et al. (2010), *Reese et al. (2007), Timberlake (1994), *Valentine (2000),
Early Childhood (0–5)	7	Ahn and Filipenko (2007), Gernhardt et al. (2014), Purdie et al. (2000), Macfie and Swan (2009), Moss (2009), Welch-Ross et al. (1999), Wang (2004)

Table 7
Socio-economic status

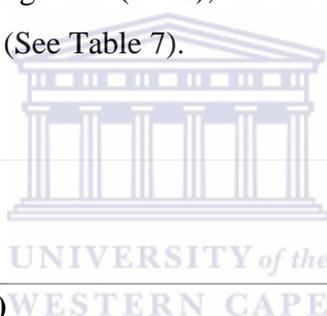
SES	Number	Author (s)
Low	14	Abrams and Aguilar (2005), Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006), Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler (1994), Graham and Anderson (2008), Isom (2007), Johnson (2014), McMurray et al. (2011), Roth (2006), Moses (2006), Kickett-Tucker (2009), Timberlake (1994), Whitesell et al. (2006), Moss (2008)
Medium	12	Bohanek et al. (2006), Bohanek et al. (2008), Egan and Perry (1998), Hung et al. (2011), McLean and Jennings (2012), McLean

Table 6

Age

AGE	Number	Author (s) * Multiple age groups
		and Breen (2009), McLean et al. (2010), Reese et al. (2010), Valentine (2000), Wang (2004), Welch-Ross et al. (1999), Reese et al. (2007),
High	1	Ahn and Filipenko (2007)
Mixed SES	9	Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), De Haan et al. (2010), Gernhardt et al. (2014), Hammack (2010), Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Lim (2008), Noble-Carr et al. (2013), Rogers et al. (2012), Purdie (2000)
Unspecified	2	Cockle (1994), Macfie and Swan (2009)

Socio-economic Status: The greatest number of studies took place amongst participants from a low socioeconomic status background (n=14), closely followed by participants from medium socioeconomic status background (n=12), and lastly participants from a high socioeconomic background (n=1) (See Table 7).

**Table 7**

Socio-economic status

SES	Number	Author (s)
Low	14	Abrams and Aguilar (2005), Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006), Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), Fernández-Kelly and Schauffler (1994), Graham and Anderson (2008), Isom (2007), Johnson (2014), McMurray et al. (2011), Roth (2006), Moses (2006), Kickett-Tucker (2009), Timberlake (1994), Whitesell et al. (2006), Moss (2008)
Medium	12	Bohanek et al. (2006), Bohanek et al. (2008), Egan and Perry (1998), Hung et al. (2011), McLean and Jennings (2012), McLean and Breen (2009), McLean et al. (2010), Reese et al. (2010), Valentine (2000), Wang (2004), Welch-Ross et al. (1999), Reese et al. (2007),
High	1	Ahn and Filipenko (2007)
Mixed SES	9	Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), De Haan et al. (2010), Gernhardt et al. (2014), Hammack (2010), Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Lim (2008), Noble-Carr et al. (2013), Rogers et al. (2012), Purdie (2000)
Unspecified	2	Cockle (1994), Macfie and Swan (2009)

Region: The regions where the studies took place include 13 different countries; USA, Canada, UK, Holland, Palestine, Singapore, Greece, Brazil, Australia, Germany, South Africa, China, and New Zealand. Although this represents a diversity of global regions, there

remains a limited amount of studies within developing countries with the vast majority of the studies (n= 23) within the United States (see Table 8).

Region	Number	Author * Multiple regions
USA	23	Ahn and Filipenko (2007), Cockle (1994), Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), Egan and Perry (1998), Bohanek et al. (2006), Bohanek et al. (2008), Reese et al. (2007), Reese et al. (2010), Valentine (2010), Welch-Ross et al. (1999), McLean and Jennings (2012), Isom (2006), Graham and Anderson (2008), Roth (2007), Whitesell et al. (2006), Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Rogers et al. (2012), Fernández-Kelly and Schaffler (1994), Lim (2008), Abrams and Aguilar (2005), Timberlake (1994), Macfie and Swan (2009) *Wang (2010)
Australia	4	Moss (2009), Purdie et al. (2000), Noble-Carr et al. (2013), Kickett-Tucker (2009)
Canada	2	McLean and Jennings (2012), McLean and Breen (2009)
UK	2	McMurray et al. (2011), Valentine (2000)
New Zealand	2	Reese et al.(2007), Reese et al. (2010)
South Africa	1	Moses (2006)
Singapore	1	Hung et al. (2011)
Greece	1	Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006)
Brazil	1	Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998)
Palestine	1	Hammack (2010)
Germany	1	Gernhardt et al. (2013)
China	1	*Wang (2004)
Holland	1	De Haan et al. (2010)

Research context: The research context of the studies was categorised into school, home, community/ neighbourhood, social service, after-school programme and university laboratories. The most common space used was the schools (n=17) followed by the home (n=9) and the community/neighbourhood (n=7). The least common space was the university laboratories and an after-school programme setting (n=2) (See Table 9).

Table 9
Research context

Context	Number	Author * Multiple contexts
School	17	Ahn and Filipenko (2007), Cockle (1994), De Haan et al. (2010), *Fernández-Kelly and Schauflier (1994), Gernhardt et al. (2014), *Graham and Anderson (2008), Kiang and Fuligni (2010), Lim (2008), McLean et al. (2010), McLean and Breen (2009), Kickett-Tucker (2009), *Purdie et al. (2000), Rogers (2012), Roth (2006), *Timberlake (1994), Valentine (2000), Wang (2004)
Home	9	Bohanek et al. (2006), Bohanek et al. (2008), *Fernández-Kelly and Schauflier (1994), * Graham and Anderson (2008), Johnson (2014) Macfie and Swan (2009), McLean and Jennings (2012), *Purdie et al. (2000), Welch-Ross et al. (1999)
Community/ Neighbourhood	7	Campos Monteiro and Dollinger (1998), *Graham and Anderson (2008), Hammack (2010), Moses (2006), * Purdie et al. (2000), *Timberlake (1994) Whitesell et al. (2006)
Social Service	6	Abrams and Aguilar (2005), Anagnostopoulos et al. (2006), Clinkinbeard and Murray (2012), McMurray et al. (2011), Moss (2009), Noble-Carr et al. (2013),
After-School Programme	2	Hung et al. (2011), Isom (2007)
University Laboratory	2	Reese et al. (2007), 2010

Emerging Themes

Six central thematic categories emerged as the key influences on the way in which children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self.’ These included; multidimensionality, discursive practices, environmental conditions, oppression and marginalisation, culture, and social support.

Multidimensionality: The first common theme which emerged from the studies was the multidimensional nature of the self which was situation specific and fluid. The studies combined showed the variety of influences on a child’s self- development, including culture, environmental and structural conditions, developmental processes and social interactions. Within the research, the self was made up of multiple domains, including global, academic, racial, ethnic, gender, athletic, and collective self. Although the studies were divided into multiple self-concept domains, these domains often overlapped with other domains, largely

dependent on the specific sociocultural situation. For example, Purdie et al. (2000) focused on the positive self-identity for Indigenous students and its relationship to school. The participants in the study were faced with conflicting messages about education from their traditional community versus their mainstream school environment. A positive self-identity as an Indigenous young person was not necessarily linked with successful academic outcomes, however successful academic outcomes were linked to a positive self-identity as a student. Self-concept additionally became situation specific for many participants as they experienced feelings of pride when relating to others in their community and experiences of shame while attending a mainstream schooling environment where there existed negative messages around the indigenous culture.

A further example of the multidimensional nature of the self was seen within the study by McMurray et al. (2011). The study presented an analysis of semi-structured interviews with 13 young people who were in residential and non-residential care and their social workers. The young people in the sample exhibited different identities in different contexts which were largely shaped by their relationships, often rooted in family, role models, and current experiences. The study presented positive social relationships to be of key importance for the development of a secure sense of self. While the study provided a valuable insight into the self-concept of young people in care, the participants consisted of only Caucasian young people who were either born or had lived locally for many years and therefore did not necessarily struggle with issues related to their ethnic or cultural identities. The authors recommended further research explore the self-concept of children in care from other sociocultural backgrounds.

Also amongst children in care, Moss (2009) explored identity issues for indigenous children in foster care, specifically focused on the domains of self-esteem and sense of self as it was interconnected with their cultural identity. The findings demonstrated key differences in cultural connectedness, self-esteem, identity, and psychological well-being for indigenous children in out of home care compared to those not in care. Young people in care were much more likely to have self-esteem issues and displayed a poor sense of self in comparison to children not in care. Similar to the findings of McMurray et al. (2010), family and other significant social relationships, such as social workers and peers, all contributed towards the

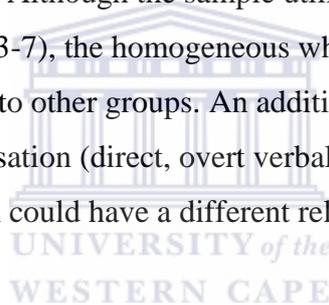
participants' self-concept. A connection with one's cultural background was additionally identified to be an important factor for a stable self-concept.

The study by Hung, Lim, and Jamaludin (2011) explored the connection of self and community, specifically in the form of the projective identity of an 11-year-old and how this interplayed with his athletic self-concept as a bowler. The projective identity framework views the self to be developed as individuals observe the actions of role models, compare them, and marks certain patterns of action relative to their own, then refines their own actions. The study illuminated how the participant developed an identity as a bowler over time through his narrative, dialogue, and performative actions. The participant actualized his bowler identity through the three projective identity stages of identity tinkering, identity negotiating, and identity sustaining. The single case-study method provided a valuable example of the utilisation of the projective identity framework for understanding children's self constructions, specifically related to the bowler identity. However, further research could improve the understanding of the self through the application of the projective identity framework within other sporting or extra-mural environments and sociocultural contexts.

Isom (2007) aimed to illuminate the meaning making world of children and their constructions of racial and gender identities amongst a sample of 75 African American children aged 10 to 12. Identity in this context emerged as diverse and shifting, while reflecting a strong desire for a self apart from external constructions. Hammock (2010) explored the complexity of the relationship between the personal narratives of youth and the master narrative of Palestine. The interviews showed the complexity of individual self-constructions within the Palestinian identity as the participants in the study struggled with an identity constructed around the master narrative of the historical Palestinian and their individual narrative as a teenager. Timberlake (1994) further captured the multidimensionality of the self-concept of 200 homeless children who clung to the other domains of the self, such as that of an academic self, in order to buffer against the negative external and internal self-perceptions associated with homelessness. Although individually the above studies are limited in their application of the findings across populations and contexts, the studies combined provide evidence for theoretical implications which support the influence of the internalised experience of being a member of an oppressed group on the

participants' self-concept and the various resources and coping strategies drawn upon to preserve their sense of self.

Additional descriptive self-concept domains were apparent within the studies, which included self-regard, self-efficacy, self-worth, and self-esteem. Egan & Perry (1998), for example, tested whether self-regard contributes overtime to victimisation by peers especially when self-regard was assessed in terms of self-perceived peer social competence. Additionally, they sought to measure if vulnerabilities were more likely to lead to victimization over time when children had low self-regard. The findings supported the experience of being victimized to lead to a diminished self-regard over time. Confidence in one's peer group association served as a protective factor for behaviourally at-risk children from victimisation. These results supported a conceptualization of high self-regard to be an adaptive coping resource in stressful or threatening situations. Although the sample utilised a large sample size (n=189) and a range of age groups (grade 3-7), the homogeneous white middle-class sample limited the generalization of the findings to other groups. An additional limitation was that the study only explored one type of victimisation (direct, overt verbal and physical abuse by peers), while other kinds of victimization could have a different relation to the self-concept.



Discursive Practices: Various forms of discursive practices were emphasized to play a central role in the meaning making processes surrounding child self-concept within many of the studies. The studies which focused on this proposed the self to be constructed through discourse. For example, language, specifically in the form of talk with others, was a means through which the participants made sense of themselves and their social world. For example, McLean & Breen (2009) examined narrative identity in adolescence in terms of narrative content and processes. The study demonstrated how simply learning about the self does not predict self-esteem in middle and late adolescence rather this occurs through constructing experiences through negative to positive discourse. The study by Mclean & Jennings (2012) explored the role of peer and parental discourse, specifically focusing on the role of friends in comparison to mothers in adolescent narrative identity development. The results showed how the narrative identity development of the teenage participants occurred simultaneously with intimacy development with friends and mothers. The findings additionally supported the meaning-making process of narrative identity development to occur through the reflection of

past events which became integrated into the self-concept through discourse. Limitations of the study included the demographics and size of the study which excluded the exploration of the complexity which gender, race, and SES may contribute towards adolescent narrative identity development. The longitudinal study by Reese et al. (2010) conceptualised how children draw meaning from important life events and how this influenced the development of a self-concept through examining parent and child conversations. The findings supported personal narratives to be linked to self-understanding throughout development. The emotional content of parent reminiscing was found to be most important for child self-concept. Future longitudinal research should seek to capture both the continuity and change in the self-concept over time. A second study by Reese and colleagues (2007) examined the relation between talk about past events with talk about on-going emotions and events for self-development amongst fifty-one five and six-year-old New Zealand children and their parents. Conversations about negative past events where parents' reference the child's negative emotions and to negative evaluations of the child and event, were related to children's self-esteem. Additionally, parental explanation of negative emotions in the conversations was positively related to the children's stable self-concept. Welch-Ross (1999) similarly explored the influence of discourse on self-concept amongst young children through analysing the emotional content of mother-child conversations about past events and references made to mental states during these conversations. The extent to which children elaborated on the emotional aspects of past experience in their personal narratives was related to the organization of their psychological self-concepts. The authors recommended further research focus on the relation between the development of self-knowledge and autobiographical memory and the need for longitudinal research to determine the relation between age, self-knowledge, and the establishment of autobiographical memories.

Bohanek et al. (2006) looked beyond mother-child conversations to how meaning was negotiated as families constructed narratives. Within the study, three family narrative styles emerged including the coordinated perspective, individual perspective and imposed perspective. Families who engaged in a coordinated perspective style tended to have children, especially girls, who had higher self-esteem, and families who engaged in an individual perspective style had children, especially boys, with a more external locus of control. The study provides implications for how the role of family narratives may be particularly critical for children's self-constructions. The sample of participants resulted in some limitations,

including the size and demographics. The majority of the participants came from well-adjusted families, with implications for future research to examine family narratives amongst larger samples and across cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Valentine (2000) explored the ways in which British children are positioned within a social and culturally prescribed identity narrative. Within these influences, age and gender played a key role in how the young people constructed a sense of self, as the narratives of the young people negotiated and challenged the ascribed gender and age identities and their meanings. For example, the identity of children in Britain has been historically defined in opposition to adults, however recently children have been increasingly positioned within the narratives of individualisation, with an increasingly independent entry into their sociocultural environment. The research provided valuable insight into the identity construction of British children whose experiences lie within a particular set of narratives. Further research in other contexts could provide complimentary evidence into child self-constructions amongst children who are located within the narratives of other histories and cultures. Hammock (2010), for example, explored the relationship between the identity constructions of Palestinian children and the master narrative of Palestinian history and collective identity. The findings revealed the historical narrative of the Palestinian identity to become internalised as a part of the individual identity. However, the personal narrative of the participants was at times constructed in opposition to the Palestinian master narrative, which influenced the construction of an identity in divergence to the master narrative. The authors note that the participants in the study represented a theoretical, rather than representative sample of Palestinian children.

Socio-environmental Conditions: Socio-environmental conditions were presented in the majority of the studies to have a strong influence on a child's self-concept. Conditions such as poverty and a lack of social infrastructure in the neighbourhood placed limits on the participants' access to vital resources for constructing a healthy self-concept. This is seen in the ethnographic study by Moses (2006) amongst 63 children aged 10-18 from Ocean View, South Africa. The study showed how social and economic capital was not equally accessible to all people and how this influenced the self-concept of the local children. The children in the study expressed opposition to the negative identities and assumptions imposed on them

from external sources based on the community's reputation for poverty and violence. Many of the children attached their own meaning to their identity and community through their positive engagement of the public space and with their peers. Positive social relations with both peers and adults in the community enabled children to build a sense of collective self-efficacy and self-esteem.

The study by Timberlake (1994) highlighted the concept of self as homeless as children engaged with their unstable living environment. The participants in the study included 200 children aged 6 to 12 years old who took part in individual interviews accompanied by a teacher survey which measured psychosocial functioning. Despite the devalued perceptions of others around homelessness, the children's responses emphasised their drive to reconstruct a mental representation of the self as valued. Other children in the study, however, may have internalised the negative image of a devalued self, which consequently resulted in poorer psychosocial functioning, specifically in the form of academic performance. The mixed methods approach to the study provided valuable insight into the coping strategies and barriers for children under-going homelessness and how these influence the self-concept. While the teacher survey provided valuable information regarding the psychosocial functioning of the participants, it would be valuable to include the survey amongst the parents and the participants themselves in order to have a more holistic understanding of the influences of homelessness on the participants' self-concept and well-being.

The influence of life on the street on children's self-concept is further captured in the study by Campos-Monteiro (1998), which aimed to analyse street children's photographic depiction of their perceptions of themselves and their environment. Three themes were identified as a part of the children's reality of living or working on the street including; images of physical environment, social-collective orientation in the social environment, and aspects of individual self-identity. A strong sense of collective identity emerged as the children described their family, friends, and community connections. Despite social marginalisation, many of the children identified their selfhood to be connected to positive aspirations for the future. The negative aspects of life on the street were also included in the photos, such as the realities of prostitution, abuse and neglect, all of which influenced the ways in which the children constructed self-meaning. A limitation of the study included the sampling of the participants,

who were all attending a local project for children who spent most of their time on the street. Future research could benefit from exploring the influences of the street life on the self-concept of children who are not attending a formalised programme. These children may have a different experience of life on the street and may lack access to the same resources as those who are attending a programme.

Oppression and Marginalisation: A substantial amount of evidence supported conditions of oppression and marginalisation based on race, ethnicity and gender to have a strong influence on the self-concept of the participants. Those participants who were able to make sense of their circumstances, who had awareness of their historical situation as a marginalised group, and who were able to access adequate social support, were seen to have more positive outcomes in self-concept development. Other participants struggled to overcome the conditions of oppression, internalising negatively the perceptions from the dominant culture as a reflection of the self.

Anagostopoulos et al. (2006) investigated how a traumatic situation, such as forced migration, may affect the process of identity formation in adolescence. Using a case study approach, the study examined the experiences of two adolescent males who were forced to immigrate to Greece where they were faced with further marginalisation as a part of a minority ethnic group. The adolescents in the study negatively internalized their disruptive traumatic processes as they struggled to establish a personal identity which remained conflicted between the cultures of their community of origin and their new community. The study supports how violent changes within an adolescent's relationship to other ethnic groups may trigger the process of disturbed identity formation and lead to a negative self-internalization. Although the case-study approach provided valuable insight into the affects which a traumatic situation, such as forced migration, could have on identity development, further research amongst a larger sample of participants and across immigrant groups could provide further insight into the processes of identity formation for immigrant children and adolescents.

The influence of gender and racial oppression on the self is investigated in Johnson (2014). The study aimed to understand the implications of a loss of a friend to homicide on the psychosocial process of identity development amongst urban African American teenage girls. Amongst the participants, the loss of a friend was commonly integrated into a sense of self often in a meaningful and reflective way. The self-concept of the girls in the study was also influenced by the often conflicting messages from their experiences within the dominant culture, their culture as an African American female, and their experiences as a socially marginalized group. Shifts in self-concept were seen towards a stronger religious or spiritual identity and towards a stronger racial identity based on the awareness of social, racial and gender devaluation. A stable self-concept, sense of social awareness around injustices, claim to social service accountability, and consciousness of the larger issues of race and oppression all contributed towards the participants' resilience.

The self-concept within the social and psychological dynamics of racial and class membership were further described by Lim (2008). The study specifically highlighted the influence of class background and ethnicities in developing an academic identity. Middle class white students could more easily adopt an identity as a good student than students from a lower class and from an African American background, regardless of their academic capabilities. Likewise, boys were able to more easily adopt an identity as good mathematics students than girls of all classes, reflecting the conflicting identity of femininity versus the authoritative masculine field of mathematics. Also based within an academic setting, De Haan et al. (2010) sought to understand the role that diversity plays in collaboration patterns and knowledge construction in multi-ethnic classrooms. Students from a minority background had a tendency to resist identities which were not seen as being in accordance with their group, reflected within the academic and the social discourse of the groups. While Dutch students were able to represent the more dominant role in the academic discourse, they lost this position in the informal non-academic discourse. Additionally, while ethnic minority youth demonstrated a lower self-concept when it came to academics, this was not reflected in their social sense of self.

Whitesell et al. (2006) shed light on the positive aspects of the meaning ascribed to an identity as an American Indian youth. The study participants developed a strong sense of self

around a positive personal identity and a strong collective identity despite a history of social marginalisation and oppression. Although the youth in the study lived in reservations where they were faced with difficult circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, isolation, substance abuse, and violence, the majority of American Indian adolescents in this study had both high self-esteem and a strong often bicultural collective identity. An interesting point for investigation could be around the meaning ascribed to an American Indian youth identity amongst American Indian youth who do not reside within a reservation, thus may experience further disconnect from their ethnic culture.

Culture: The theme of culture posed a notable influence on the participants' conceptualisation of the self. This was especially evident within the studies which included ethnic minority or previously disadvantaged participants. Rogers et al. (2012) showed how meaning around ethnic identity emerged throughout middle childhood within a sample of Chinese, Dominican, Russian, White, and Black American children in New York city who were second-generation immigrants. While a variation of meaning emerged amongst ethnic groups, children described their ethnic identity to be formed around language, physical appearance, social position, culture, and pride. It would be valuable for further research to explore the meaning around ethnic identity amongst first generation immigrants, across different age groups, and overtime.

While Rogers et al. (2012) focused on the emergence of ethnic identity throughout middle childhood, Wang (2004) examined the emergence of cultural self-constructs from two different societies amongst early childhood participants through the use of the open-ended free narrative method. The data revealed critical differences in the structure and content of autobiographical memories and self-descriptions in European American and Chinese children as young as age 3 and 4. Chinese children placed a greater emphasis on social interactions and on the roles of other people than the American children, who showed a tendency to focus on their own roles, feelings, and opinions. The research suggests that the autobiographical memory and self-concept are two interrelated constructs of meaning that emerge in the context of culture. Different cultural values and self-beliefs are seen within the everyday activities, playing a crucial role in shaping a child's self-development.

Also amongst early childhood participants, Gernhardt et al. (2014) examined the conceptions of self and family held by migrant Turkish preschool children, as expressed in their drawings of themselves and their families. The drawings of children from five cultural milieus provided insight into the perceptions of the self and family. Examples of significant cultural differences were seen in gender specific features, emotional relatedness, and size.

In addition to individual identity, collective identity was commonly a part of the cultural self-constructions of children and youth. Fernandez-Kelly (1994) highlighted the role of collective identity as a significant resource in the process of assimilation for immigrant children. In the study, collective self-definitions were formed through the process of segmented assimilation as immigrants interacted with other ethnic groups. This presented the ways in which immigrant children construct a sense of self based on the perceptions of others in their environment and in comparison to other more marginalised immigrant individuals or groups. Whitesell (2005) additionally described the cultural self-concepts of American Indian reservation youth to be comprised of both a positive personal identity and a strong collective identity, both of which provide avenues to a healthy self-development. Valentine (2000) further explored the idea of collective self-identity through an examination of the social processes involved in the everyday construction of individual and collective selves among eleven to sixteen-year-olds in a middle income school in the UK. The study highlighted the complex and fragmented nature of adolescent self-conceptions as the participants negotiated their individuality against their peer group identities and against the adult-imposed identity of childhood.

Social Support: The final thematic category which emerged from the studies is that of social support. Across the studies, social networks revealed to be a key influence on both a positive and negative self-concept for the study participants. Forms of social support included family, peers, adults in the community, mentors, coaches, and social service providers. This is evident in a study by Noble-Carr (2013), who explored the critical role of identity and meaning in the lives of vulnerable adolescents who were enrolled in youth support services and the implications of this for supporting their needs. The findings emphasized the need to assist young people to understand the psychosocial benefits of positive social connections.

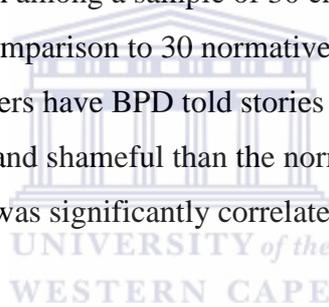
Additionally, the study implied that there is a need for support services to emphasise and understand issues around young peoples' personal identity and meaning-making.

Moss (2009) further explored the role in which social support contributes to identity development of youth in residential and non-residential care. Interviews were conducted amongst twenty, 4 to 18-year-old indigenous Australian young people focused on self-identity. The participants demonstrated key differences in terms of connectedness, self-esteem, identity, and psychological well-being amongst the children in residential care compared to those who were not. Young people not in care across all age ranges and genders were much more connected to their family of origin and extended family and identified culture and cultural practices as being important to their sense of self. Young people in care were much more likely to have lost contact with father, mother, siblings and extended family and thus were more likely to have challenges with attachment, trust, emotional regulation, and self-esteem. They additionally displayed a lack of cultural knowledge and a poorer sense of self. Also focusing on youth in residential care, McMurray et al. (2011) presented an analysis of semi-structured interviews with 13 young people in residential and non-residential care and their social workers. The young people in the sample presented different identities in different contexts which were largely shaped by their relationships. The findings showed how positive social relationships can support a healthy self-development despite adverse environmental circumstances. The study revealed the differences between the social workers' perspectives of the influences on the identity of children versus the perspectives of the children themselves, further illuminating the need to include children in the research process.

Abrams & Aguilar (2005) explored the role which social support played on the self-concept of juvenile offenders. The study aimed to explore how young male teenagers deal with expectations to change their ways of conceptualizing their past, present, and future selves in the context of a six-month residential program that included both cognitive-behavioural therapy and behaviour modification approaches. The images of the self were constructed in relation to close friends and family members. Images of role models which the participants could identify with and an ability to take personal responsibility helped the offenders to create images of hoped for selves. While offenders showed improvements in strategies for

self-growth while in treatment, they struggled to view these strategies as attainable within their regular social environments, emphasising the challenge of crime temptations upon release. While skills development and planning on how to deal with criminal influences and how to improve social support for the adolescents' may influence positive behavioural change, this may be limited when applied to youth offenders' real-world situations where the larger community and structural challenges must also be taken into account. Because the data was collected at only one facility with a specific treatment model, it would be interesting to explore how youth conceptualise the self within other treatment models or in other facilities.

Within the theme of social support, attachment to caregivers was additionally identified as having an impact on the child's self-development. An example of this is seen in the study by Macfie & Swan (2009) which assessed representations of the caregiver-child relationship and of the self, and emotion regulation among a sample of 30 children aged 4 to 7 whose mothers had Bipolar Disorder (BPD) in comparison to 30 normative cases. The results of the study showed that children whose mothers have BPD told stories in which the child's self was represented as more incongruent and shameful than the normative group. Additionally, the child's maladaptive self-concept was significantly correlated with maternal self-harm.



The social support within the therapeutic relationship was also shown to influence a child's self-concept. The narrative case study by Cockle (1994) demonstrated the importance of one to one time with an unconditionally accepting adult in facilitating self-growth through the use of the art self-portrait process with a six-year-old boy. Through the therapeutic process, the child expressed feelings of insecurity of self and environment which gradually decreased overtime and emerged as feelings of self-acceptance, self-love, and self-growth. The implications of the study focus on how the process of drawing combined with an accepting relationship could lead to self-growth and feelings of security and freedom.

Discussion

Current research related to children's meaning assignments and constructions of the self supports the ways in which children construct a self-concept to be strongly tied to the ways in which children make sense of their well-being. The studies reveal the importance of locating

the self within an individual's proximal matrix of social, cultural, structural and environmental influences. Timberlake (1998) for example demonstrated how children living in poverty, who are able to make sense of self and social situation of homelessness, have higher levels of subjective well-being. Anagostopolous et al. (2006) further discussed how the negative self -internalisation of the views of others on a minority's ethnic group can lead to a disruption in psychosocial well-being, specifically in the form of shame and self-hatred. Moss (2006) demonstrated how children who live within an impoverished community assign meaning to the self in coordination with their understanding of their marginalised economic and social position in society which limits their access to resources for their well-being.

Within the reviewed studies, the notion of self-concept was identified to be a fluid, situational and multi-dimensional phenomenon. The young people in the studies often created different identities in different contexts and could show an inflated self-concept in one domain simultaneously with a negative self-concept in another. Culture and age were highlighted to influence both conflictual and changing notions of the self. The majority of the studies took place amongst an adolescent population which could be related to the level of cognitive and social development of the participants that allow for meaning-making. However, studies such as Welch-Ross et al. (1999) support children as young as three years to be in the continuous process of constructing meaning around the self. A large portion of the studies support the process of self-conceptualization to be driven through narratives, emphasising the ways in which children continuously create and reconfigure their self-concept within their discourses. While narratives were the main tools adolescents utilised for their self-development, preschool-age children were shown to use avenues such as art and play to assist them in their self-constructions (See Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Gernhardt et al., 2014; Moss, 2009; Welch-Ross, 1999).

The majority of the studies utilised a qualitative approach, which cannot be generalized across populations. However, the studies were conducted across various countries, cultures, ages and genders, all of which create a more cohesive understanding of the processes through which children and adolescents construct a self. The studies additionally highlight the impact which one's socio-political and historical situation have on the self. Conditions of oppression have shown to have a negative impact on an individual's healthy self-development. This is

seen in studies amongst South Africans, African Americans, Dominican Americans, Chinese Americans, Native Americans, Palestinian children, migrant youth in Greece, minority youth in Holland, and aboriginal youth in Australia. Prejudice and racism within these studies placed the participants in situations where they had to negotiate their self-concept against social mainstream messages of racial or cultural inferiority. While some youth responded through a strong prideful racial or cultural identity, others appeared to struggle with feelings of shame and self-hatred. Academic self-concept was additionally affected by racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes (See De Haan et al., 2010; Lim, 2008; Roth, 2006). Females in the studies, for example, struggled with unrealistic self-body images and negative messages around their academic and athletic capabilities (See Johnson, 2014; Lim, 2008). This implies that in order to truly understand children's self-constructions, one must take into account the larger historical and structural conditions within the child's specific context.

Resilience was a common influence on the healthy self-development of the young people within the studies. While many young people were faced with negative interactions within their environment, they seemed to resort to various means of coping in order to preserve their sense of self. An example is seen in Timberlake (1994), where the participants placed a great amount of energy into constructing a mental representation of 'self' as valued and competent in order to combat the negative self-messages associated with homelessness. For some participants, resilience meant discounting the self-domains which they did not excel in, such as an academic self, while clinging to the more positive domains.

An individual's sense of hope and future is additionally revealed to be a means of nurturing a healthy sense of self in the face of adversity. Abrams & Aguilar (2005) and Clinkenbeard & Murray (2012) highlighted the importance of the 'possible selves theory,' where young people are met with the conflict of their possible future selves versus their feared selves. Those who could produce a clear picture of their future self, and have a realistic plan for achieving this, showed greater psychosocial outcomes. These outcomes came coupled with adequate social support and community resources. Children from marginalised groups in Australia, USA, Pakistan, Greece, and the UK struggled with the similar processes of identity development as they attempted to construct a sense of self within contexts of racial, cultural, and historical oppression. Consciousness raising had an impact on the healthy self-

development of many of the marginalized youth. The young people who seemed to have a good understanding of their racial or cultural history were able to construct a healthier sense of self, despite negative social messages related to their race or ethnicity (See Graham & Anderson, 2008; Johnson, 2014; Roth, 2006; Whitesell et al., 2006). This emphasises the importance which issues of social justice and equity play on an individual's self-concept.

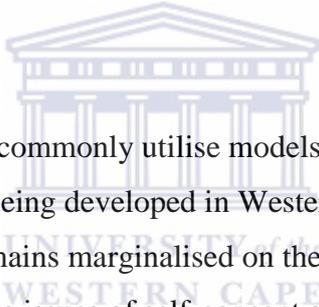
Conclusions and recommendations

The current systematic review elucidates the various means children utilise to construct and assign meaning to the self. Current research has explored this across a variety of socioeconomic, historical, and ethnic contexts. A notable amount of the literature, however, takes place within the United States and a disproportionate amount amongst a middle-class adolescent population. The current systematic review provides evidence to the ways in which children construct a self from various age groups and supports children from early childhood through adolescence to be capable of the self-meaning making processes. Due to the broad age group, the current review lacks an in-depth analysis of how specific age groups vary in their self-constructions and how self-constructions and meaning making processes may change or evolve throughout one's life span. There additionally remains a need for further research in more diverse contexts, especially in developing countries and amongst early and middle childhood children from lower and higher socioeconomic environments. The study also highlights the multidimensional and situational nature of the self. Even within a United States context, the ways in which young people constructed a sense of self varied and were largely dependent on their social, historical, and cultural position within the country's immense social matrix.

The study additionally emphasises that the self-concept is mutually influenced and supported by an individual's immediate social networks and environmental resources. Children who live in conditions of poverty, especially those faced with high levels of community and domestic violence, are particularly affected as resources available for a healthy self-development are limited. Poverty and oppression, however, do not necessarily result in a negative self-concept. Several studies amongst children within impoverished communities revealed that many of the participants construct a healthy sense of self, despite oppressive conditions. This was often influenced by their immediate social interactions. Due to the lack

of research available specifically related to children in poverty as well as the unique experience within a specific community, further research is necessary for understanding how conditions of poverty influences the self-concept of children across contexts and cultures.

The implications of this study point to the importance of considering the self-concept as being crucial for child well-being. These activities must look to the contextual meaning-making processes which surround the self-identity of young people. The interventions should also be inclusive of positive social support networks. These networks are especially beneficial if available on the structural, community, and individual levels and range from social service providers, teachers, community mentors, family members, and peers. Additionally, interventions should be inclusive of the individual and contextual issues influencing child self-concept including coping skills, structural challenges and proximal economic and social resources.



Current intervention programmes commonly utilise models based on the assumptions of the objective measures of child well-being developed in Western countries. However, how children feel about themselves remains marginalised on the child well-being agenda. Evidence from this review supports issues of self-concept as playing a pivotal role in how children make sense of their well-being. The complex nature of the self implies that there is not a single self-concept intervention which could fit all children. Rather, the intervention must be developed around the views of the children themselves within the specific context where the intervention is intended. This provides a powerful rationale for research related to child well-being to create more space for the voices of children, especially those from more marginalised communities and countries, regarding issues around their well-being. Such research should focus on the subjective nature in which children construct and assign meaning to the self.

4. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter presents the first phase of the research process, a systematic review which aimed to systematically review academic literature focused on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The review provides considerations for increased interventions aimed

at improving child well-being which must take into account the unique ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the self. Such interventions should be inclusive of the individual and contextual issues influencing child self-development, including coping skills, structural challenges and proximal economic and social resources.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CHILDREN'S DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF

1. Introduction

Chapter four presented a systematic review of current academic literature focused on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The review provided considerations for increased interventions aimed at improving child well-being which must take into account the unique ways in which children construct a 'self' and an identity. This chapter builds off of the literature in the form of a study which explores children's discursive constructions of the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. A total of eight focus group discussions took place amongst forty children age nine to twelve around how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' in their communities. The journal review process for this article is presented below; subsequent to which the article is presented.

2. Journal Review Process

Article 2 (Chapter Five) was submitted to *Child Indicators Research* on 10 November 2015. *Child Indicators Research* is an international peer-reviewed journal which presents measurements and indicators of children's well-being and their usage within multiple domains and in diverse cultures. The journal explores how child indicators can be used to improve the development and well-being of children (see <http://link.springer.com/journal/12187>), with a 2014 (2015) 5-year Impact Factor of 1.513. The manuscript went through two rounds of revisions, and received positive overall feedback from the reviewer as well as from the executive editor. The reviewer comments and authors' rebuttals are presented below. The author's reflections on the review process is presented. Finally, the article is presented, which was accepted for publication on 08 April 2016, DOI: 10.1007/s12187-016-9389-8.

2.1. Revisions

This article went through two rounds of revisions. Feedback from the journal in terms of the manuscript was initially received on 18 December 2015. The editor's and reviewers' comments are presented below, as well as the corresponding rebuttal to these comments.

2.1.1. Editor's comments:

Dear Ms. Benninger,

Reviewers have now commented on your paper. Based on their recommendations I would like to encourage you to revise and re-submit the paper. If you are prepared to undertake the work required, we would be pleased to review the revised paper and consider it for publication in CIR. For your guidance, reviewers' comments are appended below. If you decide to revise the work, please submit a list of changes or a rebuttal against each point which is being raised when you submit the revised manuscript. Your revision is due by 02/01/2016., if you need more time please contact the journal office. To submit a revision, go to <http://isci.edmgr.com/> and log in as an Author. You will see a menu item call Submission Needing Revision. You will find your submission record there. Please make sure to submit your editable source files (i. e. Word, TeX). Thank you for considering CIR for publishing your work!

Asher Ben-Arieh

Editor-in-Chief

Child Indicators Research



2.1.2. Reviewers' comments:

Reviewer 1

I found this paper compelling to read at the beginning and consider it to contribute valuable new knowledge on children's constructions of the self in the context of post apartheid South Africa. I suggest that it would be strengthened considerably with some restructuring of the findings section and expansion of the discussion of findings and conclusions. I have suggested some major revisions on restructuring and further analysis, then some minor questions about the existing text. I hope that these are helpful as I found your research very interesting and innovative.

The major revisions on restructuring are as follows:

The findings section needs to be more focused around the four discourses so I think that it would help to have the findings presented under the four subheadings. The section could start with an introduction that restates that the themes were introduced by the researcher/facilitator and that the themes then emerged from there.

The sections on each discourse could then include much of your analysis across all of the children that you worked with but be more selective on your use of quotes. For example, it would be useful to know if the issues that you pull out from the quotes that you have used are more generalized or particular - you do say this but I think some analysis of race/ethnicity and gender would also be helpful under each discourse.

The discussion of findings then also needs expanding and to have more about the similarities and differences across the two communities. I suggest that this section also needs to refer back to some of the literature you present at the beginning of the chapter to show how your findings are contributing to knowledge and theoretical thinking. For example it would be good to discuss in more depth and from a critical perspective how your findings are supported or challenge Stryker's (1980) ideas and also how your ideas fit with Vygotsky's socio-ecological approaches to child development, and Fanon's ideas about domination which you mention in your introduction. Theoretical perspectives and ideas around intergenerational relationships and intersectionality could also be relevant in your discussion.

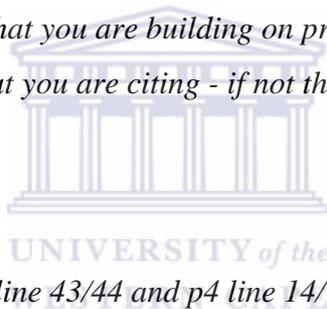
Your conclusions at the moment go into new territory about interventions and sound quite polemic and do not sound grounded in your evidence. I suggest that these conclusions would be much stronger if you took the key areas of new knowledge under the four discourses and how children's constructions of the self provide new insights that could be useful to policy and practice. Areas of further research can also be included and built upon here. I suggest your conclusions need to be more substantial and really convince the reader of why a participatory approach to understand children's constructions was valuable. Your conclusions can also reflect on the ethical dilemmas of the research and what you have learned for future research processes with children.

Your literature upfront and in discussion should include some references on adult-child/ intergenerational relationships and support, also broader reference to previous research on vulnerability and reasons for school drop out and street connectedness. I suggest that you may also want to consider looking at some of the fifth wave resilience literature.

There also needs to be more consideration of race/ ethnicity and gender throughout the paper.

Minor comments:

In the background and rationale there is an over reliance on Stevens et al. (2003). If this is the author then be more explicit that you are building on previous research you have done but still expand on the authors that you are citing - if not then do not rely on one author so heavily.



When authors are cited - e.g. p3 line 43/44 and p4 line 14/15 there needs to be references for each of these. Be clear that Vygotsky (1994) reprint.

When you first mention the two communities in the western cape you need to explain these communities in terms of their particular characteristics, including race and other aspects of social difference and socio-cultural difference. You also refer to the communities by name by the quotes but not in the text - please be specific about which community is predominantly Black and 'Colored' and also decide whether you are naming the communities or keeping them anonymous - discuss the ethical dilemmas around this.

On p6 you suggest that children's cognitive and psychological abilities do not allow them to participate in a meaningful way if they are under 9. This is not necessarily the case - see guide for including young children in research produced by the Bernard van Leer Foundation so reword this paragraph.

For the discourse on Forfeited childhood - how did you come to this term? It may be useful to hear the terms the children used and to more closely align the discourse to something the children said?

Be careful when you use italics too much as takes away the emphasis. I would stick to using them for the discourses and then possibly also if children used particular words relating to these discourses.

Under ethics you may want to mention something about how you verified your analysis with children?

I think this is very innovative and exciting research and will be worth the time it would take to communicate this to an academic audience



2.1.3. Authors' Rebuttal

Dear Editor in Chief and anonymous reviewers,

We would like to thank the editor and reviewers for the extremely helpful comments which we believe have made significant contributions to improving the overall quality of the paper. In the table below we have outlined our responses to the major and minor comments identified by the reviewers. We trust that this meets with your favourable feedback.

Authors' revisions

Reviewer's comment	Authors' response
Major Comments	
The findings section needs to be more focused around the four discourses so I think that it would help to have the findings	While we agree with the reviewer that this recommendation would provide a more logical structure, we however found that

<p>presented under the four subheadings. The section could start with an introduction that restates that the themes were introduced by the researcher/facilitator and that the themes then emerged from there.</p>	<p>presenting the emerging discourses as they emerged within thematic categories allowed for a more coherent narrative. The main reason for this was that the discourses were present across the thematic categories. This is most likely the result of a thematic analysis being conducted prior to the discourse analysis. A similar presentation of the findings using discourse analysis was presented in a previous edition of Child Indicators Research by Savahl et al. (2015). We therefore request that the reviewer and editor allow us to present our findings in this manner.</p>
<p>I think some analysis of race/ethnicity and gender would also be helpful under each discourse.</p>	<p>Agreed. We have included a further analysis of race/ethnicity and gender within the findings and discussion [pages 11, 15, 24, 25, 26]</p>
<p>Similarities and differences across the communities</p>	<p>We have included some comparisons, especially where the contextual factors evoked substantial differences in constructions of the self. However, it is important to point out that the focus of the study was not on comparing cultural differences with regard to constructions of the self. Rather our focus was narrowly defined as exploring how children construct and assign meaning to the self in impoverished communities in the Western Cape. [pages 11, 21, 24, 25]</p>
<p>I suggest that this section also needs to refer back to some of the literature you present at the beginning of the chapter to show how</p>	<p>Agreed. We have attended to this recommendation and believe that it has substantially strengthened the paper [pages</p>

<p>your findings are contributing to knowledge and theoretical thinking. For example it would be good to discuss in more depth and from a critical perspective how your findings are supported or challenge Stryker's (1980) ideas and also how your ideas fit with Vygotsky's socio-ecological approaches to child development, and Fanon's ideas about domination which you mention in your introduction. Theoretical perspectives and ideas around intergenerational relationships and intersectionality could also be relevant in your discussion</p>	<p>13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29]. However, the recommendation about intergenerational relationships was more challenging as this was not present in the data.</p>
<p>Your conclusions at the moment go into new territory about interventions and sound quite polemic and do not sound grounded in your evidence. I suggest that these conclusions would be much stronger if you took the key areas of new knowledge under the four discourses and how children's constructions of the self provide new insights that could be useful to policy and practice. Areas of further research can also be included and built upon here. I suggest your conclusions need to be more substantial and really convince the reader of why a participatory approach to understand children's constructions was valuable. Your conclusions can also reflect on the ethical dilemmas of the research and what you have learned for future research processes with children</p>	<p>Agreed. We have attended to this comment. Our conclusions and recommendations are now more closely tied to the findings.</p>

<p>Your literature upfront and in discussion should include some references on adult-child/ intergenerational relationships and support, also broader reference to previous research on vulnerability and reasons for school drop out and street connectedness. I suggest that you may also want to consider looking at some of the fifth wave resilience literature.</p>	<p>Again while we have added some references to resilience literature [pages 5, 16] we feel that this is outside of the scope and focus of this article. Resilience is currently a highly contested concept in South Africa, with some critical Social Psychologists arguing that the focus should be on changing structural conditions and not how individuals have adapted to what they refer to as 'abnormal conditions.'</p>
<p>Minor comments</p>	
<p>In the background and rationale there is an over reliance on Stevens et al. (2003). If this is the author then be more explicit that you are building on previous research you have done but still expand on the authors that you are citing - if not then do not rely on one author so heavily</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have expanded and included references to other literature.</p>
<p>When authors are cited - e.g. p3 line 43/44 and p4 line 14/15 there needs to be references for each of these</p>	<p>Agreed. We have attended to this comment.</p>
<p>Be clear that Vygotsky (1994) reprint.</p>	<p>Agreed. We have attended to this comment.</p>
<p>When you first mention the two communities in the western cape you need to explain these communities in terms of their particular characteristics, including race and other aspects of social difference and socio-cultural difference. You also refer to the communities by name by the quotes but not in the text - please be specific about which community is predominantly Black and 'Colored' and also decide whether you are naming the communities or keeping</p>	<p>Agreed. We have attended to this comment.</p> <p>A further description of the participating communities has been provided.</p> <p>In terms of protecting the children's identity we are choosing to name the communities because it will not be possible to track the children and also it is critical to name the communities for advocacy purposes.</p>

<p>them anonymous - discuss the ethical dilemmas around this.</p>	
<p>On p6 you suggest that children's cognitive and psychological abilities do not allow them to participate in a meaningful way if they are under 9. This is not necessarily the case - see guide for including young children in research produced by the Bernard van Leer Foundation so reword this paragraph.</p>	<p>This paragraph has been restructured to further support children's ability for meaningful participation throughout development and the need for further research on children and the 'self' amongst middle childhood participants</p>
<p>For the discourse on Forfeited childhood - how did you come to this term? It may be useful to hear the terms the children used and to more closely align the discourse to something the children said?</p>	<p>The authors came to the term of a 'forfeited childhood' based on the responses of the participants, who commonly discussed their agreed upon definition of what childhood should be versus their reality where the social and physical environment prevented them from being able to be children. Although the participants did not use the word 'forfeit', this term best describes the discourses amongst the participants related to their childhood. For example, being forced to take on adult responsibilities, lack of access to play, lack of safety, under-resourced schools, lack of supportive caregivers all contributed towards this notion of a 'forfeited childhood'</p>
<p>Under ethics you may want to mention something about how you verified your analysis with children?</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have included this within the ethics section.</p>

<p>Be careful when you use italics too much as takes away the emphasis. I would stick to using them for the discourses and then possibly also if children used particular words relating to these discourses.</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment and have used italics only for the discourses and for particular words related the discourses.</p>
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2.2. Second round of revisions

The second round of feedback from the journal in terms of the revised manuscript was received on 20 March 2016. The editor and reviewers' comments along with the author's rebuttal are presented below:

2.2.1. Editor's Comments

Dear Ms. Benninger,

Reviewers have now commented on your paper. Based on their reviews I have decided to accept your paper for publication at CIR with some minor revisions. I hope you are willing to undertake the work required, and revise your paper accordingly. For your guidance, reviewers' comments are appended below. Your revision is due by 05/04/2016. If you need more time please contact the journal office. Please submit a list of changes or a rebuttal against each point which is being raised when you submit the revised manuscript.

To submit a revision, go to <http://isci.edmgr.com/> and log in as an Author. You will see a menu item call Submission Needing Revision. You will find your submission record there. Please make sure to submit your editable source files (i. e. Word, TeX). Thank you for considering CIR for publishing your work!

Asher Ben-Arieh

Editor-in-Chief

Child Indicators Research

2.2.2. Reviewers' comments

Reviewer 1

A very interesting read and glad that my previous comments were helpful. I think it is improved. I have a couple of very small changes to suggest.

In section on Design in Method I suggest that you could say a little more about children's participation. On p6 line 11 reword as this sounds as if all you need is creating space - this is an important aspect of a participatory approach with children but I think it would be helpful to introduce some of the other elements of your method that become apparent as you read on. Perhaps quote a couple more authors from previous child indicators articles?

- 
- p5 line 39 remove *on the before existing resources?*
 - p6 line 22 delete *T* after context
 - p6 line 58 plus p.7 line 39 - please provide specific sources and add to reference list.
 - p7 line 4 write NPOs in full
 - p7 line 46 explain after prison gangs (26s, 27s and 28s)
 - p7 line 48 when you refer to 'regular fights' be clearer what you mean - how often from what source? observation?
 - p8 line 7 useful to have a reference where you claim limited research ... middle childhood. Or present a little more fully to this.
 - p16 Bold for participant quote
 - p26 In the summary of findings you may want to introduce how these three theories compliment each other or even contradict each other in their application to this research.
- I look forward to reading the final version.*

Reviewer 2

Summary of comments

This paper discusses some of the discursive frameworks young people living in poverty in the South African context use to construct their self-concept (/identity?). Using qualitative data from focus groups with young people, this paper presents three key themes that influence their identity construction. With these key themes the paper nicely demonstrates how (through discursive constructs) young people navigate the constraining and enabling elements of poverty in the context of violence and safety.

Overall, this paper is examining factors that influence young people's wellbeing, specifically in the context of poverty and marginalisation. This paper is important because it focuses on the voices and experiences of young people as experts in their own lives in order to understand the aspects of poverty which influence their wellbeing and self-construct/identity.

Whilst the paper presents some engaging findings that value the voices of young people, I think there are two weaknesses that could be strengthened. Firstly, establishing the conceptual framework and, secondly, linking the findings to current scholarly arguments regarding self-concept and poverty.

Regarding the conceptual framework for example, overall, coming from a background that is not in psychology, the idea of "self-concept" is a little thin and not conceptualised well. In this paper, I am struggling to understand what the difference between self-concept and identity construction is (if there is any?). Furthermore, the links between self-concept and wellbeing are not outlined well. Can you explain how self-concept is linked to wellbeing for young people - is a link that the literature has made or the authors? And what is it you mean by wellbeing?

The discussion on structure, power and violence is given lots of emphasis early in the paper but then this isn't linked to the data and discussion of findings. You clearly explain in your findings that young people are demonstrating the ways they manage the constraining and enabling influences of power in their social context (demonstrated on page 23) but this isn't linked with the discussion on power and structure you have set up early in the paper.

The "Aim" section is also a minor issue. The purpose of the article needs to be made clearer here, the "so what" is missing. Perhaps this section would be a good time to outline that at

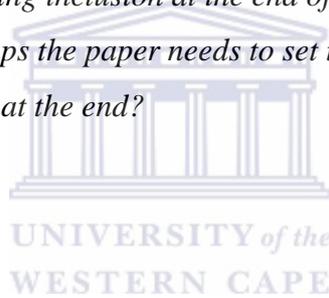
the end, the author will provide recommendations to improve opportunities for young people living in this context of poverty by demonstrating how constructions of self may come to bear on young people's wellbeing, their ability to develop capital and their transition into adulthood.

Another minor concern is the organisation of the paper, as the subheadings are a little confusing. For example, the sub-headings of childhood, children's spaces and social connectedness are different. Whilst childhood appears in small, in-text italics, the others aren't. Consistency needed here, particularly in the use of italics.

Summary of findings section could be altered to a discussion section. This could then be used to discuss how the research findings of this work tie in but are different from other research.

Recommendations are an interesting inclusion at the end of the paper. This wasn't discussed as a main aim of the paper, perhaps the paper needs to set this up so the reader is expecting a discussion of recommendations at the end?

Minor comments



In the title, the word self is presented in as 'self' why does the word appear in quotation marks as if to problematise it? How does the paper go on to do this?

Pg. 4: Line 53 (from now on presented as Page: Line)

The 'sociocultural self model' and structuralism - this isn't linked well. The paragraph on sociocultural self-model is hinting at power structures as influencing the self, but then a new subheading (in italics called oppression and identity) is introduced with no links ... perhaps more detail needed here in terms of how sociocultural self model and power are connected.

4:55: Violence and oppression of the self -What do you mean (e.g. physical, embodied, structural, all of the above?) Think about what is meant by violence and oppression, does this mean power structures? Or does it literally mean physical violence?

5: 8: *Vertical violence and dominant powers influence over identity ... this sounds more Foucauldian ... In this section, are the authors saying that identity is constructed through cultural and social context and that when these contexts involve a dominating power (which you have labelled violence) identity is constrained? I can see where you are steering this but some important discussion might be missing about the idea of power and influence on agency (especially if you are going to continue on to talk about discursive constructs). This conceptual framework hasn't set the reader up for what is to come and isn't explored through the findings.*

5: 32: *It is important ... important to who?*

Mention that the design of the project values children as the foremost experts in their own lives and aligns with children's human rights agenda

5:53: *May be worth indicating which pseudonym you have given the 'black' community and which you have given the 'coloured' - you differentiate where each child is from throughout the paper but it's not clear which is which and why this distinction is important. Also what are the demographics of the area, i.e. how many young people live here, how many people in paid employment, access to health care, do children in these areas regularly attend school? The presence of gangs is mentioned but what about the other social/cultural factors and outcomes that may also influence concept of self?*

On the following page you mention that these two groups were selected to demonstrate diversity of childhood experiences, perhaps more information is needed to elaborate how, contextually, their experiences might differ from one town/community to another?

6:21: *Middle childhood children. Check the literature on how this period is labelled; you may find that "middle years" is a better way of framing this period from 8-14...*

6: 57: *Were the participants rewarded with incentives (vouchers or otherwise)?*

7: 18: *Could you elaborate on how you phrased the research questions / activities to the young people? The concept of self is tricky and methodologically it would be interesting to explain how you framed this to children in their middle years so they could understand the concept.*

7: 28: *"expressed within their discourse". Remove discourse and replace with "language use".*

7: 30: *How is the exploration of individual subjectivity linked to the study aim? At the end of this paragraph, you could expand your point about discourse 'doing things' in terms of reinforcing dominant power structures and how individuals exercise agency in order to negotiate the constraining and enabling aspects of dominant discourses, which is what your participants are doing (whether you have realised this or not).*

7:56: *Complaint process?*



15:30: *This concept of children's spaces is confusing and requires refinement ... For example, the sentence beginning "These spaces of escape were described to be places of safety ..." So what is being said here? Are they escaping to these places? The idea of escaping to places in their community is confusing, aren't you arguing that for these children, the community is where the danger is? Perhaps further clarification is needed here, what are the ways that community is represented as a safe place for these kids? This could be clarified by refining sentence structure but at the moment the idea of escaping from spaces (particularly community) isn't clear. The associated quote may indicate that it's not about the spaces, but the people they trust who are in these spaces, which allows the places to change meaning and present an opportunity for them to feel good about themselves? As I read on from this point the idea is taking shape, but that first paragraph remains ambiguous. Perhaps could introduce the concept of space and neighbourhood by considering links to some of the literature, from Weller, Sutton, Morrow.*

18: 14: *Last sentence in the paragraph, is this suggesting that the young people you interviewed were using drugs and engaging in criminal activity? This raises ethical concerns*

about reporting procedures and safety protocol...

21: 59: You mention 'possible selves' linked to other research. Research by the author or others? This should be made clear.

22:34: Summary of findings: This could be a useful time to link in with some literature about agency, the way young people 'get by', 'get (back) at', 'get out' and 'get organised' (see Redmond, 2009) and how your findings link in with these conceptualisations of agency and structure in the poverty literature.

23:47: This line introduces a new concept, that of supportive (and protective) networks - not sure how this is linked to vulnerability and helplessness? Can you make this into a new paragraph or add a sentence or two explaining how support networks and vulnerability are linked?

24:3-4: This would have been a good opportunity to link positive "opportunities" as an element of wellbeing

24:53: "A sense of safety is at the core of a stable sense of self" - this seems like a key finding of this research and a way to link this work to other literature. This point is buried in this paragraph but is an important finding from your research with young people living in the context of poverty you present here.

2.2.3. Authors' rebuttal

Dear Editor in Chief and anonymous reviewers

We would again like to thank the editor and reviewers for the extremely helpful comments which we believe have made significant contributions to improving the overall quality of the paper. In the table below we have outlined our responses to the comments identified by the reviewers. We trust that this meets with your favourable feedback.

Reviewer's comment	Authors' response
Reviewer #1	
p5 line 39 remove on the before existing resources?	The authors have attended to this comment.
In section on Design in Method I suggest that you could say a little more about children's participation. On p6 line 11 reword as this sounds as if all you need is creating space - this is an important aspect of a participatory approach with children but I think it would be helpful to introduce some of the other elements of your method that become apparent as you read on. Perhaps quote a couple more authors from previous child indicators articles?	Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment.
p6 line 22 delete T after context	The authors have attended to this comment.
p6 line 58 plus p.7 line 39 - please provide specific sources and add to reference list.	The authors have attended to this comment.
p7 line 4 write NPOs in full	The authors have attended to this comment.
p7 line 46 explain after prison gangs (26s, 27s and 28s)	The authors have attended to this comment.
p7 line 48 when you refer to 'regular fights' be clearer what you mean - how often from what source? observation?	The authors have attended to this comment.
p8 line 7 useful to have a reference where you claim limited research ... middle childhood. Or present a little more fully to this.	The authors have attended to this comment.
p16 Bold for participant quote	The authors have attended to this comment.

<p>p26 In the summary of findings you may want to introduce how these three theories compliment each other or even contradict each other in their application to this research.</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment.</p>
<p>Reviewer 2</p>	
<p>Regarding the conceptual framework for example, overall, coming from a background that is not in psychology, the idea of "self-concept" is a little thin and not conceptualised well. In this paper, I am struggling to understand what the difference between self-concept and identity construction is (if there is any?).</p>	<p>Agreed. The construct of the self-concept has been more clearly defined. Self-concept and self-identity are commonly used interchangeably within social psychology (see page 3).</p>
<p>Furthermore, the links between self-concept and wellbeing are not outlined well. Can you explain how self-concept is linked to wellbeing for young people - is a link that the literature has made or the authors? And what is it is you mean by wellbeing?</p>	<p>Agreed. This has been attended to within the introduction. (See page 2, page 3)</p>
<p>The discussion on structure, power and violence is given lots of emphasis early in the paper but then this isn't linked to the data and discussion of findings. You clearly explain in your findings that young people are demonstrating the ways they manage the constraining and enabling influences of power in their social context (demonstrated on page 23) but this isn't linked with the discussion on power and structure you have set up early in the paper.</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment. (page 11, page 15, page 16, page 28)</p>

<p>The "Aim" section is also a minor issue. The purpose of the article needs to be made clearer here, the "so what" is missing. Perhaps this section would be a good time to outline that at the end, the author will provide recommendations to improve opportunities for young people living in this context of poverty by demonstrating how constructions of self may come to bear on young people's wellbeing, their ability to develop capital and their transition into adulthood.</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment.</p>
<p>Another minor concern is the organisation of the paper, as the subheadings are a little confusing. For example, the sub-headings of childhood, children's spaces and social connectedness are different. Whilst childhood appears in small, in-text italics, the others aren't. Consistency needed here, particularly in the use of italics.</p>	<p>The subheadings of childhood, children's spaces, and social connectedness are the same in the text and make up the three themes of the article. Within the themes are the discourses, where the phrase '<i>forefeited childhood</i>' appears as small in text italics</p>
<p>Summary of findings section could be altered to a discussion section. This could then be used to discuss how the research findings of this work tie in but are different from other research.</p>	<p>The summary of findings section has been altered to a discussion section, with a focus on how the findings relate to other studies and theories of the self.</p>
<p>Recommendations are an interesting inclusion at the end of the paper. This wasn't discussed as a main aim of the paper, perhaps the paper needs to set this up so the reader is expecting a discussion of</p>	<p>This has been attended to within the study aims (page 3).</p>

<p>recommendations at the end?</p>	
<p>In the title, the word self is presented in as 'self' why does the word appear in quotation marks as if to problematise it? How does the paper go on to do this?</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment.</p> <p>The authors have chosen to place the concept of the 'self' in the title within single inverted commas because it is a word which carries multiple philosophical and psychological meanings. Since the study seeks to understand the children's meanings which they assigned to the self, the construct can carry multiple meanings depending on the individual. It was therefore decided to use the single inverted commas within the title and the study aim.</p> <p>It is used to highlight the concept status as contingent and contested within the field of study (Garner, Racisms an Introduction, 2010)</p>
<p>Pg. 4: Line 53 (from now on presented as Page: Line)</p> <p>The 'sociocultural self model' and structuralism - this isn't linked well. The paragraph on sociocultural self-model is hinting at power structures as influencing the self, but then a new subheading (in italics called oppression and identity) is introduced with no links ... perhaps more detail needed here in terms of how sociocultural self model and power are connected.</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment. (page 4)</p>

<p>4:55</p> <p>Violence and oppression of the self -What do you mean (e.g. physical, embodied, structural, all of the above?) Think about what is meant by violence and oppression, does this mean power structures? Or does it literally mean physical violence?</p>	<p>Violence and oppression have been further defined (page 4).</p>
<p>5:8</p> <p>Vertical violence and dominant powers influence over identity ... this sounds more Foucauldian ... In this section, are the authors saying that identity is constructed through cultural and social context and that when these contexts involve a dominating power (which you have labelled violence) identity is constrained? I can see where you are steering this but some important discussion might be missing about the idea of power and influence on agency (especially if you are going to continue on to talk about discursive constructs). This conceptual framework hasn't set the reader up for what is to come and isn't explored through the findings.</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment. (page 11, page 15, page 16, page 17, page 25, page 27)</p>
<p>5:32</p> <p>It is important ... important to who?</p> <p>Mention that the design of the project values children as the foremost experts in their own lives and aligns with children's human rights agenda</p>	<p>Agreed. The child participation framework and its relation to children's rights and its usefulness within studies aimed at improving matters related to children's well-being has been more clearly described.</p>

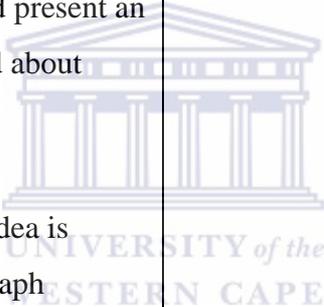
<p>5:53</p> <p>May be worth indicating which pseudonym you have given the 'black' community and which you have given the 'coloured' - you differentiate where each child is from throughout the paper but it's not clear which is which and why this distinction is important. Also what are the demographics of the area, i.e. how many young people live here, how many people in paid employment, access to health care, do children in these areas regularly attend school? The presence of gangs is mentioned but what about the other social/cultural factors and outcomes that may also influence concept of self?</p>	<p>A description of the communities in relation to their demographics as 'Black' and 'Coloured' have been provided on page 7 under the research context section. This distinction is important because it sets up the sociohistorical setting in which the research took place, where South Africans were marginalised differently based on their racial classification. Further demographics of the community have been included.</p>
<p>On the following page you mention that these two groups were selected to demonstrate diversity of childhood experiences, perhaps more information is needed to elaborate how, contextually, their experiences might differ from one community to another</p>	<p>This is further elaborated under the research context section (page 6).</p>
<p>6: 21</p> <p>Middle childhood children. Check the literature on how this period is labelled; you may find that "middle years" is a better way of framing this period from 8-14...</p>	<p>Middle childhood is a term commonly utilised in developmental and social psychology to mark the ages 7-12 (Brown & Jones, 2003, Piaget, 1952, Erikson, 1953)</p>
<p>6: 57</p> <p>Were the participants rewarded with incentives (vouchers or otherwise?)</p>	<p>Yes, this is included on page 10, under the ethics section.</p>

<p>7: 18</p> <p>Could you elaborate on how you phrased the research questions / activities to the young people? The concept of self is tricky and methodologically it would be interesting to explain how you framed this to children in their middle years so they could understand the concept</p>	<p>Agreed, the questions used have been included.</p>
<p>7: 28</p> <p>"expressed within their discourse". Remove discourse and replace with "language use".</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment.</p>
<p>7: 30</p> <p>How is the exploration of individual subjectivity linked to the study aim?</p>	<p>The study aims to further understand children's subjective understanding, construction, and meaning of the self.</p>
<p>At the end of this paragraph, you could expand your point about discourse 'doing things' in terms of reinforcing dominant power structures and how individuals exercise agency in order to negotiate the constraining and enabling aspects of dominant discourses, which is what your participants are doing (whether you have realised this or not).</p>	<p>Agreed. This has been included.</p>
<p>15: 30</p> <p>This concept of children's spaces is confusing and requires refinement ...</p> <p>For example, the sentence beginning "These spaces of escape were described to be places of safety ..."</p> <p>So what is being said here? Are they escaping to these places? The idea of</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment.</p>

escaping to places in their community is confusing, aren't you arguing that for these children, the community is where the danger is? Perhaps further clarification is needed here, what are the ways that community is represented as a safe place for these kids? This could be clarified by refining sentence structure but at the moment the idea of escaping from spaces (particularly community) isn't clear.

The associated quote may indicate that it's not about the spaces, but the people they trust who are in these spaces, which allows the places to change meaning and present an opportunity for them to feel good about themselves?

As I read on from this point the idea is taking shape, but that first paragraph remains ambiguous. Perhaps could introduce the concept of space and neighbourhood by considering links to some of the literature, from Weller, Sutton, Morrow.



18: 14
 Last sentence in the paragraph, is this suggesting that the young people you interviewed were using drugs and engaging in criminal activity? This raises ethical concerns about reporting procedures and safety protocol...

The researchers worked closely with the social workers from the two participating organisations to consult with and follow-up with issues around child protection and safety. However, this is a complex part of conducting research with children within communities characterised by high levels of crime and violence, especially if we are trying to provide the opportunity for

	<p>children to openly and honestly voice their perspectives on issues influencing their lives. The reality is that within the participating communities, substance use and involvement in crime is a common practice amongst children which requires further advocacy, interventions, and structural changes in order to resolve. This research hopes to contribute towards this. As part of the research process, the referral protocols with social workers were put in place to ensure the protection of children. This has been explicitly included in the ethics section.</p>
<p>21: 59 You mention 'possible selves' linked to other research. Research by the author or others? This should be made clear.</p>	<p>Research by other authors has been provided. (page 27)</p>
<p>22: 34 Summary of findings: This could be a useful time to link in with some literature about agency, the way young people 'get by', 'get (back) at', 'get out' and 'get organised' (see Redmond, 2009) and how your findings link in with these conceptualisations of agency and structure in the poverty literature.</p>	<p>Thank you for this resource. This article was very useful and has been incorporated into the discussion and findings sections (page 19, page 29, page 30)</p>
<p>23: 47 This line introduces a new concept, that of supportive (and protective) networks - not</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment.</p>

<p>sure how this is linked to vulnerability and helplessness? Can you make this into a new paragraph or add a sentence or two explaining how support networks and vulnerability are linked?</p>	
<p>24: 3-4 This would have been a good opportunity to link positive "opportunities" as an element of wellbeing</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment. (page 26)</p>
<p>24: 53 "A sense of safety is at the core of a stable sense of self" - this seems like a key finding of this research and a way to link this work to other literature. This point is buried in this paragraph but is an important finding from your research with young people living in the context of poverty you present here</p>	<p>Agreed. The authors have attended to this comment. (page 28)</p>

2.3. Author's reflection of the review process

I found the review process to provide a valuable contribution towards the way in which the study is presented as well as my own growth as a researcher. At times the process was frustrating, as a few of the reviewer comments seemed to disrupt the flow of the article. For example, I attempted to restructure the paper under discourse headings, rather than thematic headings, as requested by the first reviewer. This, however, disrupted the presentation of the findings, as the data was initially analysed through the use of thematic analysis prior to the discourse analysis, with the various discourses emerging within the themes. Overall it was a very valuable process and has contributed towards the overall strength of the dissertation.

3. Article

This part of the thesis is presented in an article is published in Child Indicator's Research, 2016, DOI: 10.1007/s12187-016-9389-8. The article in its original version is provided below:

Children's Discursive Constructions of the 'Self'

Abstract

The ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' could have an impact on their social and emotional well-being, including their coping skills, relationship formation, and behaviour. Furthermore, a child's understanding of the 'self' could influence the way in which they make meaning out of their experiences and internalize these experiences as a means of understanding one's abilities and self-worth. Conditions of poverty and oppression could negatively impact the development of the self-concept and a child's overall well-being. Such conditions exist in South Africa, where the aftermath of apartheid's system of structural racism continues in the form of social inequity, poverty, and violence. This study utilized a child participation framework to explore children's discursive constructions of and meanings assigned to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. Eight focus group discussions were conducted amongst fifty-four children between the ages of nine to twelve. Thematic and discourse analysis were used to analyse the findings. The themes of childhood, social connectedness, and children's spaces were identified as key influences on a child's self-concept. Four underlying discourses emerged within the themes as central to the participant's self-constructions. These included; (1) '*forfeited childhood,*' (2) '*vulnerability and helplessness,*' (3) '*preserving the integrity of the self,*' and (4) '*opportunities for escape.*'

Keywords: children, self, self-concept, well-being, child participation, discourse analysis

Background and Rationale

The ways in which children assign meaning to the ‘self’ could have an impact on their social and emotional well-being, including their coping skills, relationship formation, and behaviour. Furthermore, a child’s understanding of the ‘self’ could influence the way in which they make meaning out of their experiences and internalize these experiences as a means of understanding one’s abilities and self-worth. In the field of Social Psychology the conscious component of the ‘self’ is commonly referred to as the self-concept (Egan & Perry, 1998) or self-identity (Rogers et al., 2012). Conditions of poverty and oppression could negatively impact the development of the self-concept and a child’s overall well-being (see Noble-Carr, 2013; Parkes, 2007; Savahl et al., 2013; Schimmack & Diener, 2002). Such conditions are seen within post-apartheid South Africa, where the aftermath of a system of structural racism remains in the form of social inequity, poverty, and community violence.

The history of systematic violence and oppression in South Africa can be traced back to the era of colonisation in the 1600s on the premise of colonial expansion, conquest, and slavery (Stevens, Seedat, & Van Niekerk, 2003). Since this time period, violence in the form of structural racism became increasingly institutionalised to enable ‘White’ privilege through the social, economic, and psychological exploitation of the ‘Black’ residents (Stevens et al., 2003). This was made especially explicit during the apartheid era in South Africa (1948-1994), where state policies controlled the spaces where people could reside and access based on their classification within the four racial groups of Black, Coloured, Asian/Indian, and White (Moses, 2008). With a growing concern of the integration of people of colour with the white population, the 1950’s Group Areas Act was implemented to separate the residents of colour from the ‘White’ residents (Mabin, 1992). Along with distinct residential areas, government services, education, medical care, beaches, and parks were all segregated with the superior services and systems provided for the people classified as ‘White’ (Moses, 2008). With little opportunities to essential resources, including adequate healthcare, education, social services, housing, or employment opportunities, poverty flourished within the townships along with its associated challenges of community violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and the spread of infectious disease.

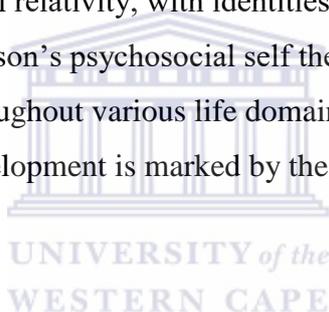
Post-apartheid South Africa is faced with a growing struggle of social, health, and economic inequity, with over half of South Africa's children living in conditions of poverty (World Bank, 2013). In addition to poverty, violence continues to permeate the everyday lives of South Africans, shifting from its overt institutionalisation to intra-personal and inter-personal forms of violence (Stevens et al., 2003). Due to the high exposure to adverse social and environmental influences on mental health, protective influences are crucial for the optimal development of South African children (Petersen et al, 2010). It is therefore necessary for communities to be exposed to promotional activities focused on improving children's well-being. When referring to children's well-being, this study specifically focuses on subjective well-being, defined as the cognitive and affective evaluations that children make about their lives and circumstances within a specific social environment (Diener, 2006). Research has identified the self-concept to have a strong influence on children's subjective well-being (see Camfield, 2012, Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007, McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007, Schimmack & Diener, 2002). For example, Schimmack & Diener (2002) found explicit self-esteem to be a predictor of subjective well-being. In a previous addition of *Child Indicators Research*, Savahl et al. (2014) have noted children's perceptions that a 'stable self' is critical to a positive self-identity and their overall well-being. Although the 'self' has been a long-standing topic in psychological research, the understanding of what contributes towards the development of children's self-concept needs to be further explored. Additionally, there are limited studies on how messages of oppression, violence, and threat impact the subjective understanding of the self-concept with young children. This specific study explores how children conceptualise the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape challenged by high levels of community poverty and violence. This is achieved through an analysis of the discourses which children use to make meaning of the 'self.'

Aims

The aim of the study was to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape. Within this process the study aimed to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments were manifested within children's discourses. The study further aimed to provide recommendations to inform further research and practice aimed at improving children's self-concept and its influence on children's well-being.

Children's Conceptualisation of the Self

Social psychology has a strong influence on the current knowledge and scientific understanding of the self. The way in which individuals perceive, think, and feel about themselves in relation to their abilities, characteristics, and attributes is commonly referred to as the self-concept or self-identity (Marsh & Craven, 2006). Psychologists such as George Mead (1934), Erik Erikson (1959), Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke (2000) have looked towards understanding the components of the 'self' which are more easily accessible in a person's awareness and which can be looked at with objectivity. Mead's self-object theory (1934) conceives all social experiences to be identified and integrated with the self. Through interactions with multiple social contexts, a person's self is divided into a variety of different selves which are communicated to others or to the self. Erikson (1959) theorized a healthy self to be characterized by cultural relativity, with identities formed in relationship to one's social and cultural contexts. Erikson's psychosocial self theory (1959) explains the concept of the self to be in continuity throughout various life domains, rooted in early childhood experiences of trust. Healthy development is marked by the integration of the self in adulthood.



Identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000) seeks to describe the reciprocal relationship between the self and society. Identity is defined as the "parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.284)." Burke and Stryker (2000) conceptualize the self to be partially a structure of multiple identities. Social structures are composed of interconnected social roles linked through activities, resources, and meanings, all of which influence the self-identity. People adopt as many selves as there are distinct social groups with which the person interacts, occupies a position, and plays a role (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

For Vygotsky (1933 [1994]), Luria (1994), and Stephens and colleagues (Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012), culture is central to the development of the child, their self-concept, and their behaviour. Luria theorized the development of the child to take place in a series of

transformations which are influenced by the cultural environment. In other words, a child changes in order to adapt oneself to the conditions of the community. Likewise, the subject matter of the cultural experience influences the beliefs about oneself and one's abilities. Vygotsky's theory of learning and identity looks to the specific cultural influences on identity, learning, and behaviour (Vygotsky, 1933 [1994]). Culture influences our daily experience and therefore shapes the selves which make up the culture. Child development is the process of mastering items of the cultural experience along with cultural behaviours and cultural ways of reasoning. As a child constructs an internal process following the mastery of an external method, these internal schemas are used to influence decision-making.

Oppression and self-identity. In accordance with the theories of Vygotsky (1933) and Luria (1994), the 'sociocultural self model' explains the interdependence of both individual characteristics and culture on behaviour outcomes, while further acknowledging the influence which structural conditions could have on an individual's self-concept and identity development (Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). This model takes into consideration the variety of contextual and cognitive variables which influence the development of an individual and collective self. When individuals participate in a certain environment, their self-concept changes accordingly, thus adopting a culturally-congruent self (Adams & Markus, 2004). While the self is shaped by cultural experiences, new sub-cultures can simultaneously arise in the form of the interactions of the individual selves within them (Adams & Markus, 2004). In order for an individual to adapt to a more desired behaviour, the current selves must be congruent with the behaviour change.

Social constructionism looks to the historical, material, and ideological impact of violence and oppression on the self, with the understanding that oppression in itself is a violent act. Within social constructionism, the sociogenetic theory argues that social conditions of structural, vertical violence give rise to the generation of intra-personal, inter-personal, and collective counter violence, which permeates into social institutions, community structures, and relationships (Stevens et al., 2003). This theory is reflected in the writings of Frantz Fanon, which investigated the psychology of colonialism, understood not only by the historical events which took place, but the psychological response and the internalized factors of those events (Hook, 2003). According to Fanon (1967), black inferiority continues not

only through the external economic exploitation of black people but additionally through the internalized meaning of this experience. Fanon describes this as the impact of systemic vertical violence aimed at reproducing racial domination which produces a collective unconsciousness of racism. After a prolonged period of time, the ideology of the dominant group becomes internalised by the dominated group, leading to intense internal distress and damaging the identity (Hook, 2003). In an attempt to defend the self from the psychological distress, oppressed individuals may turn inward on the self and outwards on the members of their own community and race.

Coping and resilience. Although suboptimal environments, such as communities with high levels of poverty, may result in an increased risk for negative social and emotional outcomes, these are not inevitable and often depend on a young person's ability to understand, respond and cope, and gain the resources for support and protection (Margarlin & Gordon, 2000). According to Malindi & Theron (2010), resilience occurs when young people who reside within suboptimal environments and their ecologies work together to maximise existing resources. For example, Malindi & Theron (2010) found resilience to be a product of a socio-cultural context and personal activism amongst street youth in South Africa. Examples of personal and environmental assets which assisted the youth to build resilience included stoicism, reflexivity, local role-models, enabling adults, schooling, and cultural heritage. Studies related to the self-concept have shown children to exhibit resilience through adopting a strong identification with one domain of self-concept in which they are good at, while minimising the others in order to protect their sense of self (De Haan, 2010, Whitesell et al., 2006). Further research has identified social networks, including family, peers, adults in the community, mentors, coaches, and social service providers, to have a key influence on a healthy self-concept in the face of adversity (see Moss, 2009, Noble-Carr, 2013).

Method

Design

The design of the study is located in a Child Participatory Research Framework. This framework locates the child centrally in the research process in order to gain a detailed understanding of their subjective experiences and meaning-making processes while taking

into consideration the social, cultural, and historical context (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007). Through meaningful and collaborative participation, children and adults are able learn new things, find new solutions and achieve new outcomes (Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur, 2015). There is a growing acceptance in participatory research with children, which recognizes children as key and competent informants on their own lives (Casas, 2016). Furthermore, there is a growing body of academic literature which seeks to understand children's perspectives on issues related to poverty (Redmond, 2009). This is influenced by social constructionism and contemporary childhood studies, which challenge the way psychology and the social sciences have marginalised and excluded children through the construction of the child as a 'becoming adult.' Social constructionism and contemporary childhood studies rather views children as social actors and knowledgeable subjects (Mason & Watson, 2014). Child participation, especially amongst children in poverty, is additionally influenced by current international children's rights legislation which grants children the right to freely express their opinion, to be heard, and for their opinions to be taken seriously on all matters which affect them (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

Central to the child participation process was the use of a child reference group who served as co-researchers and consultants throughout the study. The use of a child reference group is further supported by the research by Moore et al. (2015), which points to the need for further research around how children may meaningfully participate in co-reflexive activities such as reference groups, and how reference groups can be used as an important strategy for participation as well as a site for co-reflexivity.

Research context

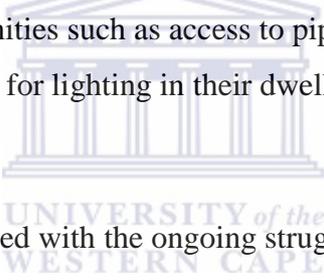
The research took place within the two communities of Lavender Hill and Khayelitsha located in the Cape Flats region of Cape Town, South Africa. Although faced with similar challenges of violence and poverty, the communities are diverse in their spatial, cultural, and historical make-up, all of which may have an influence on the local children's experiences and resources within their sociocultural environment which they draw upon for self-construction and meaning.

Lavender Hill. Lavender Hill is a predominantly Coloured community which was developed after the passing of the 1950's Group Areas Act, when residents classified as 'Coloured' were restricted to live in the area which was under-resourced in terms of infrastructure, social services and educational and employment opportunities. Due to the high rates of poverty within the community, it is faced with a number of challenges which compromise the mental health and well-being of the residents. According to recent statistics, 32,598 people reside in the community, 29.1 % of the residents are children under the age of 14 (9,503), and 95% of which identify as coloured (City of Cape Town, 2011). Fifty-nine percent of households have a monthly income of R3,200 (approximately 200 USD) or less, only 18.2% of those aged 20 years and older have completed grade 12 and less than 1% have completed a higher education (City of Cape Town, 2011). This lack of financial and educational capital contributes towards a variety of other prevalent social issues, including high crime rates, gang activity, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and substandard mental health. This daily exposure to crime and violence could have a detrimental impact on the psychological well-being and healthy self-concept of the children within the community, who live within a perpetual environment of danger and threat (Crime stats SA, 2013). Children in the community are especially at-risk to both forced involvements in gang activity and gang-related victimisation. For example, Knoetze (2013) reported seven children to be killed and six injured in the crossfire of gang warfare in Lavender Hill between February and June 2012.

Despite the high rates of underemployment and crime, the community possesses a variety of local assets. A significant amount of community members are taking action towards improving the well-being of the local children. There are over twenty child and youth community organisations, non-profit organisations, and non-governmental organisations operating within the community to assist with addressing the community's needs. Primary and secondary schools are also working towards providing a safe and nurturing environment for its learners and work to collaborate with local organizations, law enforcement, and service providers on matters affecting the community's children.

Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is a community which was established in 1983 as a township for 'Black' residents as a result of apartheid's system of racial segregation (SA History Online,

2014). Khayelitsha, meaning “new home” in isiXhosa, was originally developed to accommodate an overflow of informal settlement dwellers. The area continued to grow rapidly with migrants from the Eastern Cape arriving in search of work (SA History Online, 2014). The population of Khayelitsha is estimated to have 391, 749 residents, with 28.1% (110,330) children under the age of 14 (City of Cape Town, 2011). The township is currently the second biggest township in South Africa and is characterised by a complexity of economic and social challenges which limit the availability of resources for the optimal health and well-being of the local children. This is reflected in the low levels of economic and educational opportunities. According to recent statistics, only 36% of those aged 20 years and older have completed Grade 12 or higher. Thirty-eight percent of the labour force (aged 15 to 64) is unemployed and 74% of households have a monthly income of R3 200 (approximately 200 USD) or less. The structural living conditions have an additional negative impact on the well-being of the residents. Only 45% of households live in formal dwellings, with the majority of the residents living in shacks in informal settlements. The majority of the homes lack access to basic indemnities such as access to piped water or a flush toilet in their dwelling and 19 % lack electricity for lighting in their dwelling (City of Cape Town, 2011).



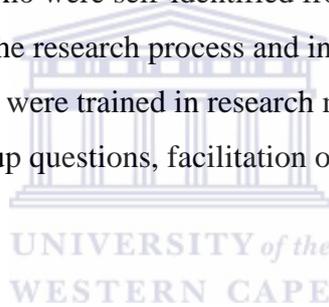
Children in the community are faced with the ongoing struggle of community violence, with the community possessing the highest national murder, attempted murder and aggravated robbery figures (De Kock, 2012) There are a number of residents, community based organisations, and schools taking action towards the improvement of child well-being in the community, including programmes which target building healthy and safe neighbourhoods. The *Ubuntu* culture within the community, which promotes human connectedness and kindness, additionally provides a strong support network for many of the children who are treated as family by other community members.

Participants and sampling

The study included 54 participants from the two participating communities ages 9-12 (26 girls and 28 boys). This age group was selected due to the limited research available on the ‘self’ and meaning amongst middle childhood aged children (Benninger & Savahl, 2016). This is further supported by recent developmental research which supports their ability for meaningful engagement in the social sphere and in decision-making and meaning-making

processes (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Purposive sampling was utilised to select four groups of participants [two groups from each community] from the local primary schools and community organisations. Purposive sampling “involves selecting participants who share particular characteristics and have the potential to provide rich, relevant and diverse data pertinent to the research question (Tong et al., 2007, p.352).” The criteria for participation included; (1) participants were between the ages of 9 to 12, (2) participants resided in one of the participating communities, (3) participants had a willingness and time to participate. The use of multiple child environments (schools and community organisations) was chosen in order to capture important perspectives from children within various community settings and also allowed the researcher to reach more difficult-to-reach children within the community.

A child reference group was selected from each community which consisted of five child co-researchers, males and females, who were self-identified from the partnering organisations due to an interest in engaging in the research process and in meeting the age criteria. The child reference group participants were trained in research methodology and participated in the development of the focus group questions, facilitation of the focus group discussions, and data analysis.



Data Collection

Data were collected by the means of eight focus groups, with each of the four groups attending two focus group sessions. Focus group discussion is the data collection technique which was implemented with the child participants. Focus groups enable children to articulate their perceptions and experiences related to an issue or phenomenon, which in this study was the self (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2009). Focus groups are particularly useful with children due to the emphasis on creating an environment in which children feel comfortable to engage with the material. This opens up the opportunity to generate interactive conversations among children that can assist with the clarification and conceptualisation of the topic (Darbyshire et al., 2009). A semi-structured interview schedule was followed, with four core questions which focused on various factors which influence the ‘self.’ These questions were developed in collaboration with the child reference group. The questions included; *How do you describe yourself? How do children think and feel about*

themselves in our community? What makes them think or feel that way? How do different places within the community and outside of the community make you feel?

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded by means of a thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The key motivation for using the thematic analysis was to facilitate a thematic grounding wherein the discourses could be interpreted. Thereafter, discourse analysis was then used to draw out the participants' emerging meanings of the self as expressed within their language use. Discourse analysis was chosen due to its strength in the in-depth exploration of individual subjectivity which is critical in addressing the key aim of the study. In the current study, the discourse analysis approach recommended by Potter & Wetherall (1987) was used. Their approach looks at the functional use of language whereby speakers draw on various forms of discursive resources to construct particular realities and to achieve certain aims (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse from this perspective is viewed to be an action, going beyond its function to *describe* things, to also *do* things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discursive meaning overtime can create a sense of self, which is in the process of being continuously constructed and reconstructed, with its meaning negotiated through social interactions (Willig, 2000). The discourse must therefore be contextually located, taking into account the cultural, social, and political practices which are being reflected within it. This includes a focus on not only the dominant discourses within a context, but additionally the ways in which individual's resist the dominant discourses and create alternative subjective positions (Willig, 2000).

Procedures and Ethics

The research was approved by the Senate Research Committee at the university where the researchers are based. The researcher partnered with two local non-governmental organisations, Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu who assisted with the process of participant recruitment. An initial session was held with the selected participants, introducing the aims of the study, expectations of participation and included a discussion of the key ethics principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, the freedom to withdraw without consequence, permission to audio record the sessions, and the academic

use of the data. The participants and their guardians were provided with an information sheet with the details of the study and a signed consent form for both the guardian and the participant. The focus group discussions were conducted in the school hall and a local community centre after school hours. The sessions were conducted in the home language of the participants by the primary researcher with the assistance of a local community youth care worker. The participants were provided with food and refreshments during the sessions, received age-appropriate skills training as a part of the research programme, and a closing party with their families where they received a meal and a certificate in acknowledgement of their participation. Given the intense nature of the study and the data collection process, counselling was available for any of the participants who experienced emotional discomfort and the referral protocols with the social workers from the two participating organisations were put in place to ensure the protection of the children. The audio recordings were transcribed and translated by an external transcriber, verified by a member of the supervisory team, and securely stored. The data collection and analysis was verified by the participants throughout the research process.



Findings

Several themes emerged as central components of the participants' self- constructions and meaning assignments. These included childhood, children's spaces, and social connectedness. Within the themes, four underlying discourses emerged as central to the participant's self- constructions. These included; (1) '*forfeited childhood*,' (2) '*vulnerability and helplessness*,' (3) '*preserving the integrity of the self*,' and (4) '*opportunities for escape*'.

Childhood

The first significant theme which will be discussed is childhood. The overall responses of the participants showed the complex and contradictory nature of the self-identity of the child in comparison to their ideological notion of childhood. The discourse of a '*forfeited childhood*' emerged throughout the group discussions. The way in which the children were treated within the communities was largely related to the history of structural racism, where children classified as 'Black' and 'Coloured' remained marginalised in terms of access to social services, education, and basic needs. Additionally, adult-child power structures within the

community further marginalised the children, where they felt they were not taken seriously or protected by the adults. While their ideological notion of childhood focused on obtaining safety, care, play, education, and basic needs, this definition was in contradiction to the reality of many of the participants, who were forced to forfeit their child identity within an environment where poverty and violence posed a barrier to acquiring their needs and limited their opportunities for learning and safety. An example is seen in the following account:

Facilitator: Do you see yourself as children?

Background: No! [several children yell out simultaneously]

Facilitator: Why not?

Male participant: Because you can't even go out to play

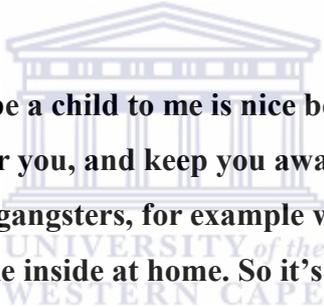
Facilitator: ...so, you called maybe a child, but you're not living like a child? [pause]. If you think of the word children or child, what does that mean to you?

Female participant: It means that I have a good life and that I can go play also. And also it could mean that I follow my parents and stuff and get a lot of time...to go to school

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)

In the above excerpt the children immediately and with consensus responded that they did not see themselves as children. This was forcefully expressed throughout the discussions demonstrated by their views on the ideal nature of childhood which they felt they were forced to forfeit. Amongst these characteristics was an underlying need for protection and safety which was in contrast to their reality of violence. These contrasting interpretive repertoires were apparent throughout the participants' discourse of a *'forfeited childhood'* as they collaboratively constructed their self-identity aligned with or in contrast to being a child. Their notion of childhood was tied to a *good life* where children had their needs met, could play safely, and where every child could go to school.

Although the loss of childhood was described by the participants from both of the participating communities, it was notable how the participants in Khayelitsha could more easily associate themselves with a child identity. This could be influenced by the ‘elder’ system which formed a part of the community’s Xhosa culture. Within the system each age group possesses distinct roles and responsibilities with the closure of childhood marked by an initiation ceremony into adulthood. This system made it difficult for the participants to deny their position as children within their community. The elders within both of the communities were described in the form of two contrasting interpretive repertoires; that of the protector and the abuser. This was especially seen as the topic of the elder was approached from a different angle or point within the discussion. For the participants who received protection from the adults in the community, such as their parents, teachers, and older youth, being a child was viewed in a more positive manner. However, the self-concept as a ‘child’ was still constructed around a need for safety within the contextual reality of violence:



Female Participant: To be a child to me is nice because you have parents looking after you, and keep you away from dangerous things like the gangsters, for example when they fight they tell us to come inside at home. So it’s nice to be a child and you don't have to wake up and go to work [giggles] you just have to wake up, wash and go to school, eat before and take your backpack and go.

(Khayelitsha, group 1)

This account further emphasizes a third discourse which emerged around the child identity of ‘*vulnerability and helplessness*’. The participant specifically referred to the danger of the gangsters and fighting as posing a risk to her safety. Additionally, she mentions having her needs met and being cared for to be an important component of her child identity. This sense of protection and care allowed her to live the carefree lifestyle which she felt was an essential component of childhood. Victimization as a result of physical characteristics such as size and being a part of a minority ethnic group in the community were also identified to be a reality of the childhood experience which posed a negative influence on the self-concept:

Community worker: How do you feel when people call you a child?

Male participant: It hurts (begins to cry)

Facilitator: Is there space to be a child in Khayelitsha?

Male participant: It's not so nice to be a child because the older ones always beat you up and make fun of you in the class and laugh at you, also say bad stuff like you stink in the class why don't you shower?

(Khayelitsha, Group 1)

This account further emphasizes the meanings constructed around a child identity which emerged within the discourse of '*vulnerability and helplessness*.' As the participant responded to the concept of being a child, he immediately began to cry. His immediate response of *it hurts* reflected the underlying sense of vulnerability which arose as the participant assigned meaning to his self-identity as a child. The participant continued to emphasize this vulnerability as he constructed an account of his experience of being teased by the older children. The discourses of '*vulnerability and helplessness*' was also evident within the discussion of the gangsters, to whom the children helplessly '*forfeited their childhood*:'

Male participant: In our community there is children, small my age, who are selling drugs to people. The gangster leaders who threaten them to sell the stuff.

Facilitator: I see, so they are being threatened. So they don't even have a choice because they have to sell it. What else can they do?

Male participant: They kill them

Facilitator: They kill them if they don't do it. Wow. How do you think those kids feel about themselves?

Male participant: It make them feel nervous

Facilitator: They feel nervous. And how does this make you feel?

Male participant: I feel sad for them

(Lavender Hill, Group 2)

While the participant tried to make sense of the child identity as vulnerable, a sense of empathy emerged as he placed himself in the situation of the other children who were being used by the gangsters, empathizing with their feelings of nervousness and feeling sad about the overall situation. The identification of various feelings, as seen above, was also a common practice which the participants used for self-understanding.

Furthermore, the participants' connection to various social groups also influenced their self-identity. Through presenting the selves of others within the discussions, the participants conceptualized their own selves. This further resonates with Stryker & Burke's (2000) identity theory, which describes social structures to be composed of interconnected social roles which influence the self-identity. Therefore, as a person interacts with various social groups, they adopt multiple selves in connection to those groups. Due to the heavy gang presence in their communities, it was evident how the participants constructed a self either in opposition to, or alignment with, the behaviours and roles assigned to the 'gangster.' The discussions around the gangster identity were composed of fear, humour, and a fascination with the gangs and were used as a means of justifying specific behaviours. In other instances, the gangs were mentioned with admiration of their strength due to their use of violence. The participants further elaborated on their '*forfeited childhood*' to be a result of the adult-centric reality where children were unprotected, unacknowledged, and used not only by the gangsters, but other adults in the community as well:

Facilitator: and what does it feel like to be a child?

Male participant 1: It's not nice

Female participant 1: They send you up and down

Facilitator: They send you up and down, can you tell me more about that?
Who sends you up and down?

Female participant 1: my mommy

Male participant 1: to the shop

Female participant 2: my daddy

Female participant 3: my auntie

Facilitator: And what do they make you do when they send you up and down

Female participant 1: They send you to the shop to go buy chips!

Male participant 2: bread!

Male participant 2: And they sit in front of the TV and send you and they don't want to give for you

Female participant 4: Then you must clean the house.

(Lavender Hill, Group 2)

Through the collaborative exchange, the participants build common knowledge around the local reality of children. Although the participants were expressing their frustration with adults who they perceived to use them arbitrarily, they do this in a playful and humorous way, finding solidarity in the responses of their peers while constructing a sense of self around their common experience. For these participants, their *'forfeited childhood'* was represented in the struggle between the expectations that they fulfil adult responsibilities while not being provided with the respect and privileges of adulthood. Although for some of the participants, being forced to take on adult responsibilities was portrayed in a negative way, for others this responsibility gave them a sense of pride and self-efficacy:

Female participant: Sometimes, when I am at home alone, like on a Saturday. Like this Saturday, I would come in the afternoon. I will go do my own washing and all the small stuff. Sometimes, my mommy will do it... but if she is not there. I will do it.

Facilitator: and how does that make you feel when you taking on all that responsibility?

Female participant: I feel like a big woman (Lavender Hill, group 1)

For this participant, the ability to help around the house provided her with a sense of pride and accomplishment seen in her relation to herself as a *big woman*. This also provides an example of the agency which many of the participants exhibited in order to rise above the adverse conditions within the community and to preserve their self-integrity. The excerpt additionally shows how gender posed an influence on the participant's self-concept. The female participants from both of the communities commonly discussed their identity in association with the roles which were prescribed to the females within the community, such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning. For the males, however, their identity was more often linked with the groups within the community which they commonly associated (i.e. soccer team, peer group, or gang) rather than their prescribed roles or responsibilities. This could be a result of the socioeconomic and historical situation of the communities, where the policies created during Apartheid limited the educational and vocational opportunities available for men of colour. This continues to manifest itself in the form of high unemployment amongst young men who, without a clear role and identity within the community and with limited access to employment opportunities, are drawn into antisocial activities as a means of obtaining social and financial capital.

Other participants struggled between the idealised freedom of adulthood and the need for protection and dependence associated with being a child:

Facilitator: Ok, you don't see yourself as a child, because you go places by yourself, you have to get to places by yourself and children they have people doing it for them, right?

Female participant: But, I don't want people doing it for me!

Facilitator: You don't want people doing it for you?

Female participant: Because then I have to buy for that person. [laughing]

Facilitator: [Laughing] Ja! Cause you have to buy for that person. I also think...

Female participant: if I want to spend the day alone with myself and take off my sandals, then ja!

Facilitator: Ja! [giggles] and right now is that something you can do? Because you're not a child? You can do that for yourself?

Female participant: No!

Facilitator: No! You can't do that for yourself? [pause] Why not?

Female participant: I am scared of getting into taxis

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)

The above dialogue further contributed to the participants' discourse of a *'forfeited childhood.'* The variability in her discourse emphasized the participant's struggle between her needs as a child and the adult responsibilities which were forced upon her. While she expressed her desire to do things for herself and its associated freedoms, she later admitted that she was unable to do this because she was afraid of using the public transport alone. Although many of the participants were forced to *'forfeit their childhood'* due to social and environmental circumstances, they struggled to adapt to the expectations of adulthood. This could be further explained in relation to the participants' agency, which is often utilised by children to overcome adverse environments, while at the same time limited by the adult power structures (Redmond, 2009).

The participants additionally described their psychological processes and feelings associated with their experiences as children. This manifested itself within the discourses of *'preserving the integrity of the self.'* These included the coping strategies and defence mechanisms utilized in the face of difficult circumstances such as playing with friends and with animals, talking with someone, drawing, sewing, praying, surfing and running, using drugs, and smoking. The common defence mechanisms expressed by the participants included desensitization, distraction, fantasy, and adjustment. These discourses elaborated on the participants' self-constructions to not only draw upon the experiences within their sociocultural environment, but additionally their individual characteristics, such as their coping skills and defence mechanisms. This further supports the 'sociocultural self model' as

described by Adams & Markus (2004) and Stephens et al. (2012) which explains the interdependence of both individual characteristics, culture, and structural conditions on behaviour outcomes. While the structural conditions limited the resources available for the participants, these did not inevitably hinder the participants' self-constructions. Their ability to cope and adjust within a threatening environment played a crucial role in preserving the integrity of the self. An example is seen in the following account:

Female participant: I feel bad in this area, it's like when you sleeping at night.

It's almost as if you hear the bullets go over your head the whole time. It gives me bad dreams and then I can't sleep at night and am awake the whole night. Some nights I even get black outs because I am not use to this. Where I come from, is a farm. It is so quiet there with no shooting and stuff. The first time I came here, I heard the bullets. Then I asked my mother, what is that bullets? She replied; they shooting outside and I just started crying and then I fainted in front of my mother. They called the ambulance. I have heart problems since I was small. Now I feel like I just want to get out of this area. I want to go there...I used to enjoy myself there. I did not know of this of what I know now (Afrikaans translation).

Facilitator: So you had a lot of nightmares, because you were so afraid. Do you still have the nightmares?

Female participant: No, because I am now used to it.

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)

The account above shows the participant's initial psychological response to the violence when she moved into the area from a safer community where she had never experienced shootings. At first the participant experienced severe psychological distress such as sleeplessness, anxiety, and blackouts, symptoms commonly associated with Post-traumatic stress disorder. Overtime the distress minimized as the participant attempted to adjust and desensitize herself to the violence. Additionally, the account was used as a means of '*preserving the integrity of the self*' and reconstructing the self as brave and strong. Despite

her ability to *get used to* the violence, she continued to identify with her peaceful home town, where she was able to enjoy herself and to experience safety, and therefore could be a child.

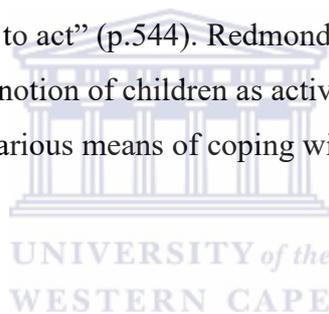
The participants additionally used fantasy as a means of adjusting and preserving the self-integrity within a threatening environment. Some of the participants fantasized about leaving the community to a place which was safer. For one boy the fantasy of him and his sister running away to another city gave him a strong sense of hope. The participants additionally used fantasy as a means of making themselves feel safe within unsafe conditions:

Male participant: **When I go to school, then I also feel very well, because when I am at school I learn also lots of things like playing soccer with my friends and everything. And there is a lot of stuff at school, like a bullet proof fence, at least that is what my friends say. I'm not sure if it is bullet proof, but my friends say it is bullet proof. I feel quite good knowing that it is bullet proof because if the shooting happens it won't come through and if I am in school and there is shooting the teachers will really look out for us. They call us and shout out to us to come to class and run to class.**

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)

Although the participant is aware of the notion of fantasy related to the school fence being bulletproof, he clings to the idea in order to make himself feel more secure. The energy of the participants appeared to be constantly expended on maintaining safety. In order to '*preserve their self-integrity*' and to function within an environment of on-going threat, the participants utilized various defence mechanisms, however, these were not always consistent or easy to maintain. The participants' accounts of the shootings were often contradictory as they grappled with *getting used to* the shooting and actually being terrified of its presence. For example: "I am kinda now am use to it, actually. But I still, I actually get scared and stuff..." (Lavender Hill, male, group 1).

These varying accounts around the shootings were used to perform a variety of functions. For example, dissociative tendencies, such as derealisation or numbing, are often utilised with children when an event is too threatening or overwhelming to process, especially when exposed to on-going violence in the home or community (Saxe, Ellis, and Kaplow, 2009). Such exposure could lead to a lack of a predictable or consistent sense of self (Cook et al., 2005). On the other hand, the chronic violence within the environment, made it very difficult to block out. This resulted in the various forms of distraction utilised by the participants to prevent themselves from becoming emotionally overwhelmed by the on-going threat. The variability in the discourse around the shooting could also have been a means of self-presentation due to the social expectations of the participants, where showing emotion and fear could be interpreted as a sign of weakness. The coping mechanisms exhibited by the participants could also be understood in relation to the concept of agency, defined by Redmond (2009) as “the capacity to act” (p.544). Redmond (2009) further describes the agency of children to support the notion of children as active agents who creatively endure economic adversity through the various means of coping with their situation and improving their own lives.



Children's Spaces

A multiple and transient self-concept was apparent as the participants discussed the various physical spaces where they normally engaged. Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminhoff (1983) describe this as place-identity, which includes the subjective sense of self which is conceptualized through the various physical spaces that define a person's daily life. The discourse around these spaces was largely constructed around their '*vulnerability and helplessness*' within an unsafe space versus their '*opportunities for escape.*' These spaces of escape were described to be the places of both physical and emotional safety both within and outside of the communities where the children could retreat from the spaces which were dominated by violence. However, this positive sense of self and behaviour did not always carry over into other areas of the participants' lives:

Male participant: When I leave the house I come mostly here, I feel quite good because I am playing the Marimba's and when I go back home I don't feel so good because of the fighting and stuff. But once I come back here and then I feel so good and maybe like am going to the shop or somewhere even if its near here as long as I am away from the house I feel good.

Facilitator: Ah okay! So different environments make you feel different ways. Depending on who is surrounding you?

Background: Yes!

Male participant #2: When I leave my house then I feel happy. Like at school my friends make me feel happy, they play games like soccer and I will play with and just enjoy myself.

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)



In alignment with current research on the self-concept, the participants in this account exhibit a multiple and fluid self which shifted across environments (see McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot, & Wigley, 2011, Purdie et al., 2000). For the first participant, seeking out spaces outside of the home provided him with a greater sense of self-worth and safety which buffered the negative influences of the home environment. The second participant responded in an exploratory manner, linking the ideas of the first respondent to his own experience within spaces outside of the home which made him feel happy. The account also showed how the spaces of safety were closely tied to the social support connected to the space. The environments especially identified to have a positive influence on their sense of self included the school, home, and after-school programmes:

Male participant: My name is (boy's name) and I feel happy when I surf

Facilitator: Who else is feeling happy right now [pause]. Only two people?

Male participant 2: I feel happy and I feel sad. I feel happy when I surf

Facilitator: It sounds like when you're surfing you are feeling really good about yourself.....How are you feeling when you are not at Waves for Change?

Male participant 1: Sad

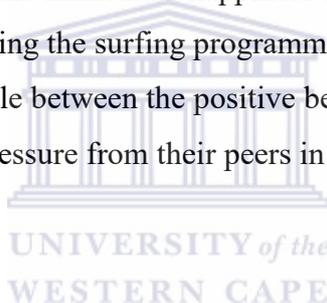
Male participant 2: Sad

Male participant 3: Sad

Female participant: Happy.....

Male participant 6: I feel angry, because when you don't surf you feel angry (Khayelitsha, Group 2)

Although the children mentioned the immediate happiness felt while surfing, this often shifted when they were not attending the surfing programme. This was also evident as the participants discussed their struggle between the positive behaviours they adopted while attending a programme and the pressure from their peers in the community to engage in substances, crime, and violence.



School was identified to be a place of refuge, safety, and an opportunity for learning, all of which contributed positively towards their self constructions. For other participants, school became a place of further victimisation, especially from peers and older youth:

Female participant: what I don't like is being teased about my head and discriminated because the other thing is that I'm fat and some kids say am finishing the school's food, I don't like this and it's not their problem if my head looks so square, it's not their problem.

(Khayelitsha, Group 1)

The above account further emphasized the discourse of '*vulnerability and helplessness*' attached to the participant's spatial environment as it is reflected in her self-concept. The

school environment for this participant was a place of victimisation, rather than one of self-nurturance portrayed in her description of the bullying which took place while she was on the school grounds. Resonating with Mead's self-object theory, the social experience of the participant, where she was regarded as *fat* and *square headed*, became incorporated into a means of understanding the self.

A third space which was expressed to have a mixed influence on the participant's sense of self was the home environment. The two contrasting repertoires of security and imprisonment emerged within the '*opportunities for escape*' discourse. For the participants who received love and adequate care from their caregivers, the home was identified to be a place of safety and self-nurturance. Siblings were also identified to be a source of nurturance and comfort for the participants, even for those who did not receive adequate support from their parents. Within the security repertoire, the home was identified to be a place of refuge from the shooting and violence on the street. An example is seen in the following account:

Facilitator: What about when you're at home, how do you feel at home?

Male participant: I feel happy there at home, because there is my mother, no one can bully me or hit me.

Facilitator: You're happy because you have the love from your mother...

Female participant: I'm feeling safety because my mother is always bringing me candies...so I'm very happy when I'm with my mother and father.

(Khayelitsha, group 1)

The notion of care and safety was central to a positive experience in the home environment and of the group's idealized child identity. For the participants in the above account, feeling safe, having fun, and having things provided for them all contributed towards a positive sense of self in association with their home. In contrast, the imprisonment repertoire was also apparent within the discourse of '*vulnerability and helplessness*,' even for the participant who received care at home:

Male participant: Sometimes I am happy and sometimes I am unhappy because, the people in our road. yoh! There are a lot of gangsters and you can't stay out late, because they shooting in the road and you can't do nothing

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)

Although the home was viewed by the participant to be a place of safety from the shooting, it was also one of imprisonment and a symbol of his vulnerability. While he wanted to stay outside and play, the gang violence in the community prevented this, leaving him with a sense of helplessness because *you can't do nothing*. For the participants who had abusive or neglectful parents, the home environment was a space of further victimisation which posed a challenge to the participants' sense of self-worth. For these participants, their *opportunities for escape* existed outside of the home where they showed a tendency to construct a sense of self around other relationships and activities. This included both pro-social and anti-social activities such as attending an after-school programme or engaging in substance use and gang activity.

Another space identified by the participants to have an influence on the self was the community. This is in alignment with the cultural identity theory of Luria (1994), where changes in the self occur in order to adapt to the conditions of the community. The participants spoke about the communities in terms of its social challenges with additional comments surrounding the physical environment and infrastructure. Peace appeared to be a fundamental factor in the composition of a 'real' community, while the spreading of fear within their community inhibited the development of a positive identity as a community member:

Female participant: The thing that makes me not like my community is because there are people eating drugs because drugs are wrong, so I

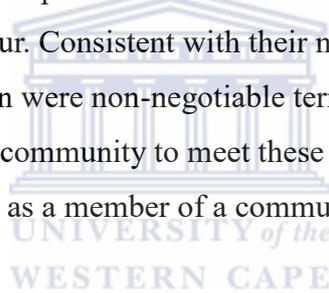
don't like drugs. And when I'm older I don't want to smoke drugs

Facilitator: It sounds like there are a lot of bad things that you see in your community, so I'm curious about how that makes you feel about yourself. What are you thinking about yourself?

Female participant: I feel that I'm not very safe at all. I'm not safe at all.

(Khayelitsha, Group 1)

The above account further emphasizes the underlying discourse around '*vulnerability and helplessness*.' For this participant the community was identified to be a space of danger, which influenced her ability to form a secure sense of self. She recognized the inevitable reality of the drugs and its violent impact on the children in the community, who adapted a sense of self around such behaviour. Consistent with their notion of childhood, the ability to play safely outside and to have fun were non-negotiable terms which also defined a community. The inability of their community to meet these needs resulted in a forfeited sense of self not only as a child but also as a member of a community.



Social Connectedness

There was a strong emphasis on the participants' connection to various social groups as influencing their self-identity. Through presenting the selves of others within the discussions, the participants conceptualized their own selves. Additionally, the participants' responses illuminated the multiple and changing identities which they adopted within different social situations:

Male participant: There is children who is looking at the people and they are smoking and stuff and when they are big they also want to do it.

Facilitator: So you can see that there are children in the area and they are watching guys smoking and it also makes them want to smoke.

Do they want to do it while they are still children or do they want to do it when they are bigger?

Male participant: **No. They want to do it when they are bigger**

Facilitator: So that's what they see themselves becoming? Someone who is drinking and smoking and things like that.

Female participant: **There is some children in our community that sees the junky funkys (gang name). They are smoking and they are doing...**

Female participant 2: **[Giggles] gangsters!**

(Lavender Hill, Group 2)

The discussions around the gangster identity were composed of fear, humour, and a fascination with the gangs and were used as a means of justifying specific behaviours. In other instances, the gangs were mentioned with admiration of their strength due to their use of violence. In addition to the influence of the gangster identity, the participants categorised the 'elders' as posing an additional negative influence on the behaviour of the local children:

Facilitator: So do you think kids have good self-esteem in Lavender Hill?

Male participant: **No**

Facilitator: No, why not?

Female participant: **They violent children**

Male participant: **They smoking too much**

Male participant: **They use their money for the wrong things**

Facilitator: They use their money for the wrong things, they're violent [pause] what do you think makes kids smoke so much?

Male participant: **They look at the elders doing it**

Facilitator: oh, they look at the elders and they want to do it like the elders.

Female participant 2: They see someone else doing it and they want to do it

(Lavender Hill, Group 2)

In the participants' accounts they blame those who fit into the category of the 'elders' for the negative behaviours of the local children. This further supports the sociocultural theories of Vygotsky (1933 [1994]), Luria (1994), and Stephens and colleagues (Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012) where the self (or multiple selves) is formed in accordance to the experiences and resources within the sociocultural environment. As the participants interacted within a social environment where the elders engaged in anti-social behaviours, they often adapted such behaviours.

The majority of the participants mentioned their peers, including the activities which they engaged in together to be linked to their identity. Engaging with peers through the use of activities such as gang membership, violence, and drug use had a mixed impact on the constructions of the self. For some of the participants, reacting with violence was a necessity for gaining the respect of their peers. Additionally, the use of violence was believed to be a representation of their strength and a form of protection. In this sense violence was used as a means of building one's social support and providing the participants with a sense of agency in an environment where they often felt '*vulnerable and helpless*'. The continuity of violence amongst the young people could further be explained through Fanon's theory of racial domination, which explains the continuity of violence within a community to be an internalised psychological response to racial domination and oppression (Hook, 2003). According to Fanon (1967) the use of violence is used as a means of re-creating the self and promoting individual self-respect.

Engaging in play, sports, and the arts with peers contributed positively to the participants' self-constructions and consequently more prosocial behaviour. They especially focused on their self-identity connected to the activities which they excelled in or found to be exciting. This further supports current research on the multidimensional self-concept which demonstrated the tendency of children to cling to the domains of the self which they are good at while minimizing the other aspects of the self (see De Haan, 2010, Timberlake, 1994).

These activities also provided the participants with '*opportunities for escape*' from the violence which were necessary for the preservation of their self-integrity:

Male participant: I play five instruments, now 6 with this.

Facilitator: Wow! Six instruments, so how do you feel when you playing your instruments?

Male participant: Sometimes I feel emotional and sometimes I feel happy

Facilitator: Emotional. Ahhhh so it brings out all different feelings.

Male participant: Hmm, it's like it takes my sight also sometimes.

(Lavender Hill, Group 1)

The participant in the above account described music to be the means through which he escaped the negative feelings within an insecure home environment. While using music as an escape he simultaneously constructed a self-concept as a musician while *preserving his self-integrity* despite his negative experiences within the home. This additionally emphasises the importance of having access to positive opportunities, such as playing instruments, to contribute towards a healthy self-concept and well-being.

The socialization into particular religious and racial groups contributed towards a prescribed self-identity around specific roles and behaviours. These identifications were also used as a means of self-construction as the participants distinguished their sense of self connected to their cultural or religious identity as separate from the 'other' group. The participants from Khayelitsha spoke about being proud to be black, and of black being beautiful. Religion for the participants in Lavender Hill was identified to be a part of their self-constructions:

Facilitator:Do you like being Christian?

Female participant: Yes it's nice

Male participant 1: We get Easter and all this stuff

Facilitator: Ah you get some fun holidays.

Male participant 2: The Muslims eat strong stuff

Facilitator: How do you think kids who are Muslim feel living here?

Male participant 2: Very rich. Yoh.

Facilitator: Oh are Muslim kids more rich?.....

Female participant 1: Yes but the Christian kids also can afford it

Male participant 2: But not as good as they [Giggles]

(Lavender Hill, Group 2)

The categorization of religious groups was used as a means of making sense of their social world, where there existed two specific and at times perceived opposing groups; the Christians and the Muslims. Religion in this sense was also used as a means of distinguishing themselves from others, mostly associated with dietary restrictions, special holidays, and wealth. The self-concept as Christian was greatly constructed around the things they could do which were *not like them*. The Christian participants portrayed the Muslim children through agreed-upon stereotypes, such as being rich and eating strong food, creating a clear distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ as a means of understanding the self.

Another significant component of the participants’ social identity was revealed through the accounts of themselves in relationship to their future. This has been referred to in prior research as the *possible selves theory* (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are identified to be cognitive structures of the self which represent what a person would like to become versus who he or she is avoiding becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The ‘possible selves’ theory describes the relationship between optimal psychosocial functioning and an individual’s future self-concept, especially when there is a clear understanding of a pathway towards the future self. The research by Abrams & Aguilar (2010) and Clinkenbeard & Murray (2012) further supports this theory amongst youth. Within their research, the participants who were able to produce a clear picture of their future self and had a realistic plan for achieving this showed greater psychosocial outcomes in the face of adversity. Although the majority of the participants in this study presented a clear picture of their desired future self, they did not consistently show an understanding of the pathway towards

the desired self. Many recognized the importance of school, education, and practice in assisting them to achieve their future goals. Their choice of professional aspiration was linked to a current strength, interest, parental influence, or desire for money. This choice was additionally aligned with the culturally prescribed gender identities, with the females aspiring to be fashion designers, beauticians and mothers, while the males aspired to be the higher paid professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and fathers who must support their families with nice things. It was interesting to note how many of the participants constructed a future self as being that of a higher paid professional – especially due to the current socioeconomic situation of the community where the oppressive conditions created during apartheid still continued to constrain the educational and professional opportunities for the local ‘Black’ and ‘Coloured’ adults.

Their possible selves also appeared to be closely tied to their notion of the idealized child, the child who has nice things, a supportive family, and opportunities towards educational and vocational success. These selves were also constructed in opposition to the selves which they did not want to become, such as a gangster or an alcoholic. For several of the participants, the pathway towards the future self was constructed around the ‘*opportunity to escape*’ from the community to a place where they could achieve their ideal possible self.

Discussion

This study emphasizes the unique ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the self. In accordance with Stryker & Burkes’s identity theory, Mead’s self-object theory (1934), and the social cultural self theories (see Luria, 1994, Vygotsky ([1933] 1994, Adams & Markus, 2004), the responses of the participants reveal the self to be multidimensional, dynamic, and fluid. According to Mead, this dynamic nature of the self is explained to occur through interactions with multiple social contexts, where our selves are divided into a variety of different selves. Similarly, Stryker & Burke (2000) describe this to occur as an individual assigns meaning to his or her various roles within the particular society. Adams & Markus (2004) likewise explain the multidimensional and fluid nature of the self to form in adaptation to an individual’s socio-cultural environment.

Within the themes of childhood, children's spaces, and social connectedness, four underlying discourses emerged as central to the participant's self-constructions. These included; (1) *'forfeited childhood,'* (2) *'vulnerability and helplessness,'* (3) *'preserving the integrity of the self,'* and (4) *'opportunities for escape'.* Conditions of poverty, especially where there were limited spaces for safety, were revealed to have an adverse impact on the way in which children constructed and assigned meaning to the self. In support of Fanon (1967), the oppressive and violent conditions of apartheid continued to affect the communities and limited the opportunities of the participants to the essential resources to nurture a healthy and stable self-concept. The responses show how structural conditions and power structures placed constraints on the participants' self-development. For the participants in this study, safety was revealed to be a non-negotiable aspect of a stable self. This is in accordance with prior research amongst adolescents in the Western Cape, where the discourse around safety emerged as a *'non-negotiable'* component of their well-being (Savahl et al., 2015). Issues around safety were also evident in relation to the self-concept of the child participants in the studies by Moses (2006) and Whitesell et al. (2006), however this was buffered by the access to positive and supportive social networks within the community.

The discourses of *'forfeited childhood'* and *'vulnerability and helplessness'* also formed central components to the participants' cumulative notion of the child-identity. The lack of safety in their community and at times the home forced the participants to forfeit their childhood in order to adjust to their reality of violence. This was reflected in an ambivalent sense of self where their age and environmental conditions restricted their engagement in both of the conceptual worlds of childhood and adulthood and reinforced an underlying sense of helplessness connected to their self-identity as children.

There was however a notable amount of participants who maintained a positive sense of self and future in the face of adversity. This could be a result of the participants' ability to exercise agency within adverse circumstances, such as economic adversity and experiences of violence. According to Redmond (2009), while economic disadvantage constrains well-being, through agency children are able to creatively and actively adapt to and manage these constraints. This was especially seen as they identified themselves with the activities which they were especially good at or excited about, such as specific school subjects, sports, and

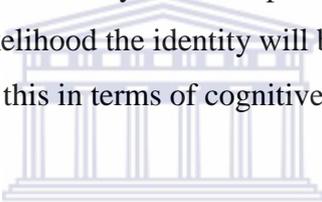
music. Within the discourse of *'preserving the integrity of the self'* there emerged a variety of defence mechanisms including over-identification, desensitization, adjustment, and fantasy. These defence mechanisms provided *'opportunities for escape'* which allowed them to cope with the on-going violence. The participants additionally showed a significant amount of self-efficacy and agency apparent in their ability to seek out safe spaces, local resources, and opportunities for learning and for self-growth. Although a sense of *'vulnerability and helplessness'* was an underlying discourse, hope seemed to play a role in assisting the participants to maintain a positive view of the self and a sense of future which stretched beyond their immediate circumstances.

The various self-identities which an individual possessed were largely influenced by the various social groups and environments where they engaged. It was through the participants' connectedness to others that the discourse of *'vulnerability and helplessness'* further emerged. This was revealed through the first-hand accounts of their experiences with other children in the community, especially those who were victims of violence and abuse. The availability of positive and supportive friends and adults in the participants' lives had a crucial influence on their self-concept. This support helped to create a sense of safety within an insecure environment while additionally nurturing a healthy self-development. Loving and supportive parents were especially influential to the participants' perceptions of self-worth and capabilities. In contrast, abusive and neglectful parenting styles were discussed to have a negative impact on the participant's self-constructions. However, the participants who experienced abuse and neglect in the home tended to seek out other supportive adults in the community and other social environments which promoted a positive self-image. Supportive and encouraging adults outside of the home, such as teachers, community members, and youth care workers played a role in nurturing a positive self-concept. This was achieved through the provision of opportunities for physical and emotional safety, learning new skills, coping with conflict, and setting goals for the future.

While the participants' participation in pro-social activities such as music and sport was connected to their positive self-constructions, the participants' engagement in anti-social activities, such as the use of drugs and violence, did not necessarily result in a negative view of the self. This was especially apparent if the children felt supported by those with whom

they were participating or if the participation resulted in a higher social status. For other participants, their engagement in violent or other anti-social behaviours was reflected upon with feelings of self-blame and guilt because of their perceived feelings of others.

For the participants who attended an after-school programme, there was a struggle between their self-concept associated with the programme and that which they adopted outside of the programme. These identities and behaviours did not always carry over across environments. Other participants mentioned their struggle between the consistency of their desired versus their undesired behaviours such as keeping calm while attending the after-school surfing programme while losing their temper at school or in the community. Stryker (1980) described this as identity salience, or the ability of an identity to carry over across social situations. According to Stryker, the greater the connectedness a person has to an identity within a certain social group, the more likely it is for a person to experience the salience of that identity, meaning a greater likelihood the identity will be drawn upon in various situations. Fanon (1967) explains this in terms of cognitive dissonance:



“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief.”

In other words, a child's experience within his or her social environment influences the establishment of core self-beliefs and self-congruent behaviours, which become difficult to change. For example, if a child establishes a core belief about the self as violent, aggressive, or inferior, which has been reinforced by their social and structural environment, it would be difficult for this self-belief or self-related behaviours to change, even if the child is exposed to new healthy experiences and ways of thinking about the self.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study advances the use of a participatory approach with children for increasing knowledge and understanding of the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The discourses which emerged throughout the focus group discussions revealed the self-concept to be closely connected to the participants' experiences within their sociocultural environment. For example, the discourses of a '*forfeited childhood*' and '*vulnerability and helplessness*' reflected the potentially detrimental influence which structural and social inequalities could have on the participants' self-concept, especially regarding how structural inequities limit the resources available for a healthy self-construction. This further highlights a need for further research and practice to work towards understanding and addressing the impact of structural and social inequities. The discourses of '*preserving the integrity of the self*' and '*opportunities for escape*' shed light on the individual characteristics and community resources which allowed children to cope and maintain a positive self-concept within suboptimal circumstances. Although the small sample size was valuable in providing in-depth knowledge of the participants' self-constructions, it is limited in its ability to broaden the findings as a representative sample of the community or of children residing within other contexts. It is recommended that further research be conducted on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within other social contexts and across age groups. Finally, it is recommended that further research exploring the relationship between children's self-concept, and its influence on subjective well-being across various sociocultural contexts be conducted.

4. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented a study which utilized a child participation framework to explore children's discursive constructions of the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The study advances the use of a participatory approach with children for increasing knowledge and understanding of the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self'. Furthermore, the study highlights a need for further research to explore the relationship between children's self-concept, and its influence on subjective well-being across various sociocultural contexts.

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CHAPTER SIX: THE USE OF VISUAL METHODS TO EXPLORE HOW CHILDREN CONSTRUCT AND ASSIGN MEANING TO THE SELF WITHIN TWO URBAN COMMUNITIES IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

1. Introduction

Chapter five presented a study which utilized a child participation framework to explore children's discursive constructions of the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The study advances the use of a participatory approach with children for increasing knowledge and understanding of the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self'. Furthermore, the study highlights a need for further research to explore the relationship between children's self-concept, and its influence on subjective well-being across various sociocultural contexts. This chapter presents a study which contributes towards the findings of the prior study through exploring how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' through the use of the child participation methods of Photovoice and community maps.



2. Journal Review Process

The article was originally submitted to the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* on 01 February 2016. The *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* is an international peer-reviewed journal which includes papers on a wide range of social science methods, especially those with a focus on methodological pluralism, mixed methods and participatory research. Feedback was received from the journal on 05 February 2016 where the editors decided that the article was not suitable for the particular journal because it provided a discussion of the research process and findings from a particular piece of research, rather than a critical reflection on the methods.

It was then decided to submit the article to the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being (QHW)* on 08 February 2016. The journal provides an Open Access peer reviewed meeting-point for studies using rigorous qualitative methodology of significance for issues related to human health and well-being. The Journal aims to support and shape the emerging field of qualitative studies and to encourage the development of tools for a better understanding of all aspects of human health and well-being. Initial feedback

from the editor and reviewers was received on 15 April 2016. The manuscript went through one round of revisions, and received positive overall feedback from the three reviewers as well as from the executive editor. The article was accepted for publication on 17 May, 2016, DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v11.31251>. The reviewer comments and authors' rebuttals are presented below. The author's reflections on the review process is presented. Finally, the article is presented.

2.1. Revisions

2.1.1. Editor's comments

Dear Ms. Elizabeth Marie Benninger,

Your paper has been reviewed by three external referees. You will find their reports at the bottom of this email. Unfortunately, the article cannot be accepted for publication in its present form. We are, however, looking forward to a revised manuscript, considering all the points raised by the three reviewers. The changes should be marked either with "track changes" function or underlined. Together with the new version 2 there should be a separate document with reply to the reviewers' comments, point by point, i.e. a clarification of what changes that have been done compared to version 1.

If you find any of the reviewer's comments inappropriate, please specify your reason for refuting it.

Kind regards,

Carina Bertero

Linköping University

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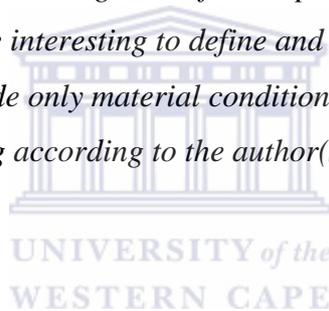
2.1.2. Reviewers Comments

Reviewer A

The use of visual methods to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban communities in the Western Cape” is a very informative paper, well-written, with interesting reflections on the topic described and also on the methodology used. The participation of children in research contributes a lot to the knowledge and debate on the role of children and childhood in general and particularly in a context of violence. The references are adequate and also the ethical procedures, therefore I recommend its publication.

However, after reading the paper I have some suggestions that in my opinion can improve and clarify some parts of the article.

Introduction: As author(s) stated “The research points to the importance of health promoting activities focused on enhancing the self-concept of children to be crucial for child well-being” However, it would be interesting to define and clarify the concept of child well-being. For instance, does it include only material conditions, or also subjective well-being? What is the meaning of well-being according to the author(s) or literature reviewed? And what about the components?



Data analysis: This section can be explained in more detail. There is no information regarding the process of categorizing and encoding, authors of reference, processing, inference and interpretation of results, inter-judge reliability, the criterion established to accept the various categories and subcategories, etc...

Reviewer E

Evaluation: The subject of the article is suitable for the journal. The author discusses the use of two qualitative tools to understand the construction of the concept of self in children who live in a violent surrounding. This problem is relevant, as it presents a social problem that needs to be studied more thoroughly. The author discusses briefly but adequately the results of other studies on the subject, but the text would benefit from a somewhat larger discussion on the advantages of visual methods in participatory research with children (in the data

collection section). Also, it will be necessary to explain in more detail the “thematic analysis” (in the data analysis section). Was this a content analysis? How were the results systematized, how were the main subjects (safety, children’s spaces, and social connectedness) identified?

It is good to see that the ethical issues of the study receive considerable weight in the text. The author has followed ethical guidelines and is able to underpin their relevance when working with children. The findings are concise and the author gives sufficient examples to illustrate the results. In the discussion, I think it is necessary to include a few paragraphs about the contribution of each of the two visual tools. How did the community mapping tool help to understand the construction of self (which themes surged when)? How did the photovoice add to this understanding? How did the study triangulate the data of both tools and with what results? (If it is not the idea to discuss the tools, then I would strongly suggest a change in the title of the article, because of its current emphasis on the use of visual methods.)

Other comments: About the key words: I would exclude the concept of “child participation” from the list of keywords, since this concept is not discussed in the text. Clearly, the children participated in the study, but it is not their participation in itself that is discussed in the analysis but the used visual tools and the products they created during this participation.

About the introduction: The introduction is well constructed, but the problem statement (the need to understand how children make sense of and assign meaning to the self) requires a little more development. It is said how the idea of self may develop in a violent society, and that it is important to know the self-concept of children in intervention scenarios. But is it not made clear why it is important to know how children construct this self. This may seem obvious to some of the readers, but needs an explanation or justification at the final part of the introduction since it is the foundation of the article. Also, this justification will underscore the academic and social relevance of the problem. Therefore, I would include the information of the section “child participation” at the end of the introduction, and not as a part of the research design.

Reviewer F

Reviewer Summary: This article provides an insight into the lives of 54 young people between the ages of 9 to 12 living in Western Cape in South Africa. These children have seen and experienced great hardship and challenges throughout their lives and living in these communities. This article articulates this story and experience of these youth through innovative, original and age appropriate ways that tap into the direct experiences of these youth. The manuscript concludes with implications for interventions that support child well-being through the development of safe spaces for children to play, to learn, and form meaningful, supportive relationships.

Strengths of this manuscript:

The importance of subject matter: This article is relevant to this journal and provides an innovative method of garnering the views and experiences of this vulnerable population within the community.



Sharing the often untold stories of these children who have experienced such hardship from these conditions is of the utmost importance in bringing light to the issues as well as a way forward to provide appropriate intervention and support.

Adequacy of the research design and methods: The method is innovative and original and taps into the voices and experiences of these young people. This is a very strong section of the manuscript. Well done!

Adherence to ethical standards:

There are no concerns regarding the ethical nature of how this study was conducted.

Contribution of new knowledge: This study contributes largely to the field as there are little to no articles that focus on not using this type of qualitative methodology but also in sharing to researchers, academics, policy makers and professionals the voice of these children from these communities.

Areas for improvements:

Clarity in writing style and formatting: I recommend an editor to review this article. There are many issues throughout the manuscript where the text and information shared is neither clear nor articulated appropriately. There are several issues with formatting, this makes the manuscript difficult to read. The writing style did not do the study justice this is the reason why the reviewer has asked to revise and highly recommends a re-submit of this manuscript. Once the writing has improved the reader can more clearly follow, understand and connect with the important stories, images told by this article.

Adequacy of the references: There are several strong statements made in this article that are NOT supported by references. Citations need to be used to support the justification and rationale of this research.

Can the reviewer suggest looking into using Bernice McCarthy model of writing? She has taken Kolb's model and simplified it to five words – "Why", "What", "How", and "So What" (or "What If") which is why she called it "The 4-Mat" to ensure clarity and rationale of the research in writing styles is evident.

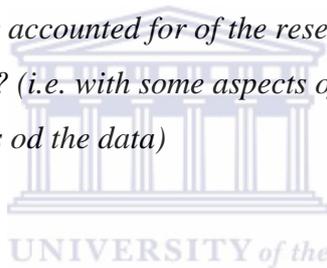
Introduction: self-concept is not strongly justified for its inclusion; a stronger rationale is needed here – why look at self-concept? It would seem, considering the limited previous research in this area, that the study would be better suited to explore their views first and investigate whether self-concept is an issue raised by the kids themselves, considering that poverty has been such an issue and crime – maybe they would consider safety more of an issue that needs support? It would seem to me that a stronger rationale would be to simply

explore their views and experiences of these communities through a method which captures their voice (as has been so eloquently done). It sounds like this construct is the researchers lens, which needs to be discussed in the limitations section

Method: I would suggest that the authors include a statement from the United Nations Rights of the Child Convention, article 12,13 or 14 that state children need to share in developmentally appropriate ways their experiences and that they should be asked – as a rationale as to why this method was selected as well as a rationale for this study.

Community mapping? What is this? This has not been adequately defined

Photovoice: how was subjectivity accounted for of the researchers in terms of interpreting the themes emerged in the photos? (i.e. with some aspects of qual inter-rater reliability is used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data)



There are no clear research questions or aims that funnel from the introduction and lead into the method, please write the aims of this study more clearly and possibly in 1) and 2) format

Meaningfulness of the results and the discussion: The results of this paper are meaningful and provide insight into the needs of these young people that will adequately inform practice. However key statements such as “Additional research is also necessary for the development and the evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children.” Need to be followed with either how or why? (connecting to the rationale at the beginning of the introduction as to why self-concept is so important).

2.1.3. Author’s Rebuttal

Dear Editor in Chief and anonymous reviewers,

We would like to thank the editor and reviewers for the valuable comments which we believe have made a significant contribution towards the overall quality of the paper. The authors agree with and have attended to all of the comments. In the table below we have outlined our responses to the comments identified by the reviewers.

Reviewer Comments	Authors' Comments
Reviewer A	
As author(s) stated “The research points to the importance of health promoting activities focused on enhancing the self-concept of children to be crucial for child well-being” However, it would be interesting to define and clarify the concept of child well-being. For instance, does it include only material conditions, or also subjective well-being? What is the meaning of well-being according to the author(s) or literature reviewed? And what about the components?	The authors have attended to this comment. (pages 2,3)
Data analysis: This section can be explained in more detail. There is no information regarding the process of categorizing and encoding, authors of reference, processing, inference and interpretation of results, inter-judge reliability, the criterion established to accept the various categories and subcategories, etc.	A detailed description of the data analysis process has been included in the data analysis section. (page 7)
Reviewer E	
The text would benefit from a somewhat larger discussion on the advantages of visual methods in participatory research	A larger discussion of the benefits of visual methods has been included in the data collection section. (page 5)

<p>with children (in the data collection section).</p>	
<p>Also, it will be necessary to explain in more detail the “thematic analysis” (in the data analysis section). Was this a content analysis? How were the results systematized, how were the main subjects (safety, children’s spaces, and social connectedness) identified?</p>	<p>A detailed description of the data analysis process has been included in the data analysis section. (page 7)</p>
<p>In the discussion, I think it is necessary to include a few paragraphs about the contribution of each of the two visual tools. How did the community mapping tool help to understand the construction of self (which themes surged when)? How did the photovoice add to this understanding? How did the study triangulate the data of both tools and with what results? (If it is not the idea to discuss the tools, then I would strongly suggest a change in the title of the article, because of its current emphasis on the use of visual methods.)</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment. (page 17)</p>
<p>About the key words: I would exclude the concept of “child participation” from the list of keywords, since this concept is not discussed in the text. Clearly, the children participated in the study, but it is not their participation in itself that is discussed in the analysis but the used visual tools and the products they created during this participation.</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment.</p>

<p>The introduction is well constructed, but the problem statement (the need to understand how children make sense of and assign meaning to the self) requires a little more development. It is said how the idea of self may develop in a violent society, and that it is important to know the self-concept of children in intervention scenarios. But is it not made clear why it is important to know how children construct this self. This may seem obvious to some of the readers, but needs an explanation or justification at the final part of the introduction since it is the foundation of the article. Also, this justification will underscore the academic and social relevance of the problem. Therefore, I would include the information of the section “child participation” at the end of the introduction, and not as a part of the research design.</p>	<p>The importance of understanding how children construct the self and its relation to children’s well-being has been more clearly described within the introduction. (pages 1,2)</p>
<p>Reviewer F</p>	
<p>There are several issues with formatting, this makes the manuscript difficult to read</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment.</p>
<p>Adequacy of the references: There are several strong statements made in this article that are NOT supported by references. Citations need to be used to support the justification and rationale of this research.</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment within the background and rationale section of the article. (pages 1,2,3)</p>

<p>Self-concept is not strongly justified for its inclusion, a stronger rationale is needed here, why look at self-concept? It would seem, considering the limited previous research in this area, that the study would be better suited to explore their views first and investigate whether self-concept is an issue raised by the kids themselves, considering that poverty has been such an issue and crime – maybe they would consider safety more of an issue that needs support?</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment through providing a stronger rationale related to the self-concept. (pages 1,2)</p>
<p>It would seem to me that a stronger rationale would be to simply explore their views and experiences of these communities through a method which captures their voice (as has been so eloquently done). It sounds like this construct is the researchers lens, which needs to be discussed in the limitations section.</p>	<p>A further elaboration of the rationale has been included in the introduction (page 1,2,3) and the limitations of the research in relation to the children’s voices has been included in the discussion. (Page 17)</p>
<p>I would suggest that the authors include a statement from the United Nations Rights of the Child Convention, article 12,13 or 14 that state children need to share in developmentally appropriate ways their experiences and that they should be asked – as a rationale as to why this method was selected as well as a rationale for this study.</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment. (page 4)</p>
<p>Community mapping? What is this? This has not been adequately defined.</p>	<p>Community mapping has been more adequately defined. (page 6)</p>
<p>Thematic analysis photovoice: how was subjectivity accounted for of the researchers in terms of</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment. (page 7)</p>

<p>interpreting the themes emerged in the photos? (i.e. with some aspects of qual inter-rater reliability is used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data)</p>	
<p>There are no clear research questions or aims that funnel from the introduction and lead into the method, please write the aims of this study more clearly and possibly in 1) and 2) format.</p>	<p>The aims of the study have been clearly written under the aims section.</p>
<p>The results of this paper are meaningful and provide insight into the needs of these young people that will adequately inform practice. However key statements such as “Additional research is also necessary for the development and the evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children.” Need to be followed with either how or why? (connecting to the rationale at the beginning of the introduction as to why self-concept is so important)</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment within the conclusion and recommendation section. (page 18)</p>

2.2. Author’s reflection of the review process

The review process for the article went smoothly and required only one round of revision. The initial feedback from the editor and reviewers was received two months after the manuscript was submitted for review and was accepted for publication three months after the initial submission date. The feedback from the editor and the three reviewers was constructive and made a significant contribution towards the overall quality of the paper.

3. Article

This part of the thesis is presented in an article published in *Qualitative Studies on Health & Well-being*, 2016, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v11.31251>. The article in its original format is presented below:

The use of visual methods to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’ within two urban communities in the Western Cape, South Africa

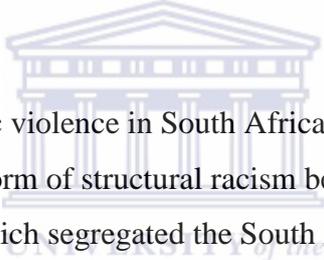
Abstract

This study aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’ within two urban communities of Cape Town in South Africa. Using a child participation methodological framework, data were collected using Photovoice and community maps with 54 participants between the ages of 9 to 12. Feelings of safety, social connectedness, and children’s spaces were found to be central to the ways in which the participants constructed and assigned meaning to the ‘self.’ The study provides implications for intervention programmes aimed at improving children’s well-being to be inclusive of activities aimed at improving children’s self-concept, including the construction of safe spaces for children to play, to learn, and to form meaningful relationships.

Keywords: Self, self-concept, child well-being, Photovoice, community maps, visual methods

Introduction

The ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' plays a central role in a young person's psychosocial functioning and their overall well-being. In Social Psychology, the way children think about their traits, abilities, and attributes is commonly referred to as the self-concept (Egan & Perry, 1998). More broadly it is perceived as a multi-dimensional construct created as a reflection of a child's interaction with their social environment (Kenny et al., 2009), which is largely shaped by the institutions, culture, history, and social conditions in which they live (Staub, 2003). For example, conditions of poverty and oppression could limit the resources which a young person has to nurture the development of a healthy self-concept. This is especially apparent within violent areas where a child's underlying sense of safety is compromised (Savahl et al., 2013). Such conditions exist within the townships of the Western Cape in South Africa where the repercussions of Apartheid's system of structural racism has resulted in the continuity of impoverished and violent living conditions.



Although the history of systematic violence in South Africa has its genesis in the colonisation era in the 1600s, violence in the form of structural racism became normalised during the Apartheid regime (1948-1994) which segregated the South African society into four distinct racial groups ('Black', 'Coloured', 'Indian', and 'White') premised on 'White' privilege and superiority (Lockhat & Van Neikerk, 2000). During this time the residents classified as 'Black' and 'Coloured' were forcibly removed to townships located on the periphery of the city. These townships were poorly resourced in terms of infrastructure, services and access to education and healthcare. The violence from the oppressive conditions led to a normalisation of violence within the communities, where neighbourhoods, schools, and homes turned into spaces of conflict, rather than nurturing environments for the local children (Lockhat & Van Neikerk, 2000). The oppressive and violent conditions created during Apartheid continue to have an impact upon the well-being of the local children with potentially damaging repercussions on their self-concept. Recent statistics reveals 50% of South African children to remain living in conditions of poverty and violence (UNICEF, 2009, World Bank, 2013) which compromises their well-being, sense of self, and opportunities to play safely (Savahl, Isaacs, Adams, Carels & September, 2013).

Children's well-being and self-concept

Well-being is defined as a holistic outlook which should be understood through an integration of its various components, including both the objective and subjective components such as life satisfaction, income, nutrition, and the way people think and feel about issues related to their health and happiness (White, 2008). The inclusion of both the objective and subjective components of well-being contributes towards a different and deeper understanding of the construct (Axford, Jodrell, & Hobbs, 2014) which must be located within a particular context and centred in the person and his or her own perspectives and priorities (White, 2008).

Prior research has defined well-being as an umbrella term to encompass specific concepts and indicators such as a positive self-concept (Camfield et al., 2009). Further research has identified the self-concept to have a strong influence on children's subjective well-being (see Camfield, 2012; Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007; McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007; Schimmack & Diener, 2002). For example, the child participants from Savahl et al. (2015) noted a '*stable self*' to be critical to a positive self-identity and their overall well-being. Schimmack & Diener (2002) compared the predictive validity of explicit and implicit self-esteem measures for informant reports of subjective well-being and found explicit self-esteem to be a predictor of subjective well-being. Based within the township of Ocean View, South Africa, Moses (2006) highlighted the complexity of the interaction of neighbourhood features with each other and with the broader physical, economic and socio-political context and its impact on children's well-being in terms of access to resources, hampering integration, and impact on children's self and collective-efficacy.

The above research points to the importance which the self-concept plays in our understanding of children's well-being. Key to this process is the understanding of how children make sense of and assign meaning to the self. The current study hopes to contribute in this regard by providing an exploration of how children construct and assign meaning to the self within two urban communities of the Western Cape through the use of various methods which captures the views and perspectives of the children themselves. This is achieved through the use of the visual methods of community mapping and Photovoice.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape through the use of methods which capture the children's perspectives on their well-being. The study further aimed to provide recommendations to inform further research and practice aimed at improving children's self-concept and its influence on children's well-being.

Method

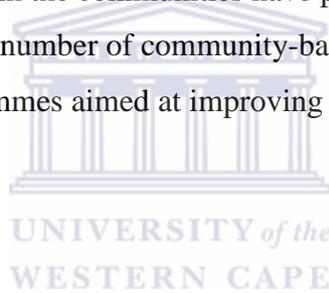
Child participation

This study utilized a child participation framework in order to provide an in-depth exploration of the participants' subjective experiences and understandings of the self. The child participation framework was chosen due to the limited research related to how children think and feel about aspects connected to their well-being. This is largely due to the current trend in studies of children in poverty which often look to the quantifiable aspects which depict children as victims and often excludes their perspectives (Tekola et al., 2009). Child participation research contributes towards a shift from an economic view of poverty to a multidimensional understanding which promotes a holistic view of children's experiences of both well-being and adversity that could be used to inform more integrated interventions (Crivello et al., 2009). Child participation is further supported by current legislation on Children's rights as stated in articles 12, 13, and 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which emphasises children's right to have a voice in decisions concerning their lives, to have their opinions taken into account, and to be able to express their opinions in an age-appropriate manner (UN General Assembly, 1989). Research relating to well-being should place the child at the centre in order to understand the aspects that children value in their lives. Furthermore, a child-focused perspective creates a better understanding of children's experiences and perceptions along with opportunities for the children to be engaged in meaningful ways (Camfield et al., 2009).

Research context

The research project took place in two urban communities located in the Cape Flats region of Cape Town, South Africa. The communities of Lavender Hill and Khayelitsha were selected

in order to capture the diversity of the childhood experience within the Cape Flats due to their diverse spatial, cultural, and historical context. Both communities were formed as a result of Apartheid's system of 'forced removals'; Lavender Hill was developed as a township designated to 'Coloured' residents, while Khayelitsha was allocated to 'Black' residents. The structural living conditions have an additional negative impact on the well-being of the residents and are typically characterized by poor infrastructure and service delivery, with high level of crime and violence, substance use, and unemployment (Savahl et al., 2013). Lavender Hill is faced with the challenge of high density households, while only 45% of Khayelitsha households live in formal dwellings, the majority of the residents living in shacks in informal settlements (City of Cape Town, 2013). Children in the communities are faced with the ongoing struggle of community violence, with the constant threat of victimisation having a profound impact on their physical and psychological well-being. Despite the complexity of challenges faced by the residents of the communities, the strong culture and commitment of the residents within the communities have provided a support system for many of its children. There are a number of community-based and Non-Governmental Organisations conducting programmes aimed at improving the lives and well-being of children in these communities.



Participants and sampling

The study included a total of 54 participants between the ages of 9 and 12 years (26 females and 28 males). This age group was chosen due to the limited research available on the self-concept amongst children in the developmental stage of middle childhood (Benninger & Savahl, 2016) and marks an important period of life for the prevention of psychosocial challenges and for the promotion of mental health and wellness (Aber, Brown, & Jones, 2003).

Purposive sampling was utilised to select four groups of participants from two local primary schools and community organisations (two groups from each community). The criteria for participation were that the participants had to be: (1) between the ages of 9 to 12, (2) residing in one of the participating communities, (3) presenting with a willingness and time to participate in the study.

Child reference group

Central to the study was the inclusion of child reference groups. Two groups were formed, one in Khayelitsha (3 boys, 2 girls) and one in Lavender Hill (3 girls, 2 boys) between the ages of nine to twelve years with the brief of acting as co-researchers and community consultants throughout the entire qualitative research process, including the focus group discussions, Photovoice and community mapping. Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur (2015) noted the importance of using children's reference groups as a strategy for participation and for co-reflexivity. They specifically point to the usefulness of child reference groups in facilitating the exploration of deeper levels of meaning and interpretation. It was therefore important to ensure the study was as inclusive as possible regarding the participation of the children and that their ideas and opinions were meaningfully incorporated throughout the research process. The child reference group participants were trained in qualitative research methodology and co-conducted the research amongst an additional 58 children within their respective communities. The children were selected from two community-based organizations where the researcher was involved based on the credentials of being the appropriate age, being available for the weekly research sessions, and having an eagerness to participate. The child reference group participants assisted with every stage of the research process with the exception of the conceptualisation of the research topic, which formed a part of a larger PhD dissertation.

Data collection: Photovoice and community mapping

The research drew upon the visual methods of community mapping and Photovoice in order to provide a more holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. Visual methods are beneficial for participatory research with children because they build upon various forms of communication and provide the opportunity for children to choose what they want to contribute and express within the study (Darbyshire et al., 2005). A range of methods is additionally important for research with children because it takes into account their developmental stages (Ennew, 2009) and various levels of literacy (Crivello et al., 2009). Furthermore, using a range of research methods with children helps to triangulate the data and to build a clearer picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Morrow, 2001). For example, Young & Barret (2001) used multiple methods such as photos, drawings, mapping, and focus group discussion to capture the socio-spatial environment of street children in

Kampala, Uganda. Another example is reflected in the study by Clark and Moss (2005) who used photography, interviewing, observations and drawings amongst early childhood participants as a means of involving children in the redevelopment of a preschool. The current study incorporated a broad range of children's capacities for expressing themselves, specifically through the use of the data collection techniques of Photovoice, community mapping, and group discussions.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology which utilizes the process of producing photographic images to address a particular community concern. Photovoice is an effective technique to use with children because it provides the opportunity for the participants to gain power through incorporating their personal voice, experience, and language (Hergenrather et al, 2009). The photos are used to generate discussions around the research topic and within the final data analysis. In the current study the participants were asked to take photos based upon the following brief: *what in your life influences how you think and feel about yourself? What influences how children in the community think and feel about themselves?* The participants were placed in pairs sharing a disposable camera with 27 photos, which they were allowed to take home, with the request to return the camera in one week. Following the return of the cameras the researcher had the photos developed and facilitated a Photovoice

Image 1. Participant discusses the significance of his photos during the Photovoice discussion session.



debriefing session. During this session, the photos were visually displayed and the group was asked to comment on the photos. Questions to stimulate discussions about the photos included: *What do you see here? What is happening in this photo? How does this relate to how you or other children in your community think and feel about yourself/themselves? What can we do about it?* The children then had the opportunity to present their photos or to select their favourite photos and to explain why they chose the photo. This technique was useful because it allowed for the children who did not have photos to be included in the conversation. The children who felt less comfortable speaking were provided with the

option of writing descriptions of their favourite photos.

Community Mapping

The community mapping activity was used to gain a deeper understanding of the regular social and environmental influences which could have an influence on the self-concept of the local children. Mapping exercises entail the drawing and discussion of a map of the social and physical environment of children which creates a valuable means for capturing children's perceptions while encouraging free responses and individual interpretations (Darbyshire et al., 2005). During the community mapping sessions, the participants were divided into groups of three or four and asked to draw a map of their community, specifically focusing on the places where they regularly engaged and the spaces which influenced how children thought and felt about themselves. The participants were then provided with the opportunity to explain the drawings through the use of writing or verbal response which provided a rich description of the spatial and environmental influences on their self-concept. The maps were additionally used to stimulate further discussion around the changes which needed to be made in order for their community environment to promote a healthy self-concept. The community mapping exercise was useful for creating an alternative avenue for children to express themselves and for triangulating research data from the Photovoice sessions.



Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded by means of a thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which included six phases: (1) familiarising yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. During the first phase, the primary author transcribed the data,



Image 2: Community mapping activity

read and reread the data, and noted initial ideas. Initial codes were systematically created from the interesting features of the data.

Colour coding the codes within the text and creating a visual map of the codes assisted with this process. The codes and data relevant to the codes were then collated into potential themes utilising a table format. The next phase

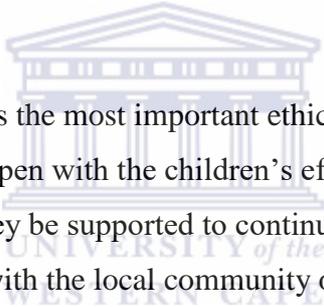
included re-reading through the entire data set to

ensure the themes accurately represented the data and to add additional data within the existing themes which may have been overlooked. After the themes were defined and further refined, a detailed analysis was written for each individual theme and included within the final report. The child reference group was consulted in order to check for the accuracy of the themes and the final analysis was verified by both the child reference group and the research participants in the form of a child-friendly report in order to ensure that their voices were accurately represented.

Procedure and Ethics

The research was approved by the Senate Research Committee at the university where the researchers are based. The researchers partnered with two local NGO's, Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu, who assisted with the process of participant recruitment. An initial session was held with the selected participants, introducing the aims of the study, expectations of participation and the ethics principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, the freedom to withdraw without consequence, permission to audio record, and the academic use of the data. The participants and their guardians were provided with an information sheet explaining the details of the study as well as consent forms for both the guardian and the participant. Only those who provided both signed consent forms participated in the study. The discussions were conducted in the school hall at a local community centre after school hours by the primary researcher with the assistance of a local community youth care worker. The participants were provided with food and refreshments during the sessions, received age-appropriate research skills training, and a closing party. Counselling was available for any of the participants who experienced emotional discomfort. The recordings were transcribed and translated by an external transcriber, verified by a member of the supervisory team, and securely stored. Moore et al. (2015) highlights the ethical importance of involving the participants in the post data analysis phase of a research project (Moore et al., 2015). While the child reference group assisted with the data analysis stage of the research process, the study findings were further validated by the groups of participants who were provided with a child-friendly report.

The following guidelines were followed during the Photovoice sessions for the privacy and safety of the participants and the community members. Two written consent forms were administered to the participants. The first form followed the university institutional review boards' ethics protocols adopted to Photovoice, which provided a detailed explanation of the participants' voluntary involvement in the Photovoice process. The second consent form was for the approval of the publication of photographs or for the utilization of photographs in the final report and the dissemination of research findings to relevant stakeholders. The participants participated in a Photovoice training session where they were instructed to follow the ethical guidelines for Photovoice which included; a discussion of the participants' responsibilities to respect the privacy and rights of others, a dialogue that yielded specific suggestions and ways to respect others' privacy and rights, and an emphasis that no picture is worth taking if it begets the photographer harm or ill will (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000, p.87).



Maglajilic (2010, p. 213) describes the most important ethical issue in participatory research with children to be “what will happen with the children’s efforts once adults gain relevant research knowledge? How will they be supported to continue their work?” The primary researcher was actively engaged with the local community organisations and schools, attended regular community forums, provided life skills and mental health education, resource development, and facilitated after school-programmes within the first community for four years and the second community for one year prior to the start of the research project. This allowed the researcher to provide timely feedback of the results to a variety of community stakeholders so that the findings could be utilised by the larger community to contribute to improvements in local child well-being. The findings were shared at parent-teacher meetings and provided a valuable contribution to the Waves for Change programme curriculum.

Findings

The identified themes related to the participants' self-constructions and meaning assignments included; feelings around safety, children's spaces, and social connectedness.

Feelings around safety

Central to the community maps, photographs, and the discussions around the self were the feelings which the participants associated to their personal safety and the safety of other children. The feelings associated with the visual data included anger, sadness, fear, strength, bravery, silliness, and calmness. The discussions around their feelings revealed an underlying sense of helplessness and vulnerability which they associated to their identity as

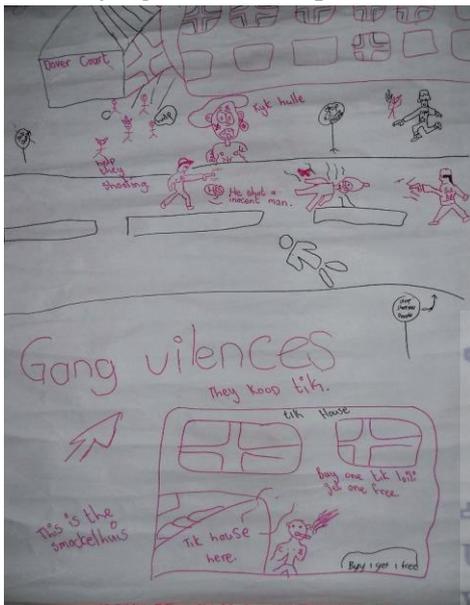


Image 3: Community map identifying the issues of violence in the community which negatively influence the self-concept of the local children (Lavender Hill, Group 1).

children. The streets within the participants' neighbourhoods were characterised by violence with limited spaces of safety. These safe spaces could only be accessed through "dodging bullets, cars, and gangsters". The maps and descriptions appeared to be a reflection of the participants' internal world, where, in the absence of safety, they struggled to form a secure sense of self. In contrast to their chaotic reality, the children longed for a community where they could feel calm and where children could safely play outside. Often, a sense of fear was depicted through the narratives of the participants' first-hand accounts of violence or through the sharing of stories of the other children in the community:

Male Participant 1: There was a kidnapping, this has affected us a lot because the kid who was kidnapped had his body cut up, put in a black bag, and buried... This spreads a lot of fear amongst the kids.

Male Participant 2: There was also a poison and a lot of kids died because a man poisoned children in the community, this makes it scary to be a child.

(Khayelitsha, Group 1)



Image 4: "This is the court where we live. Here is where we see the dead bodies. Sometimes they are left there for days" (Lavender Hill, Group 2).

The participants' discussions of their personal accounts of violence contributed towards a collective identity as children constructed around survival. A preoccupation with survival made it challenging for the participants to reflect on the deeper meanings associated with their selfhood.

The violence which the participants reported included sexual abuse, bullying, abuse by adults in the home, or victimization by the gangsters. The participants had seen first-hand or heard of violent encounters on a regular basis and related and built off of each other's narratives as a means of making sense of their individual and collective identities. In addition to a 'collective survival narrative', an underlying sense of helplessness and vulnerability manifested itself within the discussions around the maps and the photographs:

Facilitator: so there is a lot of pictures of fighting, how does that make kids feel about themselves?

Male Participant # 1: They feel angry

Facilitator: Why do they feel angry?

Male Participant #2: They feel sad

Facilitator: Why do they feel angry, why do they feel sad?

Male Participant #2: Because they can't fight for themselves

(Khayelitsha, Group 2)

In the above account the participants discussed the vulnerability related to their social position in the community where they *can't fight for themselves*. They struggled to make sense of themselves as children because they felt the surrounding violence had deprived them of the central qualities which comprised their idealized child identity; the ability to be protected and to play safely outside. This sense of vulnerability was often tied to their susceptibility to the

expressed her hope that the adults in positions of power would one day listen and change the conditions for the local children.

Many of the participants chose to take photos of the aspect of their lives which provided them with a sense of safety and calmness, as seen in the following quote: “What I like about this photo is that this puppy is safe. I like to be safe (Khayelitsha, Group 1).” Another participant similarly referred to young children as important contributors towards his sense of security: “It’s good to have young children around because young children are safe, they are not using guns (Khayelitsha, Group 1).” When asked to describe the changes they would make to their community to assist the way children think and feel about themselves, the participants explained that they would like the community to be a safer and calmer place. This meant putting a stop to the shooting, drugs, and other forms of violence which took place on the street and at times in the home.

For some of the participants, their on-going exposure to aggressive behaviour contributed towards a self-concept formed around violence. This was often associated with feelings of anger, strength, and a need for survival:

Facilitator: Why do you think there is so much fighting? What makes you feel so angry?

Male participant: Because we are kids, we are angry because we are kids.

Facilitator: Why do you get angry?

Male respondent: Because I’m strong.

In the above account the participant associated anger and the use of violence to be an innate and natural component of his self-concept as a child and a sign of his strength. This could be related to the status of the gangsters in his community, who gained their power and wealth through the use of violence. Violence served both as an ego defence mechanism as well as a strategic defence mechanism to protect the participants’ physical and psychological safety while preserving their self-integrity. These feelings were also related to the participants’

strong sense of empathy which they felt for the other children in the community, especially those who were victimized by the violence: “sometimes when they fight with the guns, the bullets pass through and kill children, this breaks our hearts (Khayelitsha, Female, Group 1).” The unpredictability of the environment was described as leading to children being continuously on edge and compromising their sense of self.

Children’s Spaces

The spaces within the community where children engaged were portrayed in two contrasting categories; the good versus the bad spaces. The good spaces included the schools, community centres, children’s programmes, churches, houses of friends and family, and sports fields. The bad spaces were identified as the streets in their communities which they must pass through in order to reach the spaces of safety. Additional bad spaces identified were the known drug-dealers’ houses, dump yards, and at times their own homes. Shops were identified to be a neutral and necessary space within the community because it provided people with the goods that they needed without having to travel very far. Although the houses were identified to be safe spaces, especially when referring to the shelter from the bullets, they were also considered spaces of imprisonment and boredom which deprived the local children of their right to play safely.



Image 6: Maps created by the participants regarding the spaces which support and those which challenge the way children think and feel about themselves (Khayelitsha, group 1 (Left), Lavender Hill, group 2 (Right)).

The housing infrastructure in the participants' communities consisted of high density and overcrowded apartments or shacks, where there were limited spaces for play. The children evocatively referred to being 'imprisoned' in their homes, which forced them to forfeit an important aspect of their child identity; the ability to play safely outside. The notion of play was brought up regularly by the participants as a central component of their child-identity. The denial of the opportunity to play compromised the way in which they made sense of themselves and their surroundings. This also left the children feeling distressed about themselves and their situation in the community. It was, however, apparent that, despite adverse circumstances, the participants were able to seek out and create their own opportunities for play. Although for some of the participants, the violent identity of the gangsters was reflected in their play; for others the ability to create peaceful opportunities for play allowed them to escape their violent surroundings and reflect on their self-potentialities.

Other participants mentioned the children in their community who had homes full of trash felt bad and ashamed about themselves and the area where they lived. In addition to the homes,



dirty public spaces were considered dangerous for children and related to feelings of shame. In contrast to the dirty spaces, the participants described their appreciation for the green spaces within the community, such as the gardens, which allowed children to develop a sense of pride and self-efficacy.



Image 7: Photos taken to represent the contrasts within the physical environment which influence the way children think and feel about themselves

The school was identified to be a space in the community which contributed positively to the self-concept of the local children. This positive contribution was attributed to the school's provision of safety, opportunities for learning, and for health: "My school is very nice, it's nice to be there because it's healthy, you do things you should do (Khayelitsha, Group 1)." The church was also described to be a good place for children

because it assisted them in making good decisions. For many of the participants, the

participation in church-related activities allowed them to create a sense of self connected to positive and pro-social behaviours.

Social Connectedness

Although the maps were largely constructed around images of violence, the majority of the photos depicted the positive aspects of the participants' lives which were associated with their networks of social support. This included close family and friends who were described to positively contribute towards the participants' self-constructions. Having a friend to play with and one who you could talk to was especially important for making them feel happy and safe. A social connection through activities such as music and surfing with friends was identified to be an important aspect of the participants' self-identity and contributed towards feelings of happiness and pride. In addition to friends, the support of family was frequently mentioned as an important contributor towards a positive sense of self. An example is seen in a photograph taken of a participant's grandmother cooking supper. The participant explained "I like this photo because it is nice when someone cooks for you." (Lavender Hill, Group 2).



Image 8: Photo taken to represent the positive influence which friends can have on the way children think and feel about themselves (Khayelitsha, Group 1)

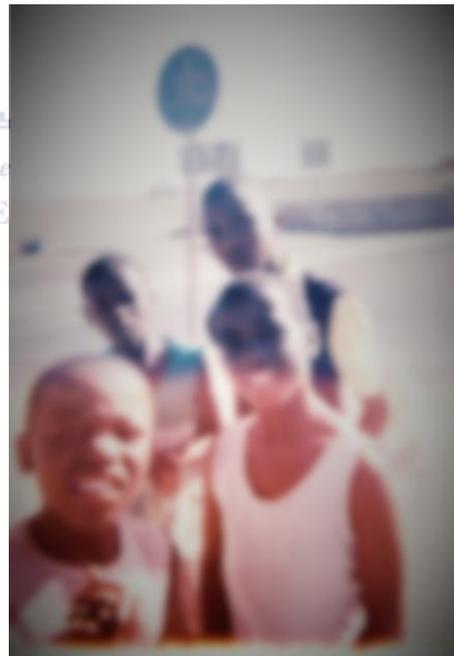


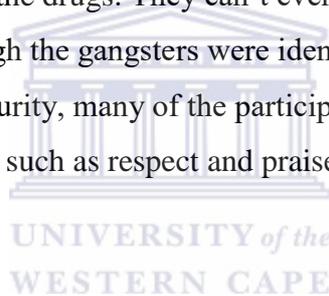
Image 9: "Those are my friends, they also make me happy. If someone wants to hurt me, they always protect me (Khayelitsha, Group 2)."

Other photographs revealed the negative influences which peers and older youth could have on a child's self-concept and behaviour. One participant, for example, selected a photograph of two young children pretending to sniff glue and explained the concern he has for the young people in the community who engaged in such behaviours. As seen in the photo description in image 10, many of the participants were concerned about the impact which the older youth were



Image 10: "My best picture. What I like about this picture, it's when little kids try something wrong. Smoking is not going to take you places. If you start smoking when you are still young your life is in danger. The older boys will teach you bad things. Do not try it because you will love it. Always stand up for yourself and your rights. Do not risk your life!" (Khayelitsha, Group 1).

having on the identity and behaviour of the younger children: "Those children are not able to think or feel anything because of the drugs. They can't even make goals for their future (Khayelitsha, Group 1)". Although the gangsters were identified to be a threat to the participants' sense of self and security, many of the participants associated the gangster identity to positive characteristics such as respect and praise.



Discussion

Feelings of safety, social connectedness, and children's spaces all played a central role in the way in which the participants constructed and assigned meaning to the 'self.' A sense of safety was not only expressed to be a 'non-negotiable' for the participants' well-being, but a 'non-negotiable' for a stable self. This key finding resonates with those of a qualitative study conducted by Savahl et al. (2015) who found 'personal safety' and a 'stable self' as 'non-negotiable' components of adolescents' well-being. In the current study, the lack of safety resulted in feelings of chaos, anger, and sadness and compromised the participants' sense of self-worth, especially as they compared themselves to their idealized child identity constructed around the ability to be cared for and to play safely. Although the majority of the participants portrayed violence in a negative manner, others justified its use as a means of gaining social and economic capital. This is in accordance with the research by Parkes (2007) which portrayed violence for young people in South Africa to carry multiple meanings which resulted in multiple consequences. In the current study, such consequences were apparent in

the multiple self-constructions formed around the participants' experiences and understandings of violence.

In addition to the 'non-negotiable' need for safety, social support played a crucial role in the development of a positive sense of self. Research has shown social support to contribute towards a healthy self-development in the face of adverse environmental circumstances (Timberlake, 1994). Support in the form of accepting relationships has been shown to contribute towards self-growth and feelings of security and freedom (Cockle, 1994). The existence of role models who young people can identify with could also contribute towards a sense of hope in relation to one's future self (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). In this study, the availability of social support contributed towards a positive sense of self, although this did not necessarily result in positive behaviour. Engaging with friends allowed the participants to feel socially connected to others which resulted in feelings of happiness and acceptance. The activities which the participants engaged in with their friends were influential in their self-constructions, even if these were deemed to be anti-social. The availability of supportive adults and older youth contributed towards feelings of self-worth and a sense of self-efficacy. Abusive adults and older youth, on the other hand, contributed towards feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, where the participants' size and social status prevented them from being able to defend themselves or to change their situation. This was reflected in both the maps and the photos of the participants, where there appeared to be a conflict between the people in close proximity who supported the self and those who compromised it.

In addition to their social connections, the children's self-identity was expressed to be closely linked to the spaces where they regularly engaged. Ellis (2005) described place to be significantly seen as a means through which people construct an identity. Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminhoff (1983) further support this notion within the theory of place-identity, defined as the subjective sense of self which is conceptualized not only through one's social relationships but through one's relationships to the various physical spaces that define a person's day-to-day life. Self-identity growth is therefore related to the development of a meaningful place-identity. This was evident in the participants' photos, maps, and discussions, where they commonly spoke about themselves in relation to the meaningful spaces where they preferred to spend their time. Safe spaces, green and clean spaces in the

community were valued by the participants and made them feel good about themselves and connected to their area, while dirty spaces had the opposite effect. Spaces where the participants could engage in activities such as gardening allowed them to develop a sense of self-efficacy and pride in their ability to improve their community. The spaces which provided activities for learning new skills were actively sought out by the participants because these spaces instilled a sense of confidence in themselves and their abilities, and provided them with the opportunity to develop a sense of self. The importance of the connection between the sense of self and place is similarly reported by (Adams & Savahl, 2016) who found that children's self-concept is influenced by their engagement in safe natural spaces.

Although space and place contributed towards the development of the self, the participants viewed their day to day spaces to be controlled by the adults. Ataöv & Hader (2006) found similar responses amongst street children in Turkey. They concluded that the public space often marginalized children and that their inclusion was imperative in the research, planning, and management of the public space. Their research highlighted the propensity to play which children had in any space sufficient enough to meet their needs, although this was often obstructed by the adults. The participants in the current study expressed their desire for adults to take children seriously and to recognize their contribution towards society. This recognition would allow the participants to develop a sense of self as valued and capable members of the community. In accordance to the international and national legislation on children's rights, this meant including children in decisions related to their lives and providing them with the activities which the children felt were important. Amongst their responses was a need to prioritize the construction of safe spaces within the public sphere for children to play. The ability to play was not only an important contributor to the way the children felt about themselves, but also provided them with the opportunity to make sense of themselves, their abilities and potentialities.

The visual methods of Photovoice and community maps provided a useful and engaging means of gathering data regarding the thoughts and feelings which the child participants had of their social and physical environment and how these influenced their self-concept. The photos taken by the participants allowed for a collaborative and creative discussion around

their self constructions and provided a more holistic understanding of the various components which influence children's self-concept. The community mapping exercise was a valuable means of triangulating the data from the Photovoice activity while providing the opportunity for the child participants to utilise drawing as a means of communicating their thoughts and ideas related to children's self-concept. Although the final data analysis was verified by the child reference group and the participants based on the group discussions around the visual data, the analysis itself was conducted by the adult researchers, whose interpretations could be different than the interpretations of the participants. The adult-child power dynamics between the adult researchers and the child participants also posed a challenge to ensuring that the data collection and analysis accurately reflected the children's voices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study highlights the impact which the social and physical environment has on the way in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' and how this influences their perceptions of their well-being. The availability of safety, social support, and nurturing children's spaces all contributed towards the ideal social environment for fostering a child's sense of self. Central to the development of a healthy and stable self-concept was the requirement for a sense of safety and security in the broader social environment. Experiences of violence and abuse posed a threat to the participants' sense of self, while experiences of love and support from others within a safe space helped buffer the negative impact of violence on the self. The meanings assigned to the participants' day-to-day spaces contributed towards their sense of self, especially in the form of their sense of place-identity. This provides implications for intervention programmes aimed at improving children's well-being to take into consideration activities aimed at improving children's self-concept. This includes the construction of safe spaces for children to play, to learn, and to form meaningful relationships. Interventions must also look at the larger structural, community, and cultural factors which marginalize children and leave them with a sense of vulnerability and helplessness. One way to address this is through the recognition of children as citizens whose feelings, ideas, and experiences need to be taken seriously. Furthermore, interventions must focus on creating a culture where children are valued and where they are included in community building processes. The structural inequalities of the context where the research took place cannot be overlooked, as these contribute towards the continuity of violence and

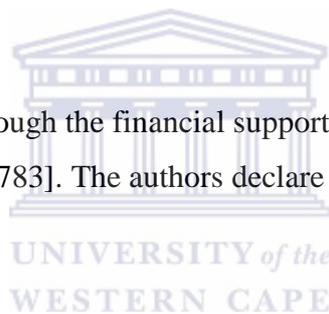
poverty within the communities and the barriers towards the creation of safer and more secure environments for the local residents. Due to the contextual nature of the self, further research is necessary to understand the unique ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within diverse communities and spaces. This should be inclusive of engaging and age-appropriate tools such as Photovoice and community mapping which allow for children to participate in a meaningful way and which takes into account children's various means of communication. Additional research is also necessary for the development and the evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the children who participated in this study and the community organizations Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu for their support and dedication throughout the research project.

Conflict of interest and funding

This study was made possible through the financial support of the Rotary International Foundation, Global Grant [#1415783]. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.



4. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented a study which utilized the child participation methods of Photovoice and community mapping as a means of exploring how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two impoverished urban communities of the Western Cape in South Africa. The chapter highlighted the importance of further participatory research focused on the development and the evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children, which must take into account the perspectives and experiences of the children for whom the intervention is intended to serve.

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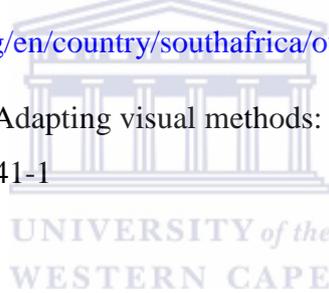
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CHAPTER SEVEN: THE CHILDREN'S DELPHI: CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A PROGRAMME FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT AND WELL-BEING

1. Introduction

Chapter six presented a study which utilized the child participation methods of Photovoice and community mapping as a means of exploring how children construct and assign meaning to the self within two impoverished urban communities within the Western Cape in South Africa. Feelings of safety, social connectedness, and the physical environment were the themes identified to influence the participants' self-constructions and meaning assignments. The chapter highlighted the importance of further participatory research focused on the development and the evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children, which must take into account the perspectives and experiences of the children for whom the intervention is intended to serve.

This chapter presents a study which utilises the child participation method of the Delphi to explore children's implications for intervention programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children within two impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The Delphi technique was utilized with a group of ten children who were the members of the child reference group in the previous two studies and perceived to be the experts on matters affecting their lives. The study illuminates the value in using participatory methods with children, especially regarding matters which influence their self-concept and subjective well-being.

2. Journal Review Process

The article was originally submitted on 23 February 2016 to *Children and Youth Services Review*, an interdisciplinary forum for critical scholarship regarding service programmes for children and youth. The journal has a 2009 impact factor of 1.66. Feedback was received from the editors on 24 February 2016, where it was decided that the article not be considered for publication because of the backlog of articles which the journal had received and the article not falling within the scope of current interest. The article was then submitted on 29 February 2016 to *Child and Family Social Work*, an international peer-reviewed journal dedicated to advancing the well-being and welfare of children and their families throughout the world. The journal provides a forum where researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, and managers in the field exchange knowledge, increase understanding, and develop notions of good practice with a current impact factor of 0.93. The article received initial feedback from the journal on 31 May 2016 where the reviewers recommended the paper be accepted for publication with major revisions. The revised manuscript was re-submitted on 20 June 2016 and was accepted for publication in the *Journal of Child & Family Social Work*, 2016, DOI:10.1111/cfs.12329.



2.1. Revisions

2.1.1. Editor's comments

Dear Ms. Benninger:

Manuscript ID CFSW-02-16-0042 entitled "Considerations for developing a programme for promoting children's self-concept and well-being: a child participation study" which you submitted to Child & Family Social Work, has been reviewed. The comments of the reviewer(s) are included at the bottom of this letter.

The reviewer(s) have recommended that your paper is not currently suitable/ready for publication. However, it shows sufficient promise that we would like to give you the opportunity for revision. Please attend to all of the suggested amendments of the reviewers and/or Associate Editor. If the reviewers have expressed concerns about the quality of written English, you may wish to consider having your paper professionally edited for English language by a service such as Wiley's at <http://wileyeditingservices.com>. Please ensure that your revised manuscript is no longer than 7000

words including the abstract and references. Your paper will be subject to re-review upon resubmission. Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to *Child & Family Social Work* and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michelle Lefevre

Editor in Chief, *Child & Family Social Work*

lefevrecfsw@gmail.com

2.1.2. Reviewers' comments to the author

Reviewer 1

Thank you for the opportunity to review this article. Indeed, a very important topic especially in the South African context. There are the following concerns in terms of the alignment of the epistemology and methodology of this paper. The author describes a child participatory paradigm and mentioning that children should participate and be engaged in every stage (p 6) yet in the research design it is mentioned that the children are purposively selected using the Delphi technique which often negates true participation as proposed by a participatory paradigm. The technique used is often viewed as structured with a goal to ensure an answer to a given social phenomenon in this instance. This research attempted participation by including child participants as experts of their own lives, but this could rather be seen as being exploratory than participatory as the method(s) that were used were too structured.

Literature review: Ensure that literature is integrated to formulate a tighter argument. The possibility to add some legislative mandates and covenants could strengthen the participatory paradigm that is promoted in this study.

Research design: The paper lacks a clear goal and/or objectives which leaves the reader unsure of its intent at times. The mentioning of this study being part of a larger study is a bit unclear and should be contextualized in the introduction of the paper. Trustworthiness should be indicated as well as

elaborating on the sampling of participants. During data analysis what was the contribution of the participants as they were seen as co-researchers?

Presentation of findings: Add more direct quotes to ensure that the voices of participants are more clear.

Reviewer 2

I think you have written a good article about a very important theme. Thus, my comments mainly concern structure and clarity.

- 1) *You should state much more clearly what the focus of the article is from the beginning of the article, i.e. the use of the Delphi Method with children from deprived neighborhoods. The introduction is OK, but does not necessarily pave the ground for your particular study. And it would be even better if there was literature specifically connected with the children in similar circumstances to the ones you included here, or literature discussing the significance of different backgrounds.*
- 2) *Thus, I think that your summing up on page 4 (citing Casas) would function even better at the beginning of the article*
- 3) *Perhaps it is my fault as a reviewer, but I do think that you need to clarify better when you talk about the Delphi study and when you talk about the larger study. I suppose it is the Delphi which is presented here?*
- 4) *Could you reflect a little more on the 10 children involved? You underline the purposive sampling, but are there, for instance, reasons to believe that these children were particularly vocal, interested, experienced in participation etc.? I also wondered how you define "self-concept" to them - the Words you use, whether they understand the actual concept? this could be clarified.*

5) *I found the analyses and discussion very interesting, and only wonder if you could reflect on what happens if this advice from the children is not followed? Will they feel betrayed in any way, and would this impede them from later participation? How was this discussed?*

2.1.3. Authors' rebuttal

Dear Editor in Chief and anonymous reviewers,

We would like to thank the editor and reviewers for the valuable comments which we believe have made a significant contribution towards the overall quality of the paper. The authors agree with and have attended to all of the comments. In the table below we have outlined our responses to the comments identified by the reviewers.



Reviewers' Comments	Author's Response
Reviewer 1	
<p>The author describes a child participatory paradigm and mentioning that children should participate and be engaged in every stage p 6 yet in the research design it is mention that the children are purposively selected using the Delphi technique which often negates true participation as proposed by a participatory paradigm. The technique used is often viewed as structured with a goal to ensure an answer to a given social phenomenon in this instance. This research attempted participation by including child participants as experts of their own lives, but this could rather been seen as being exploratory than participatory as the method(s) that were used were too structured.</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment. The authors agree that the reviewer has raised a valuable point regarding the level of the participation of the children. There were several limitations which prevented the research from being a fully participatory process, which we have included under the study limitations (page 20). However, it is notable that participation can take place to varying degrees and the authors have taken several steps to ensure the participatory nature of the research (See Crivello et al., 2009). (page 6)</p>
<p>Ensure that literature is integrated to formulate a tighter argument. The possibility to add some legislative mandates and covenants could strengthen the participatory paradigm that is promoted in this study.</p>	<p>The authors agree and have attended to this comment. (page 6)</p>
<p>Research design The paper lacks a clear goal and/or objectives which leaves the reader unsure of its intent at times. The mentioning of this study being part of a larger study is a bit unclear and should be contextualized in the introduction of the paper.</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment. (page 5)</p>

Trustworthiness should be indicated as well as elaborating on the sampling of participants.	The authors have attended to this comment. (pages 12, 13)
During data analysis what was the contribution of the participants as they were seen as co-researchers?	The authors have attended to this comment. (page 13)
Presentation of findings: Add more direct quotes to ensure that the voices of participants are more clear.	The authors have attended to this comment. (page 16, 17)
Reviewer 2	
You should state much more clearly what the focus of the article is from the beginning of the article, i.e. the use of the Delphi Method with children from deprived neighbourhoods. The introduction is OK, but does not necessarily pave the ground for your particular study. And it would be even better if there was literature specifically connected with the children in similar circumstances to the ones you included here, or literature discussing the significance of different backgrounds.	The authors agree and have attended to this comment. (page 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). We have included self-concept intervention literature connected to children within similar circumstances, although we were unable to find any other studies which utilise the Delphi method with children.
Perhaps it is my fault as a reviewer, but I do think that you need to clarify better when you talk about the Delphi study and when you talk about the larger study. I suppose it is the Delphi which is presented here?	The authors agree and have attended to this comment (pages 5, 13). The Delphi is the final stage of a larger PhD study related to children's self-concept.
Could you reflect a little more on the 10 children involved? You underline the purposive sampling, but are there, for	The authors have attended to this comment. (page 13)

<p>instance, reasons to believe that these children were particularly vocal, interested, experienced in participation etc.?</p>	
<p>I also wondered how you define "self-concept" to them - the Words you use, whether they understand the actual concept? this could be clarified.</p>	<p>The authors have attended to this comment. (page 12)</p>
<p>I found the analyses and discussion very interesting, and only wonder if you could reflect on what happens if this advice from the children is not followed? Will they feel betrayed in any way, and would this impede them from later participation? How was this discussed?</p>	<p>The authors agree and have attended to this comment. (Page 21)</p>



3. Article

This part of the thesis is presented in an article which was published in *Child & Family Social Work*, 2016, DOI:10.1111/cfs.12329. the article in its original format is presented below:

The Children's Delphi: Considerations for developing a programme for promoting children's self-concept and well-being

Abstract

This study is premised on the notion that intervention programmes aimed at improving children's well-being should be inclusive of activities which promote children's self-concept. Using a child participation framework, this study aimed to explore children's perceptions of the nature and content of intervention programmes aimed at improving children's self-concept within two impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The Delphi technique was followed with a group of ten children between the ages of 10 and 12 years who were considered to be knowledgeable experts and authorities on matters affecting their lives and well-being of children. They suggested that intervention programmes include a focus on *safety, the provision of social support, the creation of opportunities for learning and for play, and the provision of basic material needs.*

Key words: Delphi; self-concept, child well-being; child participation

Introduction

The 'self' in social psychology is seen as a multidimensional, dynamic, and complex construct, largely created as a reflection of children's interaction and engagement with their social environment (Kenny & McEachern, 2009). It is, therefore, essentially shaped by social institutions, culture, history, and the social context in which they live (Staub, 2003). Recent research (see Benninger & Savahl, 2016a; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2007; Savahl et al., 2015; September & Savahl, 2009) has shown that the ways in which children experience and make sense of the 'self' plays a central role in their psychosocial functioning and overall well-being. Subsequently, the importance of the self-concept has been foregrounded in intervention programmes aimed at improving children's well-being (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007).

Prior studies have recommended that the self-concept be supported through intervention programmes which are inclusive of meaningful social relationships, feelings of inclusion, safety, coping skills, structured and unstructured activities, opportunities for reflection, and through addressing the larger structural issues which may influence the resources available to nurture a healthy self-concept (see Demaray et al., 2009; McMurray et al. 2011; Noble-Carr et al., 2013; Rogers et al., 2012). An example is seen in a study conducted by McMurray (2010) with 13 British adolescents from a low socioeconomic background. The study found that the self-identity of the participants was shaped by their social relationships; they positioned the self in relation to their friends, siblings and extended family, and reported a need to build an emotional attachment with an adult figure. The study supported the need for intervention programmes to include activities which focus on the development of trusting relationships with peers and supportive adults and which link youth to services that assist them in the reconstruction of healthier self-identities.

Further evidence is presented by Demaray et al. (2009) who investigated the role that social support played on children's self-concept, specifically focused on the relationship between the perceived frequency and importance of social support. Participants with high close friend support had higher levels of self-concept than those with average or low levels. The results suggest that support from significant adults is a critical factor in the development of a positive self-concept. The authors considered implications for intervention programmes aimed at the promotion of a healthy self-concept to include assisting children to develop positive networks of social support, including support from peers, family, and other caring adults.

Research conducted by Rogers et al. (2012) described the role that social identity played in the development of children's self-concept in a culturally diverse sample of children from the United States. The meaning participants ascribed to their social identity connected to their ethnic group encompassed ideas such as language, physical appearance, pride, relative social position, and culture. The findings of the study support the need for further interventions that are aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept to be inclusive of activities which nurture self-reflection and meaning-making processes.

Noble-Carr et al. (2013) explored the role of social identity and meaning-making in the lives of vulnerable adolescents in Australia who were enrolled in youth support services and the implications for programmes which support their needs. The study recommended the need for support services to emphasise and understand issues around young peoples' personal identity and to assist young people to understand the importance of making positive social connections. For example, services should focus their efforts on facilitating, building and promoting opportunities for young people to develop personal caring connections, meaningful connections to the community, a sense of belonging, mastery and hope.

Research conducted by Kenny & McEachern (2009) amongst a racially diverse sample of children from the United States explored how a sense of social isolation may negatively contribute to the self-concept, specifically as it relates to feelings of self-worth. The study found the self-concept to be closely linked to the internalization of prejudice and devaluation of one's racial minority group. The authors recommended that intervention programmes include the promotion of social inclusion and cultural competency.

The research by Swann et al. (2007) discussed the subjective perceptions of children to be an important aspect of their quality of life and a worthwhile focus for the development and implementation of theoretically informed programmes. The findings supported optimal interventions to focus directly on enhancing the self-concept in specific areas relevant to the goals of the intervention and to include opportunities for skills development.

Although the existing studies provide valuable information for informing self-concept related intervention programmes for children from diverse social contexts, socio-economic circumstances, and cultures, these implications are drawn upon by the researchers, who are viewed to be the ‘experts’ in their field of study. However, there remains a gap in the literature with regard to children’s own perceptions and understandings of the nature and content of intervention programmes aimed to improve children’s self-concept and well-being. The inclusion of children’s perspectives on issues related to their well-being is increasingly supported by current child research, as stated by Casas (2016):

Children are slowly being recognized as key informants and competent informers on their own lives. Consequently, their voices, their evaluations and their points of view are increasingly more accepted as key sources of information in scientific research (p. 9).

Subsequently, this study is premised on the notion that intervention programmes aimed at improving children’s well-being should take special consideration of activities which promote children’s self-concept, and should be inclusive of the perspectives and recommendations of the children themselves. This study utilises the Delphi method with children, hereafter referred to as the Children’s Delphi, to achieve this. The Children’s Delphi is based on the epistemological position that children are knowledgeable experts and authorities on matters pertaining to children’s lives and well-being. In the current study the Children’s Delphi is conceptualised as panel of children, who through a prolonged engagement with the research process, provide in-depth knowledge and insight into the development of programmes for the promotion of a health self-concept.

Study Aim

Using the Children’s Delphi method within a child participation framework, the study aimed to explore children’s perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape in South Africa.

Child Participation

Child participation research places the child at the centre of the research process in order to gain a detailed understanding of their subjective experiences and meaning-making processes while taking into consideration the social, cultural, and historical context (Fattore et al, 2007). Prior child participation research has contributed towards valuable knowledge around issues related to children's attitudes and experiences, such as issues around the environment, labour, schooling, play, gender, sexuality, and spirituality (Mason & Watson, 2014). Mason & Watson (2014) point to child participation as a critical framework for the inclusion of children in research, which has formerly been defined by privileged and powerful adults. They further state that "children typically have been at the bottom of the hierarchy of formal knowledge production, with their knowledge excluded or marginalized because they are outside the dominant knowledge production forums, including academic institutions" (p. 2757). Child participation research recognises children as actors and knowers who are knowledgeable about their lives (Fattore et al, 2007). This epistemological position advanced by the theoretical and methodological assertions of the 'new sociology of childhood' has its genesis in international legislation on children's rights, mostly notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to freely express their opinion, to be heard, and for their opinions to be taken seriously on all matters which affect them (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Article 13 supports child participation in the form of freedom of expression. This includes the right to seek, receive, or impart information and ideas through the child's preferred form of communication.

While children have the right to voice their needs, they also may need the support of adults to take them seriously and to assist them with access to community, organisational, and structural resources. Often in the research process, the researcher's view of the child is based on societal beliefs, rather than the child's beliefs, with children rarely consulted to define their own problems and solutions (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). It is argued that this approach to research disempowers children as adult 'experts' make decisions on their behalf without consulting them or including them in the decision-making process (Crivello et al., 2009, Prilleltensky, 2010). Through child participation research, collaborative methodologies are valued to ensure that children are involved in defining problems and solutions (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). The researcher's role in child

participation shifts from the adult-centric perspective, working instead as a collaborator in ways which enhance the power children have over their own lives (Langhout & Thomas, 2010).

While using various research methods with children, it is important to note that a method is only participatory depending on the way in which it is used (Crivello et al., 2009). Children are often left out of participation processes in research or may participate to various degrees (Crivello et al., 2009). Moore et al. (2016) stresses the importance of providing children with more power and choice in the research process and in demonstrating, through words and actions, the value of their expertise and viewpoints. For research to be fully participatory, the participants should be engaged in every stage of the research process. Children should take on the role of social actors, collaborators and co-researchers and the adult researchers should collaborate in ways which enhance the power children have over their own lives (Langhout & Thomas, 2010).

Child participation research has the potential for a range of benefits for the individual participants, their communities, and the promotion of child well-being. Helping children to articulate their opinions on their environment is crucial for psychosocial problem prevention and the promotion of mental health (De Winter, 1999). Furthermore, allowing children to have a meaningful voice and active role in managing their environment is a resource for healthy development (De Winter et al., 1999). The subjective knowledge identified through child participation can be utilised to gain a deeper understanding of access barriers and to collaborate with children and community members in creating solutions which are culturally and socially relevant for addressing child mental health (Shattell et al., 2008). Through participation, children's self-efficacy can be strengthened along with an increase in self-confidence. This is achieved as the resources of children are developed, while incorporating skill building, social support, and identity development (Langhout & Thomas, 2010).

Methods

Research Context

The research was conducted within two urban communities located in the Cape Flats region of Cape Town, South Africa. The communities were formed as a result of Apartheid's system of institutionalised racism (1948-1994), which segregated the South African society on the premise of 'white' superiority and privilege (Lockhat & Van Neikerk, 2000). During this period South African residents were divided into four distinct racial classifications and forced to live in racially designated areas, with 'Black' and 'Coloured' residents relocated to poorly resourced areas referred to as townships. The townships of Lavender Hill, a historically 'Coloured' community, and Khayelitsha, a historically 'Black' community, were selected in order to capture the diversity of the childhood experience within the Cape Flats. The children in these communities remain impacted by the aftermath of Apartheid, where conditions of poverty and violence continue to pose a threat to their daily health and well-being.

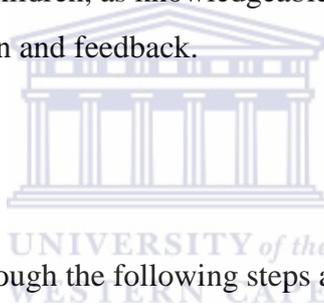
Design

The overall design of the study was participatory with various methods used to ground the research process in the values and principles of child participation. A critical component of the design was the development of a child reference group which consisted of 10 child participants, selected from the participating communities, who served as co-researchers and consultants for a larger research project which aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the self within their communities (see Benninger, 2016). The engagement of children in reference groups is based on the belief that children are competent social actors and experts with valuable insights which may be different than adults (Moore et al, 2016). While research using participatory methodologies with children has grown in recent years, Moore et al (2016) makes the essential point that "there has been little discussion within the research field as to how children and young people may meaningfully and actively participate in co-reflective activities such as reference groups (p. 2)." In this study we propose the use of the Delphi technique as a means for meaningfully engaging the child reference group as the Delphi participants premised on the notion that they are the experts of their lives and experiences.

The Delphi is a technique which captures the collective opinions of experts who have a consultative role on a particular topic (De Villiers, De Villiers, & Kent, 2005) and takes the form of an exploratory exercise conducted with the expert panel related to the phenomenon under exploration (Kennedy, 2004). The technique includes a series of forums or consultations which take place until

a consensus is reached about a particular topic or problem. Open-ended questions are used for eliciting opinions related to the topic, with additional questions formed based on the feedback from the previous rounds (De Villiers et al., 2002). The traditional Delphi is characterised by the five features of anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, statistical group response and stability in responses (Hanafin & Brookes, 2005).

Epistemologically, the Delphi technique has its roots in both positivist and interpretivist epistemologies (Hanafin & Brooks, 2005). Those working from a positivist stand-point argue that the Delphi technique is grounded in the ontological position of a single reality, while those from an interpretivists/ social constructionist position argue for multiple realities. The key argument of the interpretivist/social constructionist is that the group consensus is achieved through an inter-subjective iterative process. In the current study the latter epistemological position is adopted and works from the assumption that children, as knowledgeable experts, are creating consensus through a continuous process of interaction and feedback.



Children's Delphi Process

The data collection proceeded through the following steps associated with the Delphi. The first step included the selection of the appropriate participants for the Delphi. According to Hasson, Keeney, and McKenna (2000), the participants should be selected purposively to form a panel of informed experts who have knowledge of the subject or problem under investigation. While the Delphi panel traditionally consists of adult experts who are perceived to be the experts in their professional field related to the Delphi aim, current research supports the importance of children as key informants and competent informers around issues related to their lives (Casas, 2016).

In this study the experts were chosen in accordance with a child participation framework, where children were viewed to be the most suited for the Delphi panel. Firstly, they were viewed to be the experts of their own lives, with valuable knowledge and a deep insight, understanding, and experiences of being a young person within their communities. Secondly, they participated in all stages of the larger child participation research project, which provided them with substantial in-depth knowledge with regard to the subjective experiences of other children within their respective communities.

The Delphi participants were selected from the two participating communities of Khayelitsha (3 boys, 2 girls) and Lavender Hill (3 girls, 2 boys) between the ages of ten and twelve years. They were also the members of the child reference group of the larger research project which aimed to explore children's constructions of the self within their respective communities (see Benninger, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from two community-based organizations where the researchers were involved, based on the criteria of being the appropriate age, being available for the weekly research sessions, and expressing a willingness to participate. The primary researcher spent one year volunteering with the participating organisations prior to the commencement of the research process in order to build rapport amongst the study participants and had the opportunity to speak directly with the children about the details of the research project. Children who expressed interest in the project were requested to register as volunteers with the organizations. The child reference group functioned as co-researchers and community consultants throughout the entire research process, including the focus group discussions (Benninger & Savahl, 2016a), Photovoice, and community mapping activities (Benninger & Savahl, 2016b), and the Delphi which formed a part of a larger PhD study of the primary author. The current article reports on the final Delphi stage of the project.



The next step stipulated by Hasson et al. (2000) is to identify the resources and skills of the participants and the appropriate means of communication to use throughout the process. Given that the participants were children residing within communities with an under-resourced education system, the literacy of the participants varied; it was therefore decided to provide the participants with various means of communicating their ideas through the use of writing, drawing, and verbal response.

Three sessions were held with each Delphi group. While the content of the sessions followed a structured format, an informal atmosphere of engagement was encouraged with food and refreshments provided during each session. The first session began with a series of open-ended questions related to the themes which emerged throughout the larger research study. The discussions specifically explored how the perspectives of children in their communities could contribute towards the design of interventions aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept. The following questions were included: *How do children think and feel about themselves in your*

community? What makes them think or feel that way? What barriers did our research discover which prevented children from viewing themselves in a positive way? What is needed for children to develop a healthy self-concept in your community? What should a programme aimed at improving child self-concept look like? In addition to verbal responses, discussion feedback was also provided through the use of drawings.

After the completion of the first session, the next included a review of the items discussed in the prior session and provided the opportunity for amendments and changes. The researcher drew three separate sections on a large whiteboard labelled Photovoice and community maps, focus group discussions, and intervention programme. All of the themes identified by the participants in the prior session were listed in the applicable category on the white board. The participants then had the opportunity to add in items by verbally explaining or writing their responses in the appropriate category. This process continued until consensus was reached amongst all of the participants.

The third session of the Delphi included the data analysis. Once consensus was reached by all of the participants, the data from the Delphi was compiled into a report using content analysis and distributed to the participants during the third session for their review. The report included the thematic categories and themes as identified by the participants in the previous round. Once the participants approved the report, a final draft was written and distributed to each member for final approval.

Procedures and Ethics

The research was approved by the Senate Research Ethics Committee at the university where the researchers are based. Two local NGO's assisted with the process of participant recruitment. An initial session was held with the selected participants, introducing the aims of the study, expectations of participation and included a discussion of the key ethics principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, the freedom to withdraw without consequence, and the academic use of the data. The participants and their guardians were provided with an information sheet which included the details of the study as well as consent forms for both the guardian and the participant. The Delphi sessions were conducted by the primary researcher at a local community centre after school hours. Permission was sought from the participants to audio

record the sessions. Lastly, involving the participants in the post data analysis phase of a research project was an important component of the methodological and ethical considerations and ensured that the data was accurately presented (Moore et al., 2016). This was achieved within the third session of the Delphi process where the final report was presented to the participants, who approved the report after a series of discussions. Furthermore, the participants assisted with presentations which were conducted at various forums with community stakeholders.

Findings

The participants divided their responses into two thematic categories; (1) Factors which influence children's self-concept, (2) Suggestions for intervention programmes. Within the first thematic category, the themes of *feelings*, *children's reality* and *relationships* emerged. Within the second thematic category, the four themes included; *safety*, *social support*, *opportunities for learning and for fun*, and *the provision of basic needs*.

Factors which influence a child's self-concept

The participants first identified *feelings* to play a role in the way in which children constructed and assigned meaning to the 'self.' The participants described the children in their communities to have a variety of feelings and emotions, which were dependent on their regular experiences within their environment. For example, many of the children often felt afraid as a result of the constant threat from the local gangsters. This was at times reflected in narratives wherein they expressed a view that they were not worthy of being kept safe. These feelings of lack of self-worth were also described to occur when the adults in the community did not take the time to listen to the things which were important to children. They believed that children felt '*bad about themselves*' because they felt undervalued by adults.

Children's reality for young people who resided in their communities was also identified to play a role in the local children's self-constructions. This reality was described to be in conflict with their expectations of an ideal childhood reality, where children were able to experience safety, nurturance, and an ability to play outside. The contrasting reality of the participants was depicted to be one of violence, either as a result of the gangsters and crime outside of the home, or through their personal experiences of abuse in the home. This led to a sense of self constructed around a fear

for their safety. Children in their community did not feel safe walking to school, playing in the parks, or even at times in their own homes. They explained that children would feel better about themselves if adults would treat them with patience and kindness, rather than passing disparaging comments and profanities towards children.

The participants also described the *children's reality* to be related to an unclean physical environment which made children feel bad about themselves. A lack of resources due to the conditions of poverty was additionally tied into the *children's reality*, where they felt that their basic needs often went unmet.

Relationships with family, friends, and 'other people' were identified as factors that could influence the self-concept of the children in their communities. For the participants who had supportive relationships in the home, family played an important role in making the children feel valued and safe, despite the social context of violence and poverty. One participant explained "*children feel happy and good about themselves when they have the things they need and when their parents buy them nice things. When parents swear and hit their children, it makes the children feel bad about themselves*" (Female, age 11). For the participants who felt they had an abusive home environment, there seemed to be a natural shift towards other sources of support outside of the home which helped them to maintain the integrity of the 'self'. For example, several participants mentioned feeling supported by a teacher at school or childcare worker at an after-school programme, while experiencing abuse and neglect in the home: "*The coaches are not rude to children. When children are rude they actually are going to help you and they make kids say sorry*" (Female, age 10). Furthermore, relationships with friends were also perceived to make children feel good about themselves, especially if they treated others well, shared nice things, and played fun games. However, it was pointed out that relationships with friends also had the potential to make children feel bad about themselves when they gossiped, fought, and used foul language.

Implications for intervention programmes

Safety was identified to be an imperative for any children's programme or intervention aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept. The participants explained that safety was crucial for children in their community and that "*good programmes will make sure children are safe*" (Female, age 10).

Social support was the second theme identified as crucial for an intervention programme. This support should be in the form of relationships with elders and peers. The participants described that children need adults for supervision, to play with, to talk to about their problems, to teach them to respect each other and to give advice: “*Children need adults who you can talk your problems to, and if someone did something to you at school, you can tell an adult, and if something happened to you, you can run to an adult and tell what happened to you (Female, age 11).*” Relationships with other peers were identified as important, especially if these were formed around positive activities and behaviours. Having friends to participate in positive activities with was also identified as important for the development of a self-concept constructed around prosocial behaviours, rather than one around crime and other unhealthy behaviours such as drugs and alcohol use.

The next essential component identified by the participants as essential for intervention programmes were the creation of *opportunities for learning and experiencing new things*. The participants identified these opportunities to include writing, painting, drawing, dancing, singing, surfing, life skills, and homework: “*kids feel happy when a teacher teaches them new things*” (Male, age 10). They also identified the ability to experience new places and activities outside of the community to be important, especially for children to develop a sense of happiness and hope for their future. The opportunity to participate in *fun activities* was also identified to be a key component of an intervention programme. These activities included games, play, sports, art, music, and the opportunity to move around safely.

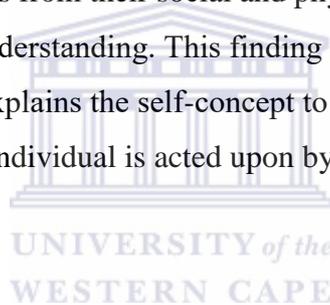
Lastly the participants mentioned the importance of programme interventions to assist children with the provision of their *basic needs*. They explained that when children do not have their basic needs met, they often feel bad about themselves or ashamed: “*When children do not have the things they need they feel bad about themselves, like when they do not have shoes for school*” (Male, age 11). The participants identified their basic needs to include uniforms and supplies for school, food, a bed to sleep in, and safety.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore children’s perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept. The Children’s Delphi technique was utilised within the

child participation framework wherein children are recognized as the knowledgeable experts on matters relating to their lives. Through their engagement in the Delphi, the participants had the opportunity to represent a population (children in poverty) who are often excluded from the decision-making and planning processes around issues regarding their lives and their well-being. The participants identified the self-concept of children to be influenced by the *children's reality*, *feelings*, and *relationships*. The participants' suggestions for intervention programmes included a focus on *safety*, *social support*, *opportunities for learning and for fun* and *basic needs*, all of which formed the ideal environment to nurture a healthy self-concept.

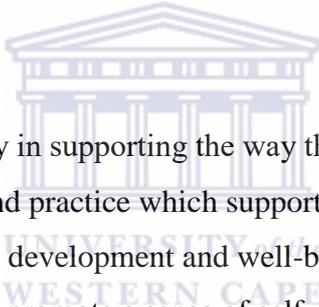
The *children's reality* was described by the participants in connection to their social relationships, spatial environment, and their affective experiences. This reality often provided the participants with conflicting messages which challenged or distorted their self-integrity. This appeared to be the result of the inconsistent messages from their social and physical environment which became internalized as a means of self-understanding. This finding is in accordance with Cooley's 'looking glass self theory' (1902) which explains the self-concept to be shaped as a reflection of a person's social environment. The way an individual is acted upon by others becomes internalized as a means of knowing the self.



Another example of the conflicting messages was related to the physical infrastructure. While the participants mentioned beautiful spaces such as gardens to make children feel good about themselves, they also mentioned the dirty spaces in the community that contributed towards feelings of shame. The participants' experiences of violence in the outdoor spaces, where they felt children should be able to play, posed a barrier to their ability to form a meaningful place-identity within their community. The importance of place-identity on children's self-concept development is further supported by the research of Tuan (1997) and Ellis (2005). According to Tuan (1997), place is defined to be a source of security, meaning, belonging, and identity which is facilitated through meaningful relationships made possible through bonds to a space. Ellis (2005) further described place to be a means through which people construct an identity. Although the children in this study were residing within conditions of poverty, this did not necessarily result in an unhealthy self-concept. Similarly, Proshanky and colleagues (1983) emphasized how living in a poor physical space does not necessarily contribute towards a negative place-identity if it leads to positive cognitions around a social context which are rewarding and positive for the individual. In the

current study, the participants' reality within a space characterised by violence, allowed them to form meaningful relationships constructed around their strategies for survival, which led to a collective place-identity based on their unique experience as children within their communities.

It was further evident how the participants found ways of creating their own meaningful spaces within their communities, despite the lack of spaces formally designated for children. These spaces included community centres, schools, parks and beaches, and the homes of family and friends where the children created their own opportunities and spaces for play. The act of actively 'seeking out' and creating meaningful spaces formed a means through which they preserved their self-integrity within an environment which threatened their safety. This aligns with the research of Rogers et al. (2012) and Noble-Carr (2013) which supported the importance of meaning-making processes for nurturing a healthy self-concept in the face of adverse social and environmental conditions.



The participants' emphasis on play in supporting the way they thought and felt about themselves is consistent with current research and practice which supports play as essential for the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development and well-being of children (Gray, 2011, Milteer et al., 2012). Play has been shown to promote a sense of self-efficacy and self-control and to contribute towards emotional regulation, social intelligence, and connectedness (Gray, 2011). For the participants in the current study, the combination of community violence, a lack of infrastructure for outdoor play (such as playgrounds and parks) and a lack of safe natural spaces (Adams & Savahl, 2016) all limit their opportunities for play. It is axiomatic that programmes aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept should take into consideration the value of both structured activities which facilitate learning and unstructured forms of play, or in other words play which is structured by the children themselves (Miltier et al., 2012). Through unstructured play, children decide what they would like to do while simultaneously receiving the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits which could also support the formation of a healthy self-concept (Miltier et al., 2012).

Aligned with prior research on children's self-concept (see Demaray et al., 2009, McMuraay, 2010, Kenny & McEachern, 2009) the availability of social support was identified to have an influence on

the way the children thought and felt about themselves and consequently their behaviour. They identified family, teachers, peers, and other adults in the community as sources of social support. The participants expressed a need for adults to be there to play with children, to talk to them about their problems, teach them new things, and to keep them safe. They also explained the importance of having peers who were supportive when they had a problem. If the children were unable to find this support within a healthy and safe setting, they would seek this elsewhere, such as within a gang or amongst peers who participated in potentially harmful activities.

An additional recommendation provided by the participants was that intervention programmes should consider the provision of basic needs. The children pointed out that the lack of basic material resources due to their impoverished living conditions contributed to feelings of shame, low self-worth and negatively affected their sense of dignity. The provision of basic material resources would form a buffer against these feelings of shame and would make the children feel valued because they would have the material necessities for their day to day survival, including clothes, food, and supplies for school. The provision of basic needs and material resources has been found to be key aspects of children's well-being (September & Savahl, 2009).

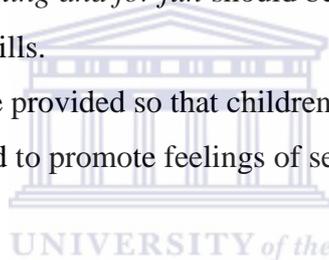
The critical finding of the study was the recommendation that intervention programmes must place the children's safety as a priority. This finding is especially relevant within the specific South African context as well as other communities throughout the world where high levels of community violence greatly affect children's opportunities for safety. The larger issue of community safety should be considered in combination with individual and organizational practices which promote a safe environment for children. The Delphi participants recommended addressing this issue through increasing adult supervision in spaces which could otherwise be dangerous for children and through the creation of more safe spaces within the community, such as after-school programmes and community centres.

Conclusion

The study provided a contribution towards an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by children in their communities and towards the identification of potential solutions for promoting a healthy self-concept. The study further highlights the importance of engaging children in

collaborative participatory research processes. An essential part of this process is delineating a clear strategy for how the research findings will translate into meaningful outcomes. It is recommended that the Children's Delphi technique be used for facilitating this process. An additional advantage of the use of the Children's Delphi in this study is that it appeared to benefit the self-concept of the participants, especially through engaging the young people in a meaningful way and through the development of new skills. In conclusion, the final recommendations for developing an intervention include:

- (1) *Children's Safety* must be placed as a priority when it comes to the planning and execution of an intervention programme.
- (2) *Social support* in the form of caring family members, positive peer groups, older youth, and other adults such as teachers and youth care workers should be provided.
- (3) *Opportunities for learning and for fun* should be equally available for children to develop their social skills.
- (4) *Basic needs* should be provided so that children can have access to the resources for their daily survival and to promote feelings of self-worth and social inclusion.



A key challenge of the children's Delphi was ensuring that the advice provided by the children was taken seriously when it came to the planning and implementation of intervention programmes. The collaboration with the local NGOs and schools assisted with this process. The findings were shared at parent-teacher meetings and provided a valuable contribution to the organisations' programme curriculum. Building trust with the participants through pro-longed engagement within the community further contributed towards creating an environment where the children felt comfortable to participate in an open and meaningful way. It is recommended that research focused on investigating various aspects of children's subjective well-being consider using the Children's Delphi technique as a methodological framework. It advances the notion that children are the authentic knowers and authoritative experts of their lives, offers a structured framework for the meaningful inclusion of children's views in research, and thus aligns to Fattore, Mason & Watson's (2012) epistemological position that children be located centrally in research that affects their lives.

4. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided a contribution towards an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by children within the participating communities and towards the identification of potential solutions for promoting a healthy self-concept. The chapter further highlighted the importance of engaging children in collaborative participatory research processes through the use of the Delphi method.

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CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

1. Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’ within two urban impoverished communities in the Western Cape, South Africa. Within this process the study aimed to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments were manifested within children’s discourses. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the implications of the children’s perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept. The study was conducted through three sequential phases; (1) systematic review (Article 1), (2) child participation research (Article 2 & 3), and (3) intervention programme development (Article 4). Within the 2nd and 3rd phases of the study, the child participation model was applied throughout the research process, including the sampling, data collection methods, analysis stages and within the ethical guidelines. The following section will discuss the key findings of each study and the implications for research and practice related to children’s self-concept and well-being.

2. Phase 1: Systematic Review

2.1. Article 1: *A systematic review of children’s construction of the self: Implications for children’s subjective well-being*

The overarching aim of Article 1 was to provide a systematic review of existing empirical studies focused on understanding the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the ‘self’. In the absence of systematic reviews, this study hoped to fill this gap in international discourse on children’s self-concept. It was decided to include the systematic review as the initial phase of the research process for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the systematic review is at the core of evidence-based practice in the medical, health, and social sectors, with a usefulness which promotes the development of practices, interventions, and services based on the best available knowledge (Long & Godfrey, 2002). Additionally, the systematic review method is an efficient way to become familiar with the best available research evidence for a focused research question (Garg et al. 2008). The review therefore provided a strong foundation of current evidence to inform the sequential phases of the study.

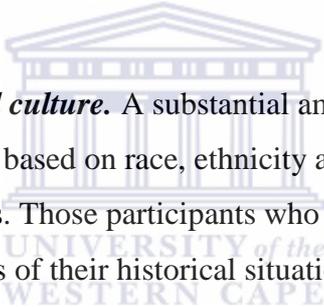
An article search and appraisal yielded 38 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Within these articles, six central thematic categories emerged as the key influences on children's constructions of the self. These include multidimensionality, discursive practices, socio-environmental conditions, oppression & marginalisation, culture, and social support.

Multidimensionality. The first common theme which emerged from the studies was the multidimensional nature of the self which was situation specific and fluid. The studies showed the variety of influences on a child's self-development, including culture, environmental and structural conditions, developmental processes and social interactions, all of which contributed towards distinct self-concept domains. These domains included global, academic, racial, ethnic, gender, athletic, and collective selves which often overlapped with the other domains largely dependent upon the specific socio-cultural situation. The young people in the studies often created different identities in different contexts and could show an inflated self-concept in one domain simultaneously with a negative self-concept in another. Culture and age were additionally highlighted to influence both conflictual and changing notions of the self.

Discursive practices. Various forms of discursive practices were emphasized to play a central role in the meaning making processes surrounding children's self-concept within many of the studies. These studies view the self to be constructed through discourse. For example, language, specifically in the form of talk with others, was a means through which the participants made sense of themselves and their social world. The findings additionally supported the meaning-making process of narrative identity development to occur through the reflection of past events which became integrated into the self-concept through discourse. A large portion of the studies supported the process of self-conceptualization to be driven through narratives, emphasising the ways in which children continuously created and reconfigured their self-concept within their discourses. While narratives were the main tools adolescents utilised for their self-development, preschool-age children were shown to use avenues such as art and play to assist them in their self-constructions (See Ahn & Filipenko, 2007, Gernhardt et al., 2014, Moss, 2009, Welch-Ross, 1999).

Socio-environmental conditions. Socio-environmental conditions were presented in the majority of the studies to have a strong influence on a child's self-concept. Conditions such as poverty and a

lack of social infrastructure in the neighbourhood placed limits on the participants' access to vital resources for constructing a healthy self-concept. For example, Timberlake (1998) demonstrated how children living in poverty, who were able to make sense of the self in connection to their social situation of homelessness, had higher levels of subjective well-being. Anagostopolous et al. (2006) further discussed how the negative self-internalisation of the views of others on a minority's ethnic group could lead to a disruption in psychosocial well-being, specifically in the form of shame and self-hatred. While many young people were faced with negative interactions within their environment, they seemed to resort to various means of coping in order to preserve their sense of self. For example, the participants in the study by Timberlake (1994) placed a great amount of energy into constructing a mental representation of the self as valued and competent in order to combat the negative self-messages associated with homelessness. For some participants, preserving their self-integrity meant discounting the self-domains which they did not excel in, such as an academic self, while clinging to the more positive domains.

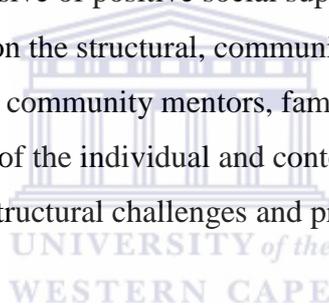


Oppression, marginalisation, and culture. A substantial amount of evidence supported conditions of oppression and marginalisation based on race, ethnicity and gender to have a strong influence on the self-concept of the participants. Those participants who were able to make sense of their circumstances, who had awareness of their historical situation as a marginalised group, and who were able to access adequate social support, were seen to have more positive outcomes in self-concept development. Closely tied to the theme of oppression, culture posed a notable influence on the participants' conceptualisations of the self. Many of the participants throughout the systematic review struggled to overcome conditions of oppression, internalising negatively the perceptions from the dominant culture as a reflection of the self. This was especially evident within the studies which included ethnic minority or previously disadvantaged participants. Prejudice and racism within these studies placed the participants in situations where they had to negotiate their self-concept against social mainstream messages of their racial or cultural inferiority. While some children responded through a strong prideful racial or cultural identity, others appeared to struggle with feelings of shame and self-hatred. Academic self-concept was additionally affected by racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes (See De Haan et al., 2010; Lim, 2008; Roth, 2006).

Social Support. The final thematic category which emerged from the studies is that of social support. Across the studies, social networks were revealed to be a key influence on both a positive

and negative self-concept for the study participants. Forms of social support included family, peers, adults in the community, mentors, coaches, and social service providers. Children who lived in conditions of poverty, especially those faced with high levels of community and domestic violence, were particularly affected as the resources available for a healthy self-development were limited. Poverty and oppression, however, did not necessarily result in a negative self-concept. Several studies amongst children within impoverished communities revealed that many of the participants constructed a healthy sense of self, despite oppressive conditions. This was often influenced by their immediate social interactions.

The implications of the systematic review point to the importance of considering the self-concept as being a crucial component of children's subjective well-being. These activities must look to the contextual meaning-making processes which surround the self-identity of young people. The interventions should also be inclusive of positive social support networks. These networks are especially beneficial if available on the structural, community, and individual levels and range from social service providers, teachers, community mentors, family members, and peers. Additionally, interventions should be inclusive of the individual and contextual issues influencing children's self-concept including coping skills, structural challenges and proximal economic and social resources.



3. Phase 2: Child participation

The next phase of the study included two separate studies which utilised a child participation framework. The overall design of the studies was participatory with various methods used to ground the research process in the values and principles of child participation. A critical component of the design was the development of a child reference group which consisted of 10 child participants, selected from the participating communities, who served as co-researchers and consultants. The engagement of children in reference groups is premised on the belief in children as competent social actors and experts with valuable insights which may be different than adults (Moore et al, 2015). While research using participatory methodologies with children has grown in recent years, Moore (2015) makes the essential point that “there has been little discussion within the research field as to how children and young people may meaningfully and actively participate in co-reflective activities such as reference groups (p. 2).”

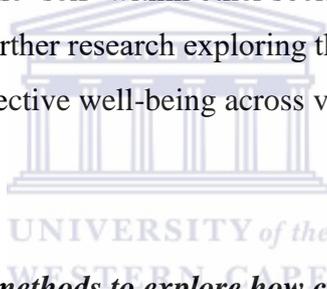
In addition to the child reference group participants, multiple groups of children from each community had the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues affecting their self-concept and were provided with various avenues for communication, including focus groups, Photovoice, community mapping, drawing, and writing activities.

3.1. Article 2: *Children's discursive constructions of the 'self'*

Article Two utilized a child participation framework to explore children's discursive constructions of and meanings assigned to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. Within this process the study aimed to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments were manifested within children's discourses. Eight focus group discussions were conducted amongst fifty-four children between the ages of nine to twelve years. Thematic and discourse analysis were used to analyse the findings. The themes of childhood, social connectedness, and children's spaces were identified as key influences on children's self-concept. Four underlying discourses emerged within the themes as central to the participant's self-constructions. These included; (1) '*forfeited childhood,*' (2) '*vulnerability and helplessness,*' (3) '*preserving the integrity of the self,*' and (4) '*opportunities for escape.*'

In accordance with Stryker and Burke's identity theory (2000), Mead's self-object theory ([1934] 1967), and the social cultural self theories (see Luria, 1994; Vygotsky, [1933] 1994; Adams & Markus, 2004), the responses of the participants revealed the self to be multidimensional, dynamic, and fluid. Additionally, the ability to nurture a healthy self-concept was connected to the participants' psychosocial functioning and subjective well-being. Conditions of poverty, especially where there were limited spaces for safety, were revealed to have an adverse impact on the way in which the participants constructed and assigned meaning to the self. The oppressive and violent conditions of Apartheid continued to affect the communities and limited the opportunities of the participants to the essential resources to nurture a healthy and stable self-concept. For the participants in this study, safety was revealed to be a non-negotiable aspect of a stable self. This is in accordance with prior research amongst adolescents in the Western Cape, where the discourse around safety emerged as a '*non-negotiable*' component of their well-being (Savahl et al., 2015).

The discourses which emerged throughout the focus group discussions revealed the self-concept to be closely connected to the participants' experiences within their sociocultural environment. For example, the discourses of a '*forfeited childhood*' and '*vulnerability and helplessness*' reflected the potentially detrimental influence which structural and social inequalities could have on the participants' self-concept, especially regarding how structural inequalities limited the resources available for a healthy self-construction. This highlights a need for further research and practice to work towards understanding and addressing the impact of structural and social inequities. The discourses of '*preserving the integrity of the self*' and '*opportunities for escape*' shed light on the individual characteristics and community resources which allowed children to cope and maintain a positive self-concept within suboptimal circumstances. Although the small sample size was valuable in providing in-depth knowledge of the participants' self-constructions, it is limited in its ability to broaden the findings as a representative sample of the community or of children residing within other contexts. It is recommended that further research be conducted on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within other social contexts and across age groups. Finally, it is recommended that further research exploring the relationship between children's self-concept, and its influence on subjective well-being across various sociocultural contexts be conducted.

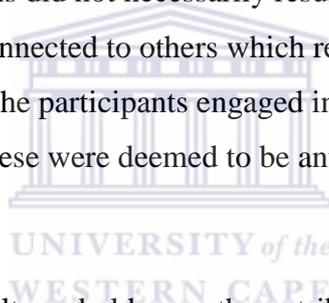


3.2. Article 3: *The use of visual methods to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self'*

This study aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape in South Africa utilising the data collection methods of Photovoice and community maps amongst 54 participants between the ages of 9 to 12. Feelings of safety, social connectedness, and children's spaces all played a central role in the way in which the participants constructed and assigned meaning to the 'self.' A sense of safety was not only expressed to be a 'non-negotiable' for the participants' well-being, but a 'non-negotiable' for a stable self. This key finding resonates with those of a qualitative study conducted by Savahl et al. (2015) who found 'personal safety' and a 'stable self' as 'non-negotiable' components of adolescents' well-being. In the current study, the lack of safety resulted in feelings of chaos, anger, and sadness and compromised the participants' sense of self-worth, especially as they compared themselves to their idealized child identity constructed around the ability to be cared for and to play safely. Although the majority of the participants portrayed violence in a negative manner, others justified its use as a means of gaining social and economic capital. This is in accordance with the

research by Parkes (2007) which portrayed violence for young people in South Africa to carry multiple meanings which resulted in multiple consequences. In the current study such meanings were apparent in the multiple self-constructions formed around the participants' experiences and understandings of violence.

In addition to the 'non-negotiable' need for safety, social support played a crucial role in the development of a sense of self. Research has shown social support to contribute towards a healthy self-development in the face of adverse environmental circumstances (Timberlake, 1994). Support in the form of accepting relationships has been shown to contribute towards self-growth and feelings of security and freedom (Cockle, 1994). The existence of role models who young people can identify with could also contribute towards a sense of hope in relationship to one's future self (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). In this study, the availability of social support contributed towards a positive sense of self, although this did not necessarily result in positive behaviour. Friends allowed the participants to feel socially connected to others which resulted in feelings of happiness and acceptance. The activities which the participants engaged in with their friends were influential in their self-constructions, even if these were deemed to be anti-social.



The availability of supportive adults and older youth contributed towards feelings of self-worth and a sense of self-efficacy. Abusive adults and older youth, on the other hand, contributed towards feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, where the participants' size and social status prevented them from being able to defend themselves or to change their situation. This was reflected in both the maps and the photos of the participants, where there appeared to be a conflict between the people in close proximity who supported the self and those who compromised it. This provides implications for intervention programmes to assist children in developing supportive relationships with peers and adults connected to healthy behaviours.

The participants' self-identity was also expressed to be closely linked to the spaces where they regularly engaged. Ellis (2005) described place to be significantly seen as a means through which people construct an identity. Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminhoff (1983) further supported this notion within the theory of place-identity, defined as the subjective sense of self which is conceptualized not only through one's social relationships but through one's relationships to the

various physical spaces that define a person's day-to-day life. Self-identity growth is therefore related to the development of a meaningful place-identity. This was evident in the participants' photos, maps, and discussions, where they commonly spoke about themselves in relation to the meaningful spaces where they preferred to spend their time. Safe spaces, green and clean spaces in the community were valued by the participants and made them feel good about themselves and connected to their area. Dirty spaces had the opposite effect and contributed towards feelings of shame and a sense of being unrecognized by the adults who were responsible for making decisions regarding the community infrastructure.

Although space and place contributed towards the development of the self, the participants viewed their day to day spaces to be controlled by the adults. Ataöv & Hader (2006) found similar responses amongst street children in Turkey. They concluded that the public space often marginalized children and that their inclusion was imperative in the research, planning, and management of the public space. Their research highlighted the propensity to play which children had in any space sufficient enough to meet their needs, although this was often obstructed by adults. The participants in the current study expressed their desire for adults to take children seriously and to recognize their contribution towards society. This recognition would allow the participants to develop a sense of self as valued and capable members of the community. In accordance with the international and national legislation on children's rights, this meant including children in decisions related to their lives and providing them with the activities which the children felt were important. Amongst their responses was a need to prioritize the construction of safe spaces within the public sphere for children to play. The ability to play was not only an important contributor to the way the children felt about themselves, but also provided them with the opportunity to make sense of themselves, their abilities and potentialities.

In conclusion, the availability of safety, social support, and nurturing children's spaces all contributed towards the ideal social environment for fostering a child's self-development. Central to the development of a healthy and stable self-concept was the requirement for a sense of safety and security in the broader social environment. Experiences of violence and abuse posed a threat to the participants' sense of self, while experiences of love and support from others within a safe space helped buffer the negative impact of violence on the self. The meanings assigned to the participants' day-to-day spaces contributed towards their sense of self, especially in the form of

their sense of place-identity. This provides implications for intervention programmes aimed at improving child well-being to take into consideration activities aimed at improving a child's self-concept. This includes the construction of safe spaces for children to play, to learn, and to form meaningful relationships. Due to the contextual nature of the self, further research is necessary to understand the unique ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within other communities and spaces. Additional research is also necessary for the development and the evaluation of programmes aimed at improving the self-concept of children.

4. Phase 3: Children's Programme Intervention development

4.1. Article 4: *Developing a programme for promoting children's self-concept and well-being: a child participation study*

Article four is premised on the notion that intervention programmes aimed at improving children's well-being should be inclusive of activities which promote children's self-concept. Using a child participation framework, this study aimed to explore children's perceptions of the nature and content of intervention programmes aimed at improving children's self-concept within two impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The Delphi technique was followed with a group of ten children between the ages of 10 and 12 years who were considered to be the experts on matters affecting their lives. The participants identified the factors which influence a child's self-concept to include; *childhood reality, feelings, and relationships*. The participants' suggestions for intervention programmes included a focus on *safety, social support, opportunities for learning and for play, and basic needs*.

Childhood reality was described by the participants in connection to their social relationships, spatial environment, and their affective experiences. This reality often provided the participants with conflicting messages which challenged or distorted their self-integrity. This appeared to be the result of the inconsistent messages from their social and physical environment which became internalized as a means of self-understanding. This finding is in accordance with Cooley's 'looking glass self theory' (1902) which explains the self-concept to be shaped as a reflection of a person's social environment. The way an individual is acted upon by others becomes internalized as a means of knowing the self. For example, one participant mentioned feeling supported by a childcare

worker at an after-school programme, while experiencing abuse and neglect in the home. This left the participant feeling insecure about herself and her value.

Another example of the conflicting messages was the physical infrastructure. While the participants mentioned beautiful spaces such as gardens to make children feel good about themselves, they also mentioned the dirty spaces in the community to contribute towards feelings of shame. The participants' experiences of violence in the outdoor spaces, where they felt children should be able to play, posed a barrier to their ability to form a meaningful place-identity within their community. The importance of place-identity on a child's self-concept development is further supported by the research of Tuan (1997) and Ellis (2005). According to Tuan (1997), place is defined to be a source of security, meaning, belonging, and identity which is facilitated through meaningful relationships made possible through bonds to a space. Ellis (2005) further described place to be a means through which people construct an identity. Although the children in this study were residing within conditions of poverty, this did not necessarily result in an unhealthy self-concept. Similarly, Prashanky and colleagues (1983) emphasized how living in a poor physical space does not necessarily contribute towards a negative place-identity if it leads to positive cognitions around a social context which are rewarding and positive for the individual. In the current study, the participants' reality within a violent space allowed them to form meaningful relationships constructed around their strategies for survival, which led to a collective place-identity based on their unique experience as children within their communities. It was further evident that the participants found ways of creating their own meaningful spaces within their communities, despite the lack of spaces formally designated for children, or were able to seek out supportive spaces such as after-school programmes, the school, and the home. Seeking out and creating meaningful places for the participants formed a means through which they preserved their self-integrity within an environment which threatened their safety. This is aligned with the research of Rogers et al. (2012) and Noble-Carr (2013) which supported the importance of meaning-making processes for nurturing a healthy self-concept in the face of adverse social and environmental conditions.

The participants' emphasis on play in supporting the way they thought and felt about themselves is consistent with current research which supports play to be essential for the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development, and well-being of children (Gray, 2011, Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). Play has been shown to promote a sense of self-efficacy and self-control and to contribute

towards emotional regulation, social intelligence, and connectedness (Gray, 2011). The findings of Glenn et al., (2012) presented valuable insight into the resiliency which children created which was driven by their inclination for play. For the participants in the current study, the combination of community violence, a lack of infrastructure for play (such as playgrounds and parks) and a lack of safe natural spaces all posed a barrier for play to take place. The high rates of violence in the communities limited the ability for the participants to engage in outdoor play, even in the spaces (such as parks and playgrounds) which were designated for their use.

Aligned with prior research on child self- concept (see Demaray et al., 2009; McMurray, 2010; Kenny & McEachern, 2009) the availability of social support was identified to have an influence on the way the children thought and felt about themselves and consequently their behaviour. The participants identified this support to encompass family, teachers, peers, older youth, and other adults in the community. The participants expressed a need for adults to be there to play with children, to talk to them about their problems, teach them new things, and to keep them safe. They also explained the importance of having peers who were fun, nice, and supportive when they had a problem. If the children were unable to find this support within a healthy and safe setting, they would seek the support elsewhere, such as within a gang or amongst peers who participated in unhealthy activities (i.e. drug use, bunking school, violence).

A key finding of the study was the recommendation that intervention programmes must place children's safety as a priority. The larger issue of community safety should be tackled in combination with individual and organizational practices which promote a safe environment for children. This could mean increasing adult supervision in spaces which could otherwise be dangerous for children to play alone. Interventions aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept should also take into consideration the value of both structured activities which facilitate learning and unstructured forms of play, or in other words play which is structured by the children themselves (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). Through unstructured play, children decide what they would like to do while simultaneously receiving the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits which could also support the formation of a healthy self-concept (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012).

The final recommendation provided by the participants was that intervention programmes support the children's basic needs. This would help form a buffer against the feelings of shame which many children had due to their impoverished living conditions and also make the children feel valued because they had the things which they needed for their day to day survival.

In conclusion, the Delphi technique provided a valuable contribution towards an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by children in their communities and towards the identification of potential solutions for promoting a healthy self-concept. The study could benefit from further research which utilizes a larger community sample to gather information regarding the local children's perspectives for intervention programmes aimed at promoting the self-concept. Due to the contextual nature of the study and the self-concept, further research is necessary for the development of interventions programmes aimed at improving the self-concept and well-being of children residing within other communities and contexts.

5. Discussion of Key Findings of Articles

This section provides a discussion of the key findings of the four articles and their theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for research and practice related to children's self-concept and well-being. The key findings include the influence of contextual realities, social networks, and individual characteristics on the ways in which children construct and assign meaning to the 'self.' The section further discusses the value in using a child participation framework for eliciting essential information regarding issues related to children's self-concept and well-being.

The nature and content of the self-concept

Collectively the studies contributed towards a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and content of children's self-concept - specifically, an understanding of children's self-concept as multidimensional, situational and fluid, and growth-oriented. What was additionally notable was how the nature and content of the self was constrained by the contextual realities. This will be discussed at a later stage.

Multidimensional nature of the self. Consistently throughout the studies, the self was described to be a multidimensional construct consisting of multiple interacting domains. These domains often overlapped and could be divided into smaller sub-domains. For example, a participant could identify himself in relation to his athletic abilities (athletic self), which could be divided into an understanding of the self as a soccer player and a surfer, with different meanings assigned to each of these domains. This is in accordance with the construct of the self as defined by the identity theorists, who regard the self as a multifaceted and organised construct (Burke, 1991, Stryker, 1980). The domains of the self identified by the participants included multiple socially influenced selves such as a physical self, academic self, athletic self, gendered self, and cultural self. Additionally, the participants referred to themselves in terms of their sense of self-worth, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

At times the participants' revealed conflicting self-domains, where one area of the self could influence the self-concept positively while simultaneously having a negative effect within other social situations. For example, some of the participants adopted a positive sense of self while attending an afterschool programme, while feeling bad about themselves while at school, home, or within other social situations. Similar findings were found within the systematic review component of the study. For example, De Haan et al. (2010) found students to resist identities which were not seen as being in accordance with their group, reflected within the academic and the social discourse of the groups. While ethnic minority youth demonstrated a lower self-concept when it came to academics, this was not reflected in their social self, where they felt very confident amongst their peers.

Situational and fluid nature of the self. Closely related to the multidimensional nature of the self, the self-concept of the participants was often described to be situation-specific and fluid across various social situations. For example, one participant discussed feeling good and happy about himself when he surfs, while feeling angry in other situations when he was not surfing. Another participant explained a similar feeling regarding his attendance at an after-school programme. While at the programme, he felt very confident in himself and his abilities as he associated himself with the specific social environment. This feeling, however, changed when he was not attending the programme. This finding is in accordance with Stryker & Burke's (2000) identity theory, which explains a person to adopt as many selves as connected social groups. The situational and fluid

nature of the self was further reflected in the behavioural patterns of the participants, which changed across social situations, largely connected to their situational specific self. For example, while in an after-school programme environment, where there was a culture of pro-social behaviour, the participants tended to change their behaviour accordingly, while adopting more aggressive and anti-social behaviours within other social contexts where these behaviours were the norm. Stryker (1980) described this as identity salience, or the ability of an identity to carry over across social situations. According to Stryker, the greater the connectedness a person has to an identity within a certain social group, the more likely it is for a person to experience the salience of that identity, meaning a greater likelihood the identity will be drawn upon in various situations.

This shift in behaviour could be further understood as a defence mechanism which the participants utilised in order to ensure their protection within their various social environments. For example, the participants may be able to adopt peaceful and respectful behaviour patterns while at an after-school programme, where there is a culture of respect and adequate adult supervision to ensure children handle conflict in a safe way. However, this type of behaviour may further victimise the participants within other community settings, such as while walking home on the street, where the use of violence may be a necessity for survival. The male participants especially recognised their involvement in violence as a means of gaining respect amongst their peers and ensuring their personal safety.

Within the systematic review, the participants' self-concept associated with their cultural and racial groups also shifted across situations, where the participants could feel proud to be a part of their cultural group within their communities, while experiencing feelings of shame outside of the communities where they were fed messages amongst the dominant group regarding their racial or cultural inferiority (Johnson, 2014; Kicket-Tucker, 2009; Kenny & McEachern, 2009). In support of Fanon's theory of racial domination, these messages became internalised as a means of knowing the self. In the study by Johnson (2014), a sense of consciousness regarding the participants' racial and cultural marginalisation allowed for them to make meaning out of their current situation and thus to preserve their sense of self-worth.

Growth-oriented nature of the self. While the self was described to move across social situations, it was additionally described to move towards growth and towards self-preservation. This finding is further supported by humanistic and existential theories of the self. Rogers (1961) conceptualized a person to have a tendency to move away from a self that he is not or from an image of what he “ought to be,” or what one’s culture or social environment expects him to be, towards a more genuine self. As a person moves from a self as defined by others, he moves towards self-growth and self-actualization. This movement was especially evident amongst the participants who experienced situations which challenged their self-worth (i.e. abuse, neglect, violence, racial and cultural devaluation), who were able to maintain a positive self-concept despite adverse circumstances.

Contextual realities

In addition to the nature and content of the self-concept, the study further illuminated the influence which contextual realities have on the way in which children construct and assign meaning to the self. Within the child participation studies, this was related to the sociohistorical situation of the communities, including the history of structural racism and the socio-cultural understandings and values assigned to children and ‘childhood.’ The oppressive conditions continued to affect the communities through the continuity of structural inequalities, community violence, and poverty. This reality limited the resources which were available for the participants to construct a healthy self-concept and often manifested itself in violent and aggressive behaviour. This behaviour could be further understood through a black existential philosophy lens, which explores the lived realities of race and racism from the viewpoint of people who are black, whose racial worth has been historically devalued (Gordon, 1997). The writings of the black existential philosopher Frantz Fanon (1963, 1967) explained the impact of racial domination on the self-concept of the oppressed, challenging the individual’s sense of self-worth and manifesting itself through the perpetuation of violent and aggressive behaviour.

A sense of security and safety within one’s social environment formed the foundation of a stable self-concept and an idealised childhood, which the participants strongly felt they were denied. This sense of safety was compromised as a result of the high levels of community violence which often prevented the children’s access to safe spaces. The ability to play safely was central to the participants’ notion of the child-identity and its absence was reflected in the participants’ self-

concept, especially regarding their sense of worthiness of being kept safe. The poor infrastructure, lack of employment opportunities and poor service delivery further challenged the participants' self-concept, especially when they felt that they did not have the necessary resources for their well-being.

Influence of individual characteristics on the 'self'

While conditions of violence threatened the participants' self-concept, individual characteristics allowed for the participants to preserve their self-integrity despite adverse situations and experiences. This was especially seen through the participants' various coping mechanisms which they utilised within stressful situations. These included playing with friends and with animals, talking with someone, drawing, sewing, praying, surfing, running, using drugs, and smoking. The common defence mechanisms expressed by the participants included desensitization, distraction, fantasy, and adjustment. This further supports the 'sociocultural self model' as described by Adams & Markus (2004) and Stephens et al. (2012) which explains the interdependence of individual characteristics and cultural and structural conditions on an individual's self-construction. While the structural conditions limited the resources available for the participants, these did not inevitably hinder the participants' self-constructions. For example, a number of the participants fantasized about leaving the community to a place which was safer. This fantasy provided them with a sense of hope regarding their situation and assisted them in maintaining a healthy self-concept, especially regarding their future.

Social networks

In addition to a sense of safety, social networks and relationships were central to the way in which the participants' constructed a self. This is in accordance with the self-concept/identity theories of Mead (1967 [1934]), Erikson (1959), Cooley (1902), and Stryker and Burke (2000) which described the self to be formed as a reflection of a person's interactions with his or her social and cultural environment. Violent, neglectful, and abusive relationships were often internalised and reflected negatively upon the self-concept. Supportive and caring relationships, on the other hand, formed a buffer against the conditions of violence and contributed towards positive feelings about the self. The participants' social networks also provided a means through which they constructed a self connected to their immediate peer groups, mentors, and other influential figures within close

proximity. This was also influenced by the activities, both social and anti-social, which they engaged in with their peers. There was especially a tendency for the participants to create a strong connection to a self-concept domain connected to an activity which they were good at or found to be fun.

Study Implications

The implications of the study point to the importance of considering the self-concept as being crucial for children's well-being. These activities must look to the contextual meaning-making processes which surround the self-identity of young people. Current intervention programmes commonly utilise models based on the assumptions of the objective measures of child well-being developed in Western countries. However, *how children feel about themselves* remains on the periphery of the child well-being agenda. This study advances the use of a participatory approach with children for increasing knowledge and understanding around how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two impoverished communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The discourses which emerged throughout the focus group discussions along with the visual data revealed the self-concept to be closely connected to the participants' experiences within their sociocultural environment. Furthermore, the findings shed light on the individual characteristics and community resources which allowed children to cope and maintain a positive self-concept within suboptimal circumstances.

The child participation methodological framework additionally highlights the importance of engaging children in collaborative participatory research processes. Including children's perspectives on issues related to their well-being is increasingly supported by current child research (Casas, 2016, Moore, 2016), however, there remains a gap in the literature which provides children, who are the experts of their lives and experiences, with the opportunity to voice their own perspectives around the nature and content of self-concept intervention programmes. Various avenues were utilised to ground the research in child participation. This included the use of multiple means of data collection, including photography, group discussions, writing, and drawing. This allowed for children to participate through a means best suitable to their preferred forms of communication. Another essential component of the study was the use of the child reference group, who were actively involved as co-researchers throughout the research process. The final, and essential, component of the process was delineating a clear strategy for how the research findings

would translate into meaningful outcomes. The Delphi technique with children was used for facilitating this process. These recommendations should be taken seriously when it comes to the planning and implementation of intervention programmes related to children's well-being. The final recommendations of the children's Delphi participants for programmes aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept included;

- (1) *Children's Safety* must be placed as a priority when it comes to the planning and execution of intervention programmes.
- (2) *Social support* in the form of caring family members, positive peer groups, older youth, and other adults such as teachers and youth care workers should be provided.
- (3) *Opportunities for learning and for fun* should be equally available for children to develop their social skills.
- (4) *Basic needs* should be provided so that children can have access to the resources for their daily survival and to promote feelings of self-worth and social inclusion.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study provides valuable implications for further research and practice related to children's self-concept and well-being. This includes the understanding of the self to be multidimensional, fluid, culturally and historically located, and influenced by social networks, physical resources, and individual characteristics. It is recommended by the Children's Delphi panel that intervention programmes aimed at the promotion of a healthy self-concept to include a focus on *safety, social support, opportunities for learning and for play, and basic needs*. Interventions must also look at the larger structural, community, and cultural factors which marginalize children and leave them with a sense of vulnerability and helplessness. One way to address this is through the recognition of children as citizens whose feelings, ideas, and experiences need to be taken seriously. Furthermore, interventions must focus on creating a culture where children are valued and where they are included in community building processes, especially through the use of participatory methods. More specifically, it is recommended that the development of a child reference group and a children's Delphi be used for this process.

The specific structural inequalities of the context where the research took place cannot be overlooked, as these contribute towards the continuity of violence and poverty within the communities and the barriers towards the creation of safer and more secure environments for the local residents. Although the small sample size was valuable in providing in-depth knowledge of the participants' self-constructions, it is limited in its ability to broaden the findings as a representative sample of the community or of children residing within other contexts. It is recommended that further research be conducted on how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within other social contexts and across age groups. Finally, it is recommended that further research exploring the relationship between children's self-concept, and its influence on subjective well-being across various sociocultural contexts be conducted.

7. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter discussed the key findings of the study which aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the self and the implications for further research and practice related to children's self-concept and well-being. The study further highlighted the value in utilising a child participation framework for eliciting valuable information regarding children's self-concept. This supported the notion of children as competent and valuable research partners and the need for further research related to children's well-being to place the self-concept as a crucial component of the children well-being agenda.

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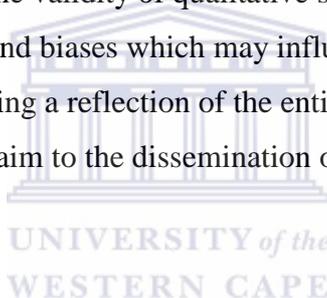
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CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

1. Introduction

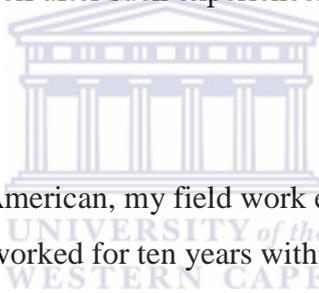
This chapter provides a reflection of the research process, including the methodological, theoretical, and ethical challenges which arose within the study and how these were addressed. The chapter largely focuses on the use of validity through researcher reflectivity, which was previously explained within the methods chapter to be an essential component of the qualitative research process. The concept of validity in qualitative studies is used as a means of demonstrating the credibility of the research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and seeks to determine if the research really measured what it intended to measure (Golafshani, 2002). While validity in quantitative research seeks to ensure the replicability or repeatability of the results, the validity in qualitative research is often measured in terms of quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2002.) The use of reflexivity is essential for the validity of qualitative studies because it allows the researcher to disclose assumptions, beliefs, and biases which may influence the study. This chapter aims to serve this purpose through providing a reflection of the entire research process from the conceptualization of the research aim to the dissemination of the research findings.



2. Research Conceptualisation

The research project was initially conceptualised through both my theoretical engagement and practical experience within the field of social, clinical, and community psychology. It was during my Master's studies, where my degree focused on both clinical and community psychology, that the topic of the self-concept especially sparked my interest. While both disciplines placed a great amount of value in the notion of the 'self' and the 'self-concept,' it appeared that across the two disciplines, there remained a gap in the literature regarding the meanings which children themselves assigned to the 'self' and how intervention programmes could successfully contribute towards a healthy self-concept. Although the research and theory supported the self-concept to be a key component of the psychosocial development and well-being of children, it remained unclear how a healthy self-concept could be successfully promoted. Furthermore, the literature was not fully explaining what I was experiencing regarding children's self-concept through my practical experiences working as a therapist trainee and a community worker with children who were residing in communities with high levels of community violence and poverty. The majority of the research supporting the theories of the self and the self-concept took place within Western countries

and amongst middle class participants, with very little to be said about how children were constructing a self within an African context. The psychological literature often pathologized children in poverty, theorising that violent and neglectful experiences within childhood could severely hinder a healthy self-development (see Dangleish, 2004). Resiliency literature on the other hand, seemed to do the opposite, skimming over the impact of violent and impoverished conditions, the constraints for self-efficacy, and the larger structural issues at play, while focusing on the individual strengths and assets which allowed people to take on a 'healthy' psychological trajectory despite adverse circumstances (see Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The constructionists' view of resilience, on the other hand, argues that resilience is defined by those with the most power in society, whose social discourse influences the mainstream definitions of what is health and what is illness (Ungar, 2004). As I observed the children's reactions to violence, I also began to wonder what constitutes a 'healthy' self-concept within their individual circumstances. Was a child who reacted positively within an abusive home environment functioning in a healthy way? Was it 'unhealthy' to feel bad about the self after such experiences, or was this a normal response to the circumstances?



Although by nationality I am an American, my field work experience took place in both the United States and South Africa, where I worked for ten years within communities challenged by high levels of poverty and violence closely tied to a history of structural oppression and racism. Specifically, within the South African context, where the current study took place, I had been working with young people in several township communities in the Western Cape for five years prior to the initiation of the research. This type of prolonged engagement was another essential validity procedure related to the research methodology. *Prolonged engagement* entails the researcher to stay within the research space for a prolonged period of time (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Prolonged engagement in this study allowed for me as the researcher to build trust within the community, to have a gateway to information which was not easily accessible, and to improve my own perspective and understandings of the participants' views and contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

My work within the communities included providing psychoeducation and counselling in the primary schools, teacher and youth-care worker training, and the facilitation of an after-school programme. During this time, I had the opportunity to access important components of the lives of

the local children. The children spoke often about their daily fears as they faced on-going community and domestic violence. Many of the children who were victimised by the crime in the community or abuse in the home, were further victimised by their peers and even the teachers at their school. Others found comfort in their home life and in having a teacher or friend who cared about them in school. Criminal activity often targeted the young people in the communities. This was revealed through the stories which they shared of being robbed and sometimes beaten by the teenage gangsters on their way to school. They explained the gangsters to be so cruel that they would even beat their grandmother's and use the local children to deal drugs and hide weapons. The lack of law enforcement and social service resources available in the community seemed to further marginalize the children. Some children would expose abuse, including sexual abuse, which would be followed up with by a report to the police and social services, where their cases would often be left unattended. Even children who knew the perpetrator would often not see justice or receive further protection.

As a part of the after-school programme, I was able to organize several outings for the children, such as surfing lessons at the beach, hikes in the mountains, and trips to museums and restaurants in the city. These outings provided me with the opportunity to further observe the children within an environment which was outside of their regular daily routine and community, where they were often met with the harsh judgement of the Western Cape's more affluent class. This consisted not only of 'White' South Africans, but additionally those who were historically classified as 'Black' and 'Coloured' who formed a growing middle class, revealing a shift in the previous ideology of racial superiority from the Apartheid regime to one of class and economic privilege. Examples included strangers hitting the children, verbally abusing them, falsely accusing them of theft, and clinging to their own children with fear as the "street kids" walked by. The reactions of the young people from the township communities varied after these interactions. Some of them would become teary-eyed, while others seemed totally unaffected by this engagement stating that "It's okay, we are used to it. Don't worry about us." I reflected on the theories of resilience and wondered which reactions constituted 'healthy'?

Through this type of engagement with the children, my own assumptions of poverty and childhood were challenged. I became increasingly curious about how these daily interactions were influencing the ways in which children were constructing a self. Was this reality simply accepted as a fact of

life? Did they numb themselves to the violence? How did the children protect their sense of self when surrounded by regular abuse? What selves did these children identify with? Prior research has shown the self-identity to be influenced through one's engagement within their sociocultural environment (see by Hung, Lim, and Jamaludin, 2011; Isom, 2007). Additionally, experiences of violence have been linked to the perpetuation of violent behaviour (Margolin & Gordon, 2000). Based on current social psychological research, I hypothesised the way young people think and feel about themselves in the township communities to be a pivotal component of well-being which must be contextually understood, and that what contributes towards a 'healthy' self-concept must be individually defined. This led to the conceptualisation of the research project around how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape. The only ones who could answer that question were the children themselves. It was therefore decided to make the project as participatory as possible, adopting a child participation model led by a group of children from the participating communities.

3. Methods

This section provides a reflection of the methodological challenges related to the research project.

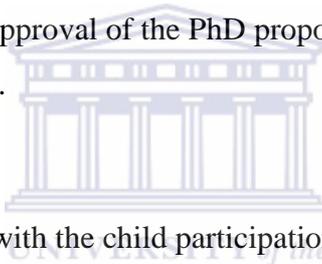


3.1. Child participation

Adopting a child participation framework was a critical methodological consideration for the research project which aimed to capture children's subjective experiences and understandings related to the self amongst children in poverty. Mason & Watson (2014) emphasised child participation as critical for the inclusion of children in research, who have been formerly defined by privileged and powerful adults: "children typically have been at the bottom of the hierarchy of formal knowledge production, with their knowledge excluded or marginalized because they are outside the dominant knowledge production forums, including academic institutions" (p. 2757). It was therefore essential to ground the research as much as possible in the values and principles of child participation. Various participatory methods were used to achieve this, including the development of a child reference group of community participants who served as co-researchers and consultants. This increased the participation of the children through involving them as collaborative research partners throughout the research process. Additionally, multiple groups of children from each community had the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions on issues affecting their self-concept and were provided with various avenues for communication which

included the use of Photovoice, focus group discussions, drawings, writing, and community mapping.

Crivello et al. (2009) makes an essential point that while using various research methods with children, it is important to note that a method is only participatory depending on the way in which it is used (Crivello et al., 2009). Children are often left out of participation processes in research or may participate to various degrees (Crivello et al., 2009). Moore et al. (2016) stresses the importance of providing children with more power and choice in the research process and in demonstrating, through words and actions, the value of their expertise and viewpoints. For research to be fully participatory, the participants should be engaged in every stage of the research process. Although the child participants were included in various stages of the research process from the collection of data, analysis of data, and dissemination of the findings, it was not possible to include the children in the initial design of the research aim, objectives, and methods, as this was a necessary requirement of for the approval of the PhD proposal and university ethical clearance for conducting research with children.



Although these methods assisted with the child participation process, there were additional factors which needed to be taken into consideration. Firstly, as the lead researcher it was essential that my personal viewpoints, values, and principles were aligned with the notion of the child participants as knowledgeable actors (Fattore et al., 2007) and that I adopted a child-focused, rather than an adult-focused, perspective (Morrow, 2009). It is argued that an adult-centric approach to research related to children's lives disempowers children as adult 'experts' make decisions on their behalf without consulting them or including them in the decision-making process (Crivello et al., 2009; Prilleltensky, 2010). To adopt a child-focused approach to the research project, required continuous reflection on my own assumptions regarding the self-concept, childhood, and children in poverty. Many of my assumptions were rooted in my training in clinical psychology, where I was often encouraged to view the child as incomplete and in development rather than appreciating the whole person in the now. Additionally, it is common for the theories within developmental psychology to challenge the meaning-making capacities of middle childhood children. For example, Mead (1932) theorized a child's self to be in development and not complete or organized. The child has no definite character, personality, or self, rather a self which is made up of a series of responses. For example, the responses of infants are not based on meaning-making, but merely adjusting to the

responses of others without experiencing a self. As a person grows older, the self arises through social processes which lead to a more elaborate organization of the self. Erikson (1959) likewise discussed the concept of the self to be in continuity throughout various life domains, with healthy development marked by the integration of the self in adulthood. It was therefore necessary to align my theoretical position with the view of the child as defined by social constructionism and contemporary childhood studies. Social constructionism challenges the way in which psychology and social sciences has marginalised children through the construction of the child as a 'becoming adult' while excluding their voices from knowledge-producing forums (Mason & Watson, 2014). Through a constructionist lens, childhood is understood to be a socially constructed phenomenon. Contemporary Childhood studies further contributes towards an understanding of children as social actors and knowledgeable subjects whose status and rights must be acknowledged (Mason & Watson, 2014).

It was also important that the children participating in the research project benefitted from the process. Child participation research has the potential for a range of benefits for the individual participants, their communities, and the promotion of children's well-being. For example, allowing children to have a serious voice and active role in managing their lives is a resource for healthy development (De Winter, 1999). Participation itself can lead to an increase in subjective well-being. Furthermore, the subjective knowledge identified through child participation can be utilised to gain a deeper understanding of access barriers and to collaborate with children and community members in creating solutions which are culturally and socially relevant for addressing child mental health (Shattell et al., 2008). Although the benefits of participation within this research were not directly measured, they were observed within the group meetings and further reported from the parents and staff of the partnering organisations. For example, the community organisation director in Lavender Hill reported the children in the project to show more confidence in their abilities and to have improvements in their behaviour. The children were also observed to be very happy and excited within the groups, and had approached me several times after the termination of the project about participating in future research projects.

3.2. Participants and sampling

3.2.1. Child reference group

In order to ensure the participation of children within the project and to minimise the power relations which could occur between an adult researcher and child research participants, it was decided to create a child reference group of ten children, one in Khayelitsha (3 boys, 2 girls) and one in Lavender Hill (3 girls, 2 boys) between the ages of nine to twelve years, who would serve as co-researchers and community consultants throughout the qualitative research process, including the focus group discussions, Photovoice, community mapping, and Delphi. Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur (2015) noted the importance of using children's reference groups as a strategy for participation and for co-reflexivity. They specifically point to the usefulness of child reference groups in facilitating the exploration of deeper levels of meaning and interpretation. It was therefore important to ensure the study was as inclusive as possible regarding the participation of the children and that their ideas and opinions were meaningfully incorporated throughout the research process.

Several challenges arose related to the reference groups. One of the challenges was overburdening the children with the research. Since each community had two separate groups of participants, it was decided to have two of the members present at each of the meetings, so that it did not take up too much of their time. Several of the members decided to attend all of the sessions because they enjoyed participating. Two of the members had additional conflicts with sports practice, so were unable to attend all of the sessions. For one of the groups there was a challenge with the power hierarchy in the sessions as reflected in the complaints of the study participants about the child reference group members "bossing around" the other participants. It was useful to task-set the reference group members so that they could be included as much as possible in the research process, including making them responsible for holding the Dictaphone, showing children how to use the cameras, and distributing materials and food to the group. This provided the co-researchers with a sense of self-efficacy and ownership over the process and prevented them from being disruptive towards the research participants. Two of the female members struggled to attend all of the sessions due to expectations to look after younger siblings at home. Two other members had to drop out of the study early because of a conflict with soccer practice. These participants were replaced by two others who were actively engaged throughout the prior phases of the research process. Although in the ideal situation the same participants would be available for all stages of the research process, Moore and colleagues (2016) found that approximately one-quarter of reference group membership to change over the life of the project.

3.2.2. Study participants

Purposive sampling was utilised to select four groups of participants from the local primary schools and community organisations (two groups from each community). The criteria for participation was that the participants had to be; (1) between the ages of 9 to 12, (2) residing in one of the participating communities, (3) had a willingness and time to participate. The children were first approached through the collaborating schools and the community-based organisations, where I visited the children, explained the research study, and asked the children to sign up with the teacher or organisation site manager if they were interested in participation. Although the study initially targeted the ages 10-12, the participants were selected from the grade 5 and grade 6 learners, which included children between the ages of 9 -13. It was then decided to broaden the age group to 9-12 (with the exception of one 13-year-old) in order to accommodate all of the children who were eager to participate within the selected grades. It was also intended to have an equal number of males and females within the groups, this however was challenging for a number of contextual reasons. Firstly, in one of the communities there were more males than females who signed up due to challenges around safety and household obligations. For the other community, one of the groups had more females than males, since the main initiative of the partner organisation was to provide support for local women and girls. Although they had recently opened up their programme to males in the community, there remained more girls interested in the project. The other participating organisation had a disproportionate amount of males who participated because the organization itself attracted more male participants than females. This was reported to be for two reasons; safety walking to the beach where the programme took place and the sport of surfing being more attractive to males within the area.

Other participant challenges included the power dynamics of the group, with children having varying levels of confidence for speaking in the group, although the use of multiple data collection tools assisted with this process. Another challenge was seen in the attendance of the female participants, who at times had to miss the sessions due to obligations at home and also due to issues regarding safety. At times the girls needed to leave early because they had to walk home with older siblings or friends to ensure their safety. Special arrangements were made with the participant's caregivers to transport the children who needed to walk a far distance from the focus group venue. Because of the exciting nature of the research project, many children from the participating schools

and organisations who were not signed up for the project would arrive each day in hopes of being able to participate in the project. Unfortunately, these children were unable to participate because they did not have parental consent and due to the nature of the project which required a small sample size.

3.3. Data collection

In addition to the participants and sampling, several challenges surfaced within the data collection procedures. Due to the varying ages, literacy levels, and other participant characteristics, it was challenging to get all of the participants to participate equally within the sessions. Triangulation was useful for managing this issue. *Triangulation* entails the use of multiple research methods to provide complimentary or contradictory data which informs a fuller picture of the research phenomenon (Morrow, 2001). Creswell and Miller (2000) define triangulation to be “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information in order to form themes or categories in a study (p. 126).” Triangulation can also be a means of gathering a more valid, reliable and diverse construction of the multiple realities which may exist in relation to a research phenomenon (Golafshani, 2002). Triangulation also provided the participants with various means of communicating their thoughts and opinions and allowed them to choose when and how they would like to participate. Triangulation was employed through the three levels of data collection; focus groups, community mapping, and Photovoice.

The visual methods were especially useful for managing the power dynamics of the groups because they allowed for the less confident children to provide their insights through the use of drawings, photos, and writing. Language also posed a challenge during the focus group discussions. Although English was the language used by the researcher, this was the second language of the participants and it was at times challenging for the children to adequately express themselves. The children were instructed to use the language which they felt most comfortable expressing themselves and a community youth & child care worker was present at all discussions to assist with the translation. The translation of the community worker did not always capture the essence of what was being expressed by the child, this was especially apparent amongst the isiXhosa-speaking participants because many phrases in the language did not translate directly into English. In order to ensure that no important data was missed, the focus groups were recorded and the audio was transcribed and translated by two outside translators who were fluent in English, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans.

At times, the content of the discussions became emotionally stimulating for the children, which resulted in the children becoming tearful. It was therefore important to end each session with a fun activity which created a happy environment for the children before closing the session. The researcher had prior training in counselling and also worked closely with a community youth care worker and with a social worker to ensure the emotional safety of the children. All children who experienced emotional discomfort were followed-up with, and several were integrated into existing community programmes where they could receive further support.

The venues and atmosphere posed an additional challenge within the data collection process. It was important to choose a venue and create an atmosphere which would be comfortable for the participants and which eliminated the power differentials between myself as an adult researcher and the child participants. It was decided that the community centres would be used for this purpose. Due to issues around transportation, a school classroom was utilised with one of the groups. A challenge with this group was that during one of the sessions the classroom was not available so the focus group session took place outside on the school playground. Although this provided an informal and relaxed atmosphere for the group to take place, it was also distracting for the participants because children who were not taking part in the research were also playing nearby. The other groups experienced similar issues regarding the venue, where at times the usual quiet meeting space was not available so it was necessary to improvise a second space nearby, which often ended up outside where the participants were distracted by the noise and playing of other children. Given the under-resourced and often chaotic nature of the communities where the research took place, it was important to stay flexible and creative throughout the data collection process. Providing the children with food and refreshments, playing games, and giving them the opportunity to play with the data collection tools contributed towards a relaxed and child friendly atmosphere.

Other challenges regarding the data collection were related to the Photovoice activity where some of the participants lost their cameras, had their cameras stolen, took photos which could not be developed, and did not leave enough photos for their partner. Within the Delphi stage of the research project, a shortcoming was related to its use of anonymity, which is characterised to be a key component of the Delphi technique. Although the participants had the opportunity to reflect and write or draw their personal opinions regarding the problem under investigation, the group setting did not allow for full anonymity of the responses. Hanfin & Brooks (2005) point out how a lack of

anonymity could influence the groups' consensus due to a tendency of group members to feel pressured by or conform to the opinions of higher status group members. Although this was not observed to be the case within the current study, future studies which utilise the Delphi with children could benefit from a methodology which assures the anonymity of the participants' responses.

Ethics

Porter et al. (2010) described the key ethical challenges of child participation studies to be power differentials with age, class, gender, social or economic status, unrealistic expectations of children, danger in overburdening children, and obligation to ensure research collected by children is utilized to its fullest (Porter et al., 2010). Collaboration with the local NGOs Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu was an effective means of ensuring all ethical standards regarding child participation research were adhered to. The partnership provided me with necessary resources for the protection of the participants, including access to a social worker, a referral service for children in need of additional support, and a means of ensuring that the findings were distributed within the community. Children who showed any psychological distress received additional counselling support and were additionally referred into other supportive programmes. The organisations additionally provided youth and childcare workers who attended all focus group sessions and assisted with translation and provided additional supplies such as pens, paper, and cameras.

There were additional ethical challenges related to the validity of the study. Banyard & Miller (1998) emphasized the importance of considering the relationship of the researcher to the participants and how variables such as cultural background and race may influence the dynamics (Banyard & Miller, 1998). It was important that I remained aware of my position as a white American from a privileged racial and socioeconomic group and additionally as an adult taking part in a participatory research project with children. The use of regular *peer debriefing* along with *member checking* assisted with this process. *Peer debriefing* is a validity procedure which includes the debriefing of data by someone who is familiar with the research topic under investigation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This person serves to provide support and to challenge the researchers' assumptions and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The research was supervised by a University of the Western Cape faculty member with research expertise in the field of psychology, child participation and child well-being within a South African and international context. The

researcher attended weekly meetings with the supervisor throughout the research process. In addition to debriefing with the supervisor, the researcher also attended counselling sessions in order to debrief around the emotional nature of the study.

Another form of validity which assisted with the credibility of the research was through the close collaboration with the research participants and the community throughout the entire research process. Through the collaboration of the child reference group, the research data and analysis was reviewed by the children for clarification and accuracy. This is also referred to as *member checking*. *Member checking* is a validity procedure which entails taking the data and researcher's interpretations back to the study participants for their confirmation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). *Member checking* was employed through confirming data and interpretations with the study participants and the child reference group. A summary of the findings, interpretations and theories generated were clearly presented and approved through the use of a child friendly report provided for the children. The researcher maintained close collaboration with the research participants throughout the entire research process through the use of the child participation methods. Collaboration with local community organisations, including having a local youth care worker present at all session, allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics and to build trust within the community.

4. Dissemination

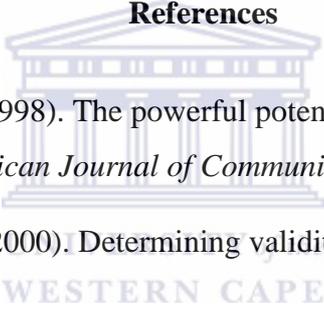
Maglajilic (2010) describes the most important ethical issue in participatory research with children to be the dissemination of the findings in a way which ensures the support of the children's efforts. This particular research study emphasised the participatory process which facilitated learning and enhanced the commitment of the children, the community, and relevant stakeholders to take action towards the improvement of children's self-concept and well-being. In addition to the collaboration with Waves for Change and Philisa Abafazi Bethu, I was actively engaged with other local community organisations and schools, I attended regular community forums, provided life skills and mental health education, resource development, and facilitated after school-programmes within the communities, which allowed me to provide timely feedback of the results to a variety of community stakeholders so that the findings could be utilised by the larger community to contribute towards improvements in local child well-being. The findings were shared at teacher meetings,

parent meetings at the schools, local children's organisations, academic conferences, and were incorporated into the Waves for Change programme model and curriculum.

5. Chapter Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided the researcher's reflection of the research process for the current study which aimed to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within two urban communities of the Western Cape, South Africa. The chapter explored various challenges which arose throughout the research process, how these were addressed, and recommendations for future research. The chapter furthermore emphasized the benefits of utilising a child participation framework when conducting research on issues related to children's self-concept and overall well-being.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Information Sheet: Child Reference Group Learner/Child



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INFORMATION SHEET

Child Reference Group Learner/Child

Project title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Elizabeth Benninger, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. The study is titled *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*. The aim of the study is to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within a context of poverty and violence. Within this process the study aims to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments are manifested within children's discourses. Additionally the study aims to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in the study?

If you agree to participate, you will have the opportunity to be trained as a community researcher, assist with the design of the implications for a community intervention programme for children, and to work as a co-researcher throughout the research process. This will include the participation in sixteen child reference group sessions; (1) Introductions, (2) Qualitative research training, (3) Accompanied community child initiation session, (4) Accompanied child community focus group discussion part 1, (5) Accompanied child community focus group discussion part 2, (6) Accompanied child community walking interview and photovoice briefing, (7) Accompanied walking interview and Photovoice, (8) Accompanied child community walking interview discussion, (9) Accompanied child community Photovoice discussion session (10) Accompanied child community termination session, (11) Community walking interview data analysis, (12) Photovoice data analysis, (13) Validity and reflexivity, (14) Intervention programme implications (15) Action plan for the dissemination of findings, (16) Termination session.

In the child reference group sessions you will be asked questions and participate in activities around how children construct a sense of self within your community. The child reference group sessions will be approximately 1 ½ hours long. In the walking interview and Photovoice sessions, you will be asked to accompany the researcher and community child participants through a walk of the neighbourhood where you interact daily. Finally, the Photovoice sessions will be conducted within the walking interview and the child community participants will be given a camera and asked to capture images which convey how children construct an identity within the community.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Your identity will remain confidential throughout the research process. Your name will not be used in the write-up of the study. Only the primary researchers will have access to the information collected which will be kept in a secure location. You may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence. The ethics principles as stipulated by the University of the Western Cape and the Western Cape Department of Psychology will be adhered to at all times.

What are the benefits of this research?

The research will be beneficial to inform interventions and policies which seek to improve community child well-being, promote mental health, and reduce community violence. As a co-researcher, you will have the opportunity to participate in the design of the implications for an intervention programme which seeks to promote a healthy self-concept for children in the community and a means of distributing the information from the study to important members of the community and local government. The participants will gain skills in research, receive child friendly copies of the final research report, a snack during the child reference group sessions, and a closing party for their participation.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary; therefore you can stop participating at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study you will not be looked upon unfavourably.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

If any part of this process results in any emotional discomfort, counselling will be arranged by the researcher without cost.

What if I have questions?

Should you have any further queries regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please feel free to contact the study co-ordinator, Elizabeth Benninger, 082 690 6210. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Research Supervisor: Dr. Shazly Savahl (ssavahl@uwc.ac.za, 021 959 2283)



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INFORMATION SHEET

Child Reference Group Parent/Guardian

Project title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Elizabeth Benninger, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. The study is titled *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*. The aim of the study is to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within a context of poverty and violence. Within this process the study aims to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments are manifested within children's discourses. Additionally the study aims to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept.

What will my child be asked to do if they agree to participate in the study?

If you allow your child to participate, they will have the opportunity to be trained as a community researcher, assist with the design of the implications for a community intervention programme for children, and to work as a co-researcher throughout the research process. This will include the participation in sixteen child reference group sessions; (1) Introductions, (2) Qualitative research training, (3) Accompanied community child initiation session, (4) Accompanied child community focus group discussion part 1, (5) Accompanied child community focus group discussion part 2, (6) Accompanied child community walking interview and Photovoice briefing, (7) Accompanied walking interview and Photovoice, (8) Accompanied child community walking interview discussion, (9) Accompanied child community Photovoice discussion session (10) Accompanied child community termination session, (11) Community walking interview data analysis, (12) Photovoice data analysis, (13) Validity and reflexivity, (14) Intervention programme implications (15) Action plan for the dissemination of findings, (16) Termination session.

In the child reference group sessions they will be asked questions and participate in activities around how children construct a sense of self within your community. The child reference group sessions will be approximately 1 ½ hours long. In the walking interview and Photovoice sessions, they will be asked to accompany the researcher and community child participants through a walk of the neighbourhood where they interact daily. Finally, the Photovoice sessions will be conducted within the walking interview where the child community participants will be given a camera and asked to capture images which convey how children construct an identity within the community.

Will my child's participation in this study be kept confidential?

The identity of your child will remain confidential throughout the research process. Your child's name will not be used in the write-up of the study. Only the primary researchers will have access to the information collected which will be kept in a secure location. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence. The ethics principles as stipulated by the University of the Western Cape and the Western Cape Department of Psychology will be adhered to at all times.

What are the benefits of this research?

The research will be beneficial to inform interventions and policies which seek to improve community child well-being, promote mental health, and reduce community violence. As a co-researcher, your child will have the opportunity to participate in the design of the implications for an intervention programme which seeks to promote a healthy self-concept for children in the community and a means of distributing the information from the study to important members of the community and local government. The participants will gain skills in research, receive child friendly copies of the final research report, a snack during the child reference group sessions, and a closing party for their participation.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary; therefore they can stop participating at any time. If they decide to withdraw from the study you will not be looked upon unfavourably.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

If any part of this process results in any emotional discomfort for the child, counselling will be arranged by the researcher without cost.

What if I have questions?

Should you have any further queries regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please feel free to contact the study co-ordinator, Elizabeth Benninger, 082 690 6210. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Research Supervisor: Dr. Shazly Savahl (ssavahl@uwc.ac.za, 021 959 2283)



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INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet: Child Community Participant

Project title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Elizabeth Benninger, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. The study is titled *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*. The aim of the study is to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within a context of poverty and violence. Within this process the study aims to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments are manifested within children's discourses. Additionally, the study aims to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in the study?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in eight group sessions including; (1) Initiation, (2) Child self-concept focus group discussion part 1, (3) Child self-concept focus group discussion part 2, (4) Walking interview and Photovoice briefing, (5) Walking interview and Photovoice, (6) Walking interview discussion session, (7) Photovoice discussion session, (8) Termination session. In the focus group sessions you will be asked questions and participate in activities around how children construct a sense of self within your community. The group sessions will be approximately 1 ½ hours long. In the walking interview you will be asked to take the researcher through a walk of the neighbourhood where you interact daily. Finally, the Photovoice session will be conducted within the walking interview and you will be given a camera and asked to capture images which convey how children construct an identity within the community.

What is Photovoice and will I be entailed to do?

Photovoice is a method in which photography is used to identify, express, and share your experiences. In participating in the Photovoice session you will be trained to utilise a camera and given directives about what to capture in your photographs. You will be provided with a camera to capture the images within your neighbourhood during the community walking interview. You will also be allowed to keep the camera for one week to capture any other relevant pictures which were not captured during the walking interview.

What will the photographs be used for?

The photographs from the Photovoice sessions will be used for a research project exploring young people's understandings of their self-concept. The photographs will also be used for our child

reference group discussions, the creation of your individual self-mosaic and for presentations and published manuscripts.

Where will we get cameras from for the Photovoice session?

You will be provided with a camera by the study co-ordinator.

Are there any risks associated with the Photovoice session?

There are no known risks associated with participating in the Photovoice session. The researchers cannot be held liable for any physical injury which could occur in the process.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Your identity will remain confidential throughout the research process. Your name will not be used in the write-up of the study. Only the primary researchers will have access to the information collected which will be kept in a secure location. You may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence. The ethics principles as stipulated by the University of the Western Cape and the Western Cape Department of Psychology will be adhered to at all times.

What are the benefits of this research?

This study aims to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the self within your community. Within this process this study aims to explore how interactions within the community influence the way children construct a sense of self. Additionally the study strategically aims to explore the implications of these constructions on creating programmes which improve the way children think about themselves. The participants will gain skills in research, receive copies of the photos taken during the Photovoice sessions, a snack during the child reference group sessions, and a closing party for their participation.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary; therefore you can stop participating at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study you will not be looked upon unfavourably.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

If any part of this process results in any emotional discomfort, counselling will be arranged by the researcher without cost.

What if I have questions?

Should you have any further queries regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please feel free to contact the study co-ordinator, Elizabeth Benninger, 082 690 6210. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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INFORMATION SHEET

Child Community Participant Parent/Guardian

Project title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Elizabeth Benninger, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. The study is titled *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*. The aim of the study is to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within a context of poverty and violence. Within this process the study aims to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments are manifested within children's discourses. Additionally the study aims to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept.

What will my child be asked to do if they agree to participate in the study?

If you agree to allow your child to participate, they will be asked to participate in eight group sessions including; (1) Initiation, (2) Child self-concept focus group discussion part 1, (3) Child self-concept focus group discussion part 2, (4) Walking interview and Photovoice briefing, (5) Walking interview and Photovoice, (6) Walking interview discussion session, (7) Photovoice discussion session, (8) Termination session. In the focus group sessions your child will be asked questions and participate in activities around how children construct a sense of self within your community. The group sessions will be approximately 1 ½ hours long. In the walking interview your child will be asked to take the researcher through a walk of the neighbourhood where they interact daily. Finally, the Photovoice session will be conducted within the walking interview and your child will be given a camera and asked to capture images which convey how children construct an identity within the community.

What is Photovoice and will my child be entailed to do?

Photovoice is a method in which photography is used to identify, express, and share experiences. In participating in the Photovoice session your child will be trained to utilise a camera and given directives about what to capture in your photographs. They will be provided with a camera to capture the images within your neighbourhood during the community walking interview. They will also be allowed to keep the camera for one week to capture any other relevant pictures which were not captured during the walking interview.

What will the photographs be used for?

The photographs from the Photovoice sessions will be used for a research project exploring young people's understandings of their self-concept. The photographs will also be used for our child

reference group discussions, the creation of your child's self- mosaic and for presentations and published manuscripts.

Where will we get cameras from for the Photovoice session?

Your child will be provided with a camera by the study co-ordinator.

Are there any risks associated with the Photovoice session?

There are no known risks associated with participating in the Photovoice session. The researchers cannot be held liable for any physical injury which could occur in the process.

Would my child's participation in this study be kept confidential?

Your child's identity will remain confidential throughout the research process. Your child's name will not be used in the write-up of the study. Only the primary researchers will have access to the information collected which will be kept in a secure location. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence. The ethics principles as stipulated by the University of the Western Cape and the Western Cape Department of Psychology will be adhered to at all times.

What are the benefits of this research?

This study aims to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the self within your community. Within this process this study aims to explore how interactions within the community influence the way children construct a sense of self. Additionally the study strategically aims to explore the implications of these constructions on creating programmes which improve the way children think about themselves. The participants will gain skills in research, receive copies of the photos taken during the Photovoice sessions, a snack during the group sessions, and a closing party for their participation.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary; therefore they can stop participating at any time. If your child decides to withdraw from the study they will not be looked upon unfavourably.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

If any part of this process results in any emotional discomfort, counselling will be arranged by the researcher without cost.

What if I have questions?

Should you have any further queries regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please feel free to contact the study co-ordinator, Elizabeth Benninger, 082 690 6210. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Research Supervisor: Dr. Shazly Savahl (ssavahl@uwc.ac.za, 021 959 2283)



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CONSENT FORM Learner/Child

Project Title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

- I agree to participate in the Group sessions and the Walking Interview/ Photovoice sessions
- I agree to have a digital recording made during the group sessions
- I agree to not disclose any information that was discussed during data collection.
- I agree to the findings of the study being disseminated (shared/ publicised) in the following formats: Conference presentation and Published manuscripts

Participant's signature _____

Witness _____

Date _____

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator: Elizabeth Benninger

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535, cell 082 6906210



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CONSENT FORM

Parent/Guardian

Project Title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree for my child to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my child's identity will not be disclosed and that they may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time, and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

- I agree to the focus group interviews and Walking Interview/Photovoice discussion group in which my child participates to be audio-recorded
- I agree to the findings of the study being disseminated (shared/ published) in the following formats: Conference presentation and Published manuscripts.

Parent/Guardians signature _____

Witness _____

Date _____

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator: Elizabeth Benninger

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535

Telephone: (021) 959-2283

Cell: 0826906210



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CONSENT FORM

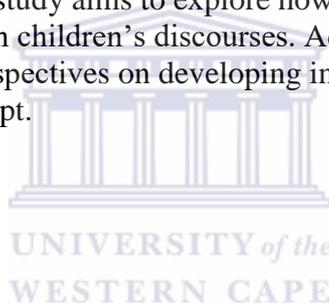
Photovoice

Project Title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Elizabeth Benninger, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. The study is titled *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*. The aim of the study is to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the 'self' within a context of poverty and violence. Within this process the study aims to explore how these constructions and meaning assignments are manifested within children's discourses. Additionally the study aims to explore the implications of the children's perspectives on developing intervention programmes for the promotion of a healthy self-concept.

Acknowledgment and Release:



Permission to utilise images:

I, _____ give Elizabeth Benninger and Shazly Savahl, the study coordinators for the research project entitled *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*, the right to utilise photographs/ images of me in the Research Project.

I have read and understood the above.

Signature of person in photograph _____

Signature of photographer _____

Date _____

Appendix VIII: Consent Form: Photovoice #2



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**CONSENT FORM
Photovoice 2**

Project Title: Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape

I, _____ (Photographer's name) give Elizabeth Benninger and Shazly Savahl, the study co-ordinators for *Children's exploration of the 'self' within two urban impoverished communities of the Western Cape*, the right to utilise photographs/ images, which I have taken during data collection for their research project, in the write-up of the study as well as in linked conference presentations and published manuscripts.

Photographer/ participant's signature _____

Date _____

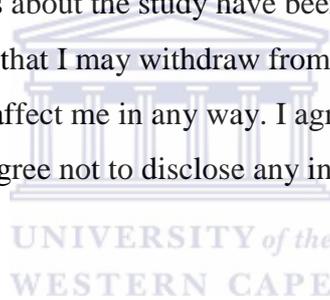


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CHILD REFERENCE GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY BINDING FORM

Title of Research Project: Children’s exploration of self-concept within a South African context of poverty and violence

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way. I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in the study. I also agree not to disclose any information that was discussed during the group discussion.



Participant’s signature _____

Witness’s signature _____

Appendix X: Data Extraction Table Template

Article No.	Authors	Aim	Sample Size	Participant characteristics	Context	Self-concept domain	Data Collection method/s	Region	Outcome	Themes
1.										
2.										
3.										
4.										
5.										



Appendix XI: COREQ

Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ) 32-item checklist (Tong et al, 2007)

COREQ Checklist

No Item

Guide questions/description

Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity

Personal Characteristics

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Interviewer/facilitator | Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group? |
| 2. Credentials | What were the researcher's credentials? E.g. PhD, MD |
| 3. Occupation | What was their occupation at the time of the study? |
| 4. Gender | Was the researcher male or female? |
| 5. Experience and training | What experience or training did the researcher have? |

Relationship with participants

- | | |
|---|---|
| 6. Relationship established | Was a relationship established prior to study commencement? |
| 7. Participant knowledge of the interviewer | What did the participants know about the researcher? e.g. personal goals, reasons for doing the research |
| 8. Interviewer characteristics | What characteristics were reported about the interviewer/facilitator? e.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic |

Domain 2: study design

Theoretical framework

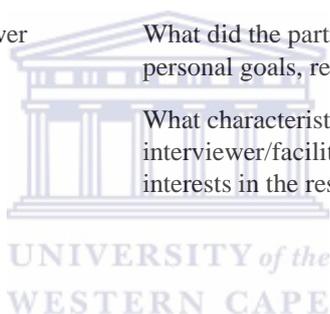
- | | |
|--|---|
| 9. Methodological orientation and theory | What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis, Participant selection |
| 10. Sampling | How were participants selected? e.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball |
| 11. Method of approach | How were participants approached? e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, email |
| 12. Sample size | How many participants were in the study? |
| 13. Non-participation | How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons? |

Setting

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 14. Setting of data collection | Where was the data collected? e.g. home, clinic, workplace |
| 15. Presence of non-participants | Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers? |
| 16. Description of sample | What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g. demographic data, date |

Data collection

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 17. Interview guide | Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested? |
|---------------------|---|



- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 18. Repeat interviews | Were repeat interviews carried out? If yes, how many? |
| 19. Audio/visual recording | Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data? |
| 20. Field notes | Were field notes made during and/or after the interview or focus group? |
| 21. Duration | What was the duration of the interviews or focus group? |
| 22. Data saturation | Was data saturation discussed? |
| 23. Transcripts returned | Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction? |

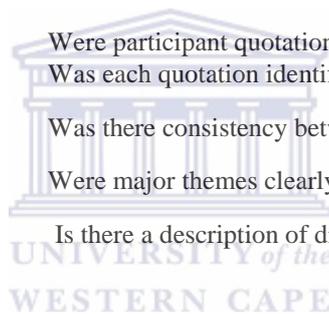
Domain 3: analysis and findings

Data analysis

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 24. Number of data coders | How many data coders coded the data? |
| 25. Description of the coding tree | Did authors provide a description of the coding tree? |
| 26. Derivation of themes | Were themes identified in advance or derived from the data? |
| 27. Software | What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data? |
| 28. Participant checking | Did participants provide feedback on the findings? |

Reporting

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 29. Quotations presented | Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes / findings?
Was each quotation identified? e.g. participant number |
| 30. Data and findings consistent | Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings? |
| 31. Clarity of major themes | Were major themes clearly presented in the findings? |
| 32. Clarity of minor themes | Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes? |



Appendix XII: CCAT

Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT) Form (v1.4)

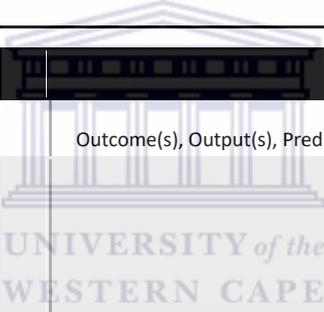
Reference

Reviewer

This form must be used in conjunction with the CCAT User Guide (v1.4); otherwise validity and reliability may be severely compromised.

Citation		Year

Research design (add if not listed)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not research	Article Editorial Report Opinion Guideline Pamphlet ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Historical	...
<input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative	Narrative Phenomenology Ethnography Grounded theory Narrative case study ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Descriptive, Exploratory, Observational	A. Cross-sectional Longitudinal Retrospective Prospective Correlational Predictive ...
	B. Cohort Case-control Survey Developmental Normative Case study ...
Experimental	<input type="checkbox"/> True experiment Pre-test/post-test control group Solomon four-group Post-test only control group Randomised two-factor Placebo controlled trial ...
	<input type="checkbox"/> Quasi-experiment Post-test only Non-equivalent control group Counter balanced (<i>cross-over</i>) Multiple time series Separate sample pre-test post-test [no Control] [Control] ...
	<input type="checkbox"/> Single system One-shot experimental (<i>case study</i>) Simple time series One group pre-test/post-test Interactive Multiple baseline Within subjects (<i>Equivalent time, repeated measures, multiple treatment</i>) ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed Methods	Action research Sequential Concurrent Transformative ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Synthesis	Systematic review Critical review Thematic synthesis Meta-ethnography Narrative synthesis ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	...

Variables and analysis		
Intervention(s), Treatment(s), Exposure(s)	Outcome(s), Output(s), Predictor(s), Measure(s)	Data analysis method(s)
		

Sampling							
Total size	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4 Control
Population, sample, Setting							

Data collection (add if not listed)	
Audit/Review	a) Primary Secondary ... b) Authoritative Partisan Antagonist ... c) Literature Systematic ...
Observation	a) Participant Non-participant ... b) Structured Semi-structured Unstructured ... c) Covert Candid ...
	Interview a) Formal Informal ... b) Structured Semi-structured Unstructured ... c) One-on-one Group Multiple Self-administered ...
	Testing a) Standardised Norm-ref Criterion-ref Ipsative ... b) Objective Subjective ... c) One-on-one Group Self-administered ...

Scores						
Preliminaries	Design		Data Collection		Results	Total [/40]
Introduction	Sampling		Ethical Matters		Discussion	Total [%]

General notes

--	--



Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT) :: Version 1.4 (19 November 2013) :: Michael Crowe (michael.crowe@my.jcu.edu.au)
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Appraise research on the merits of the research design used, not against other research designs.

Category	Item descriptors	Description	Score
Item	[Present; Absent; ■ Not applicable]	[Important information for each item]	[0–5]
1. Preliminaries			
Title	1. Includes study aims <input type="checkbox"/> and design <input type="checkbox"/>		
Abstract (assess last)	1. Key information <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Balanced <input type="checkbox"/> and informative <input type="checkbox"/>		
Text (assess last)	1. Sufficient detail others could reproduce <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Clear/concise writing <input type="checkbox"/> , table(s) <input type="checkbox"/> , diagram(s) <input type="checkbox"/> , figure(s) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Preliminaries [/5]			
2. Introduction			
Background	1. Summary of current knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Specific problem(s) addressed <input type="checkbox"/> and reason(s) for addressing <input type="checkbox"/>		
Objective	1. Primary objective(s), hypothesis(es), or aim(s) <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Secondary question(s) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Is it worth continuing? Introduction [/5]			
3. Design			
Research design	1. Research design(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Suitability of research design(s) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Intervention, Treatment, Exposure	1. Intervention(s)/treatment(s)/exposure(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Precise details of the intervention(s)/treatment(s)/exposure(s) <input type="checkbox"/> for each group <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Intervention(s)/treatment(s)/exposure(s) valid <input type="checkbox"/> and reliable <input type="checkbox"/>		
Outcome, Output, Predictor, Measure	1. Outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s)/measure(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Clearly define outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s)/measure(s) <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s)/measure(s) valid <input type="checkbox"/> and reliable <input type="checkbox"/>		
Bias, etc	1. Potential bias <input type="checkbox"/> , confounding variables <input type="checkbox"/> , effect modifiers <input type="checkbox"/> , interactions <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Sequence generation <input type="checkbox"/> , group allocation <input type="checkbox"/> , group balance <input type="checkbox"/> , and by whom <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Equivalent treatment of participants/cases/groups <input type="checkbox"/>		
Is it worth continuing? Design [/5]			
4. Sampling			
Sampling method	1. Sampling method(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Suitability of sampling method <input type="checkbox"/>		
Sample size	1. Sample size <input type="checkbox"/> , how chosen <input type="checkbox"/> , and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Suitability of sample size <input type="checkbox"/>		
Sampling protocol	1. Target/actual/sample population(s): description <input type="checkbox"/> and suitability <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Participants/cases/groups: inclusion <input type="checkbox"/> and exclusion <input type="checkbox"/> criteria 3. Recruitment of participants/cases/groups <input type="checkbox"/>		
Is it worth continuing? Sampling [/5]			
5. Data collection			
Collection method	1. Collection method(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Suitability of collection method(s) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Collection protocol	1. Include date(s) <input type="checkbox"/> , location(s) <input type="checkbox"/> , setting(s) <input type="checkbox"/> , personnel <input type="checkbox"/> , materials <input type="checkbox"/> , processes <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Method(s) to ensure/enhance quality of measurement/instrumentation <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Manage non-participation <input type="checkbox"/> , withdrawal <input type="checkbox"/> , incomplete/lost data <input type="checkbox"/>		
Is it worth continuing? Data collection [/5]			
6. Ethical matters			

Participant ethics	1. Informed consent <input type="checkbox"/> , equity <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Privacy <input type="checkbox"/> , confidentiality/anonymity <input type="checkbox"/>		
Researcher ethics	1. Ethical approval <input type="checkbox"/> , funding <input type="checkbox"/> , conflict(s) of interest <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Subjectivities <input type="checkbox"/> , relationship(s) with participants/cases <input type="checkbox"/>		
Is it worth continuing?		Ethical matters [/5]	
7. Results			
Analysis, Integration, Interpretation method	1. A.I.I. method(s) for primary outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Additional A.I.I. methods (e.g. subgroup analysis) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Suitability of analysis/integration/interpretation method(s) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Essential analysis	1. Flow of participants/cases/groups through each stage of research <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Demographic and other characteristics of participants/cases/groups <input type="checkbox"/> Analyse raw data <input type="checkbox"/> , response rate <input type="checkbox"/> , non-participation/withdrawal/incomplete/lost data <input type="checkbox"/>		
Outcome, Output, Predictor analysis	1. Summary of results <input type="checkbox"/> and precision <input type="checkbox"/> for each outcome/output/predictor/measure 2. Consideration of benefits/harms <input type="checkbox"/> , unexpected results <input type="checkbox"/> , problems/failures <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Description of outlying data (e.g. diverse cases, adverse effects, minor themes) <input type="checkbox"/>		
		Results [/5]	
8. Discussion			
Interpretation	1. Interpretation of results in the context of current evidence <input type="checkbox"/> and objectives <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Draw inferences consistent with the strength of the data <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Consideration of alternative explanations for observed results <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Account for bias <input type="checkbox"/> , confounding/effect modifiers/interactions/imprecision <input type="checkbox"/>		
Generalisation	1. Consideration of overall practical usefulness of the study <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Description of generalisability (external validity) of the study <input type="checkbox"/>		
Concluding remarks	1. Highlight study's particular strengths <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Suggest steps that may improve future results (e.g. limitations) <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Suggest further studies <input type="checkbox"/>		
		Discussion [/5]	
9. Total			
Total score	1. Add all scores for categories 1–8		